How to Improve Your Golf Performance with Deliberate Practice

By Lawrie Montague

I bet you would love to know why the majority of golfers playing this great game aren’t improving in-line with improvements in golf club and golf ball technology. How is it that we humans, as capable as we are, can’t seem to swing a golf club in such a way that the end result is lower golf scores? Over the past few years many golf books and golf magazines have been asking similar questions, and the results of these articles and discussions tend to point to problems in these five areas.

• Golf swing technique
• Golf performance psychology
• Golf course strategy and management
• Golf health and fitness
• Golf practice and training

There is an enormous amount of literature dedicated to the first and second areas, and in particular, golf swing technique. In my golf library I have golf instruction books that go back more than one hundred years which describe in detail how to swing the golf club; and yet to this day something seems to be missing from the equation. In this article I will shed some light on what it is and more importantly what you can do about it.

Dr Karl Anders Ericsson of the University of Miami has spent the past twenty five years looking into how our culture has always recognized outstanding individuals, whose performance in sports, science and the arts is greatly superior to that of the rest of the population.

Dr Ericsson’s work focused on the differences between expert performers and everyone else. He discovered that one primary distinction between expert performers and the rest of us is a day to day dedication to the deliberate effort to improve their performance in a specific domain or field of expertise.

Practicing in a highly deliberate way is a very demanding activity that requires that our attention be completely and specifically focused whilst we’re honing our skills. I believe that this is the missing factor in golf performance improvement.

Here are three excellent questions to ask yourself prior to practicing your golf in a deliberate way.

What exactly do I need to practice to improve?
To determine exactly what you need to practice I suggest that you pay close attention to your results over the next five rounds of golf you play. Look for particular weaknesses in your skills that lead to higher score averages. The skills that I find most golfers need to work more on are the chipping, pitching, sand and putting skills. I’m sure you realise that more than sixty four percent of your score is played from within sixty yards of the green so it makes good sense to identify the skills that would make the most difference to your score.

You will more than likely identify more than one weak skill area, so rate each skill based on its relationship to your score goal, and practice the skills in order of most important skill to the least important. You will find that
you increase your scoring potential by developing all your weak skills during your practice sessions, which will develop an increased capability for a wider range of expertise on the golf course.

**Exactly how should I practice this skill to improve?**

Here’s a new rule to apply to your practice sessions from now on. Design to improve. Every time you go to practice your golf skills, begin by designing a program that would lead you towards improvement in your skills, and ultimately your scores. Your golf skill practice should be programmed, understandable and focused which will reduce boredom and the opportunity to procrastinate. If you’re working on your full swing mechanics, concentrate on executing each and every stroke in an excellent way. Do not get slack with your work, practice on the very edge of your current capability. Boring repetition is based upon a foundation of goal-less and mindless duplication. Deliberate practice is exactly the opposite; deliberate practice is consistent directed effort that leads to improved performance.

**What resources and attributes do I need to help me to practice correctly to improve?**

I’ve never known anybody who improved their golf game, or anything else for that matter that didn’t begin with the passion to improve. Yes it’s nice to have a first class facility to develop your skills, but it matters little compared to a strong desire for self improvement. If deliberate practice drives improved performance, then your inner drive should be the force to drive your deliberate golf practice.

Constant feedback is a must in deliberate practice as well. Correctly assessing your results and then continually adjusting how you practice will move you towards your improvement more rapidly. If you are going to dedicate yourself to practicing deliberately then it makes good sense to find a qualified golf instructor capable of providing you with constructive feedback, which should be central to your continued improvement program. Each day of golf practice should move you forward against an ever changing benchmark.

Remember that the goal isn’t just repeating the golf swing over and over again, but to realize that you can achieve higher levels of control over every aspect of your golf performance. You will never find practice boring if in every practice session you strive to do it as well as it can be done, every single time you do it.