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# THE EMOTIONALLY INTELLIGENT PATH TO GOLF ENJOYMENT

BY DR. GARY WIREN, GOLF PROFESSIONAL,  
AND MINX BOREN, PERSONAL AND BUSINESS COACH

**H**ERE IS A QUESTION THAT FEW PEOPLE GET ASKED ABOUT their golf: "Are you really having fun?" Be honest. Do you regularly (and we do mean regularly) get joy from the experience? Or do you become depressed when playing poorly, discouraged with your performance, angry on the course, out of sorts when you arrive home, and generally down on yourself? Do these feelings impact your ability to play your best on any given day? If your time on the course is less enjoyable than it could be, we would like to introduce you to Emotional Intelligence (EI), a cutting edge mental technology that is being used by many to create more satisfaction, success, and joy in their lives.

Before we do, it's important for you to consider some critical questions about your golf. Have you ever seriously asked yourself: Why do I play this game? What is it that brings me pleasure from the experience? Is golf adding happiness to my life or detracting from it? How can I get more satisfaction from the time that I spend playing? What does a successful day at the golf course include?

Look at the "Golf Enjoyment Scorecard" below and take two minutes to test yourself in order to determine the elements of the game you enjoy. The rewards from developing your Emotional Intelligence (EI) will come from learning to focus on those aspects that you value most highly.

## GOLF ENJOYMENT SCORECARD—

*Rate the relative importance of each of the ten elements to determine your enjoyment in a round of golf. Allocate the percentages so that your total equals 100%.*

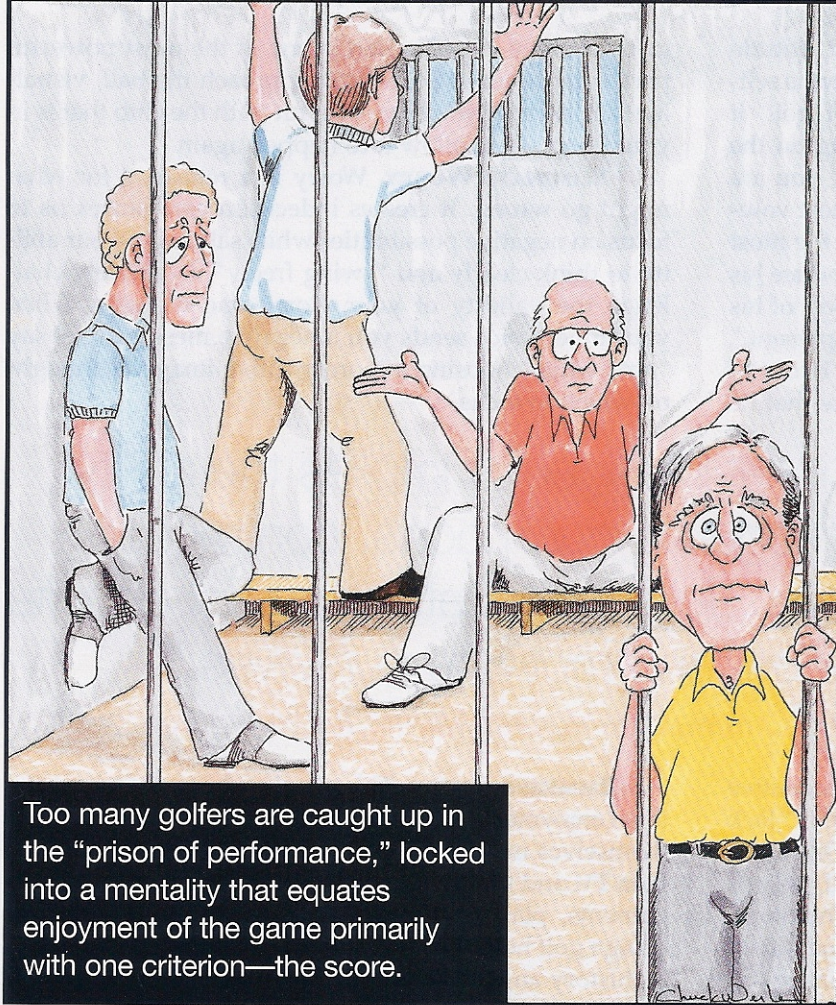
### ELEMENTS

### PERCENTAGE

- |   |         |
|---|---------|
| ■ <b>Design of the Course:</b> Variety of holes, the challenge, memorability, fairness  | _____ % |
| ■ <b>Course Conditioning:</b> Greens, fairways, roughs, bunkers, tees   | _____ % |
| ■ <b>Aesthetics of the Course:</b> Flowers, water, terrain, trees, surrounding views, setting   | _____ % |
| ■ <b>Amenities:</b> Practice range, staff, food and beverage, clubhouse and lockers, carts or caddies   | _____ % |
| ■ <b>The People With Whom You Play:</b> Friends, customers, family, competitors, people you just met  | _____ % |
| ■ <b>Weather:</b> Perfect, cold, hot, windy, rainy  | _____ % |
| ■ <b>Your Overall Performance:</b> How well you managed the course and yourself/whether you executed some good shots and appreciated your own skill/efforts | _____ % |
| ■ <b>Competition:</b> Won your match/a tournament, won or lost some bets, beat your opponent  | _____ % |
| ■ <b>Exercise:</b> Walked eighteen holes, rode and walked some, pulled a cart, carried your bag   | _____ % |
| ■ <b>Score:</b> What you shot/the final number on the card  | _____ % |

*Total equals 100%*





Too many golfers are caught up in the "prison of performance," locked into a mentality that equates enjoyment of the game primarily with one criterion—the score.

As you can see from the Golf Enjoyment Scorecard there are many factors that can affect whether or not you have a "good day" on the course. How many of them do you celebrate or even value? Do you ever think about the quality of a course design, seeing it as a work of art? Do you appreciate beautiful trees and landscaping on the course? How about the satisfaction of hitting even a few great shots to the best of your ability? Does the experience of playing a game with people you like or love, mean something special to you? Just these elements alone can make a great golf day if you choose to recognize them.

#### GARY WIREN COMMENTS...

After teaching the game for nearly half a century, I'm convinced that too many golfers are caught up in the "prison of performance," locked into a mentality that equates enjoyment of the game primarily with one criterion—the score. Just eavesdrop on the conversations of golfers after a round and the most common question you hear is, "What did you shoot?" If score is the only part of golf that is meaningful to your enjoyment, then your "pleasure factor" is going to be very limited indeed.

Throughout my career I have been lecturing and writing books about the psychology of golf, telling people not to put all their "enjoyment eggs" into the "basket of scoring" for, if they do, they will only be happy with their golf about 15 to 20% of the time (or less if their expectations are particularly unrealistic!). I too must confess to having succumbed to being a victim of the "verdict of the scorecard" from time to time. I knew the theories related to Emotional Intelligence but had never found quite the right practical tools to effectively confront the frustration, anger, and loss of composure of my students and, at times, myself during a round, that is until I started talking golf with my co-author.

#### MINX BOREN COMMENTS...

As a personal and business coach, I often say to people that I'm in the "happiness business." Why? Because designing a life that works is all about discovering the joy and satisfaction in all that you choose to do. One of the best ways I know for creating a positive mindset and improving outcomes is to develop Emotional Intelligence (EI) skills. In terms of golf, Gary and I are going to explore with you the benefits to be derived from improving just one specific EI skill: choosing enjoyment on the course.

#### FIND THE JOY

Ultimately, the aim of EI is to recognize the emotions that we are experiencing at any given moment and to determine what is needed to increase happiness/enjoyment.

Why choose happiness? On an emotional level, having fun inhibits negative feelings and quiets worrisome thoughts. As a result, the muscles relax, freeing up energy and creating a sense of well-being. This relaxation response reduces tension which is oftentimes considered "the great destroyer of the swing." The bottom line is, when we are enjoying ourselves, the mind is able to think more clearly and the body to perform with fewer physiological constraints. Happiness and enjoyment can only be found in the present and it is a choice we can continually learn to make. If you don't know how to fully enjoy today's round, you won't know how to enjoy tomorrow's either. So consider that maybe this is the time in your golf career to relinquish chasing some numerical milestone, be it 90 or 80 or 70, and broaden your focus to include all aspects of the game. What may surprise you the most is that when you moderate your pursuit of that dream score, you may actually free yourself up enough to find it. *(continued)*



Someone wise once said, "Happiness is good attitude and a bad memory." The first part of the statement is self-evident. As for a "bad memory," in terms of golf, it involves letting go of the last shot and focusing on the only shot you can do anything about—the one you are about to hit. That was the great Bobby Jones' most valuable lesson. He was often quoted as saying that the most important thing he ever learned to help him produce his best golf was to play one shot at a time to the best of his ability. Today we would call that "being in the present." His record of finishing either first or second in 11 out of 13 appearances in the U.S. Open would indicate that he may have discovered the golden key to golf that we're all seeking.

Your enjoyment of golf may be further enhanced by a "selective" memory that allows you to recall your best shots without dwelling on the less satisfying ones. At a corporate clinic, Jack Nicklaus finished a great ball striking demonstration and turned to the audience of around 30 people to answer questions. One executive seated in front asked, "How do you cure a shank?" Jack smiled and answered, "I don't know, I never hit one." Still smiling, Jack turned to another raised hand, only to hear the original interrogator retort, "I saw you hit one—Pebble Beach, 14th hole, 1984." Jack's smile immediately disappeared. He turned back to the "shank" quizzier and focused a "two blue laser stare" on him for about 20 seconds before he answered tersely, "I don't remember. Next question."

Champions do not dwell on the negative. They rely on selective memory instead. So, to help you learn to use your memory and not let it use you, here are some EI tips to practice.

### SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING YOUR ENJOYMENT FACTOR

■ **APPRECIATE FULLY.** Remember to consistently appreciate your good shots. Stamp them firmly onto your brain's memory pad in three-dimensional Technicolor 36 point bold type. Use instant recall to bring those good shot memories and the feelings they generate into sharp focus throughout the round.

■ **FOCUS POSITIVELY.** Research on Emotional Intelligence also tells us that memory is "state specific." When we are in a good mood we remember more positive events and we weigh evidence in a more positive way. Joy is self-perpetuating. So continually look for things during the round that will buoy your spirits.

■ **VISUALIZE CLEARLY.** According to sports psycholo-

gists, positive visualization is one of the most powerful performance tools. So, as you approach the ball, visualize the best shot you have ever hit with the club that is in your hand. Then allow it to happen again.

■ **ELIMINATE WORRY.** Worry is a rehearsal for what might go wrong. It creates indecision and causes us to focus on negative possibilities while sabotaging our ability to think clearly and "swing freely." To actively challenge the validity of your worrisome thoughts when your inner voice sends you a negative message, just say "no!" while choosing a more positive image or thought on which to focus.

"Emotional Intelligence implies the ability to self-regulate our moods, control our impulses, delay gratification, persist despite frustration, and motivate ourselves."

—DOC CHILDREN AND HOWARD MARTIN, THE HEARTMATH SOLUTION

■ **IMMERSE DEEPLY.** The people who seem to get the most enjoyment from golf are those who have immersed themselves most deeply in it. They read about it, watch it on TV, and talk about it with friends. They play in tournaments, plan golf trips to famous venues, and even design golf holes in their heads. Delving into the game—its history and rules, its equipment and artifacts, its lore and legends—is yet another way to significantly increase one's enjoyment factor. For an education on the game's lore and legend, please refer to the paragraph below.

Return now to the Golf Enjoyment Scorecard. You'll find it presents a sizeable sampling of elements that can enhance and enrich your time on the course. It's up to you to create and incorporate those you most value. It all comes back to that key question: Why do you play the game? Our invitation to you is to consistently remind yourself of that question so that you can focus on your personal pleasure factors even before you step on the course. There's more joy in golf just waiting to be discovered. ♦

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