



WHY THE AVERAGE GOLFER STRUGGLES

With all the technology and coaching available, why does the average golfer struggle so much to get better? Why does the average handicap stay the same, year after year? Why at the same time, are the abilities of the most elite players making significant jumps in distance, scoring ability, and other aspects of their games over the last few decades?

The reality is that elite players (Handicap of +2, elite collegiate players, and tour pros) have motion that average players simply don't understand. The more you have an elite movement pattern and the ability to move effortlessly and efficiently (which means you can do it fast with a high degree of precision), the more technology and most coaching available will help you. In fact, technology helps the best in the world exponentially more than the average player. Technology pushes the upper limits of the game forward, but 99% of us aren't at that level and that leaves a lot of us in the dust.

In a nutshell, the average player tries to master the forms of what they "think" an elite golf swing should look and feel like with no clear understanding of the function. They try to "glue" various positions and muscular movements together to get the club on the ball instead of having a clear visual concept of how the total body creates the motion relative to gravity. This is not because the average golfer doesn't want to improve or cannot improve. It is largely the fault of the total golf environment and our "get it now" Amazon/Instagram/Smartphone culture at large. In addition to faulty learning, most golfers hang on to the hope that there is a magic move that one day they will discover, and they will forever be consistent with their swing. Unfortunately, there are no miracles but there are significant "aha" moments that can open the door to positive skill development. But no elite golf swing was built quickly – most take 5 to 10 years of consistent practice to get to the elite level assuming they have a clear understanding of what the golf motion is and is not. It's a long road to excellence, just like in any other specialized skill. But the journey can be very enjoyable and that's what I hope to provide ultimately – the path to unlocking the average player's TRUE swing.

But first, let's learn more about what holds the average player back. I believe there are four main reasons the average golfer gets stuck or ceases to improve. In this chapter I'm going to explore them:

1. The culture of the game stifles learning and improvement.
2. Over-thought and doubt
3. The rigidity of the golf club.
4. Misperception of the motion that creates the golf swing.

The Culture of the Game

The beliefs – or more accurately – misbeliefs that are passed on through generations of golfers make golf so difficult to learn. I call them "golfisms". We have all heard dozens of them in our golfing lives. "Golfisms" are the assumptions that the average player makes about why a shot was or was not successful.

A great example is this golfism: “I topped the ball, so I must have looked up.” The belief that golf is a result of hand-eye coordination and not a sense of spatial movement continues to be passed on from generation to generation, even though you never hear an elite player use this as a reason for a poor shot. This blanket assumption is so far from the truth of what caused a shot poor, but it’s so easy to believe if your concept of the motion is flawed from the beginning.

Because the average player lacks clear understanding of the golf motion, they apply beliefs that seem to make sense based on what the culture of the game has posited as the truth. For example, rather than suggesting you “looked up” In my videos, I promote the eyes either following motion or actually looking behind the ball. In another example, blind people can play golf as well. Everyone can hit the ball with their eyes closed – and hit it quite well.

Because of golfisms, many players live in an “alternate” created reality where cause and effect has been rationalized, but not really understood. The cause and effect aren’t that hard to understand, but when they are based on something that simply isn’t real, then you have big problems. Our habits are built on our beliefs – if our beliefs about the golf motion are simply not accurate, then we are destined to struggle with finding a truly fluid and natural swing.

In this ball focused scenario, the problem is that if a player perceives they kept their eyes down and they hit a good shot, they are rewarding a success with something that is also not accurate! It’s always amazing to me as a coach how powerful these assumptions about mistakes are and how they hinder the development of the average player.

The universe that the culture of the game creates is not based in actual reality, yet golfers (and TV commentators) continue to throw around poor, confusing terminology, and beliefs. There are so many simplified rationalizations in golf, but they are repeated so often, most players don’t question them, they simply attribute their failures and successes to the nonsensical rules of the alternate reality created by the culture of the game.

In another example of a golfism, how many times have you heard a TV commentator say, “he came out of that shot that was why it went so far right”. The TV commentator doesn’t tell you the truth – the player was experiencing anxiety about the shot and his muscles tensed up causing him to apply an unwanted force to the club which made his body react by changing his posture. This is far more complicated than “he came out of the shot” but is, in reality, the root cause of the poor shot. The TV commentator doesn’t make the link between the mental, emotional, and physical. And the TV commentator doesn’t understand or at least explain that a force applied to the club to over-control it will always show up with a change of the total look of the swing – hence the “out of posture” look of the swing! There is so much conjecture that is blindly accepted by the collective of average golfers.

It amazes me how many first lessons I give where my client attributes all his bad shots to looking up or “standing up early”. The student has no clear concept of how his body should move, so every correction is a “golfism” instead of creating a clear intention on how to best move to support the swing. These golfisms are like trying to cure the symptoms instead of curing the cause of the disease. The golf swing isn’t that difficult, but it’s near impossible to improve if the player isn’t functioning properly, or at least understanding the WHOLE picture.

Over-thought and Doubt

Ironically, in other parts of our physical lives, we all perform so many motions with incredible efficiency and autonomy. We intend and it just happens. The reality is that we could not survive on this planet if we had to think about how to do all our motions. Imagine if we had to think about how to take each step when we walk or about how to touch our nose if we had an itch. Every move we made would be highly labored and awkward. Yet this is how most people play golf – they try to think their way through the swing which has an incredible effect on our body's natural ability to move. The conscious mind cannot keep pace with our kinesthesia (the body's ability to recall motion and relative positions of the body). Our relationship with gravity and our ability to transfer its acceleration into effortless movement is something we all excel at. We couldn't survive without it. We are designed to move with incredible efficiency without thought. Our thoughts cannot create the motion, they can only make sense of it as an afterthought.

Most players who struggle never learn how to create clear intention. And they sorely lack the ability to keep their ATTENTION – the sensory equivalent of conscious thought – on the intention. Intention is the ability to clearly visualize a motion or task. Attention is your mind's ability to allow the body to attempt movement to accomplish the task through your senses. It's a state of self-observation, also known as AWARENESS, without any mental interference on HOW to do the motion. In skill development, intention drives the motion in one form or another and the body automatically stores the memory of those motions. The trick is to get the conscious mind to pay ATTENTION so it can be selective in what motions created a successful event. This is crucial in learning a highly refined motor skill such as the golf swing.

Most golfers approach learning the motion in exactly the opposite manner – they consciously try to control the action through sequential muscular events. This causes large problems, because the conscious mind cannot keep up with the speed of the motion, but your body's ability to recall motion and position can and does without any thought.

Here is a simple exercise anyone can do to understand that your conscious mind cannot keep up with the speed of the motion. Set up your smartphone to record yourself in slow motion. Without a ball, take your backswing back about $\frac{3}{4}$ distance. Then on the forward swing take your trail hand off the club at the halfway down mark of the golf swing (just past when your lead arm is parallel with the ground) and allow the rest of the swing to go through with just the lead hand on the club. Go back and review the video. I'm certain that you will be surprised that your hand did not come off the club until right before impact. This is a powerful reminder that the part of you that truly senses motion isn't your conscious thoughts – so trying to think your way through a swing is impossible even at the true speed of even a 'relatively' smooth swing. For you to do this accurately, you would need to perform the task at a snail's pace, but that doesn't fit the speed intention to propel the golf ball any significant distance. Therefore, anytime you try to think the motion, you apply a force that slows it down.

Another way to look at how doubt interferes with our ability to allow motion to flow is to do this exercise. First, walk about 10 yards on a smooth surface of perfectly even concrete. Notice the effortlessness you use when you walk. Now walk the same 10 yards, but imagine you are on a super slippery surface of ice – one careless move and you will slip and fall. Notice how tense your body is

when you make each careful step to make sure you don't fall. Your thoughts are now trying to control your motion. Your arms are probably extending outwards to help you balance. Your steps aren't fluid and effortless – they are labored and tight. This is what overthought doubt does to us. There is no time in a golf swing for this type of self-sabotage.

If you doubt your ability to walk and try to control the motion, it takes the effortless accelerations you are accustomed to using to move and puts the brakes on them. This is what happens when golfers try to think the swing, the muscles naturally tense up and control the motion – the problem is that it stalls the energy and disrupts the natural direction of the freely unfolding swing!

Coming full circle, when we lack clarity of intention, we create doubt we can perform the task naturally and our conscious mind tries to control the motion. This causes the muscles in the body to over-tense and prevent fluid motion. This is a natural reaction to a failed attempt or anxiety about how the result is going to unfold – and it is very powerful. Most golfers struggle because they don't recognize how much they try to think their way through the motion. I'm always amazed at how much detail a 15 handicap can tell me about what they are doing in their swing, whereas a tour pro can't really tell me much at all about the details of their motion!

Optimally, we would learn golf more like we learned other sports skills that many of us are quite good at and don't really remember a specific process to learning them. This is how the elite player develops in golf. Now in all fairness, it's much harder to gain a clear concept of what is happening in a golf swing, because it is chalk full of illusions. But if you can get past those illusions, learning a golf swing should have a similar learning curve like shooting a basketball. In fact, let's use that as an example of natural learning.

We clearly understand the task of propelling the basketball on an arc to go through the hoop and we have a pretty good idea of what the body looks like when it is done well. Just like golf, we start with a very rigid, arm dominant pushing motion that has success at a short range but doesn't create the energy for the longer range. As we move farther from the basket, our shooting motion starts to employ an entire body motion to use gravity and rotational energy to get more out of the shot. We rapidly realize that if we try to muscle the shot from longer distances, we simply have no chance. Our motion changes naturally as we explore flexing the knees and creating a bit of a jumping motion to help transfer the energy of gravity outward through our body to the ball. Subsequent failures and successes continue to refine and polish our shooting motion. As we practice more and more, we get more and more efficient. It's a natural process as we improve – our adjustments keep matching the task and we learn the nuances between the attempts that succeed and fail – we recognize certain movements hinder the shot, while others help the shot. By and large, those of us who pick up a basketball and shoot everyday will continue to refine and improve over time with very little coaching or outside input.

The only thing that keeps us from improving or sustained excellence of shooting is if we begin to question if we are doing it "right" or think about how we are doing it. Good players who "lose" their shot in basketball do so because of doubt. This leads to thinking about how to do it, instead of the powerful intentions they use to fluidly repeat their excellence in shooting. It brings back the state of motion we experience when we walk on ice – tense and fearful. All you need to do to make someone worse at shooting a basketball is to get them to overthink or doubt their ability. Doesn't that sound familiar? This is the same self-inflicted pattern of the average golfer.

Unfortunately, most golf instruction exacerbates the over-thinking of the average golfer, often making them worse even though the coaching is well intended to help. Most instruction does not empower the golfer with the correct information to understand the intent of the motion, nor the tools of allowing clear visualization and other sensory engagements to drive the natural learning process.

So much readily available golf instruction is a jumble of positional and sequential thoughts that confuses the average player instead of unlocking the door to our fluid natural motion. And most average players are guilty of stumbling from one YouTube video to the next in hopes of finding a new swing thought or cue that will give them the “secret”. The more you fill up your head with various thoughts and positions, the harder it is to execute any motion.

The bottom line is if the average player wants to improve, they must learn to use their conscious mind correctly – to create clear intentions – a combination of visualization and feel and use the conscious mind as a filter for feedback. Simply thinking about how to move or the positions won't get it done.

Instead of thinking how to do the swing while striking the ball, like most of us do, it would be much better to rehearse the swing as a smooth motion in a mirror until it **looks** like what they are trying to accomplish, and associate that look with the **feel** of a smooth and unencumbered motion. Once the player has the visual and the feel, only then should they attempt to use it with the ball. During the performance, they should have no other intent other than self-observing if what they rehearsed felt like what they experienced in the shot. The conscious mind should go to work immediately after the shot to decipher the similarities or differences in what happened in the rehearsals vs. the performance.

Based on what was learned from the prior performance, reinforce attention on the visual and feel that is wanted through rehearsal, then perform the task with only awareness on what is happening – keeping their attention on the intention – and then use the conscious mind right after the performance again as the filter for any further adjustment. The process keeps repeating. Thinking is being contained to where it belongs – creation of intent before the performance and to comparative analysis of what ACTUALLY happened. Simply put – to learn naturally you must DO. OBSERVE. ADJUST. This requires a unique discipline and really is essential to long term effective skill development. I can't emphasize this enough; true learning is narrowing the gap between what you intend and what actually happened. It's knowing the difference between the way you move when you have success and when you don't.

When you try to control the motion by thinking through the actual performance, you will fail to clearly notice what actually happened. This leads to more doubt and thinking on the subsequent attempt. This makes you swing your club with the same trepidation of walking on a sheet of ice. Tense, unsure, and labored. This is the unfortunate reality of most golfers – with a little self-discipline in practice habit, anyone can make significant improvement over time!

The Rigidity of the Club

The next main reason the average golfer struggles is caused by their relationship with the club. And this is something that shows up in all ball and stick striking sports. The rigidity of the club and the location of the greatest mass on the club creates an option for movement that is very problematic to learning an

efficient golf motion. It's the main reason why a new golfer always looks very awkward (unless they have prior experience in another similar activity) when they first try to strike a golf ball. The rigidity of the club allows the player to use the club as a lever – to essentially manipulate the shaft to make the weight of the club “swing”. When you try to move the weight of the golf club through the shaft in the general shape of a golf swing, you completely have the wrong idea of how it works. 99% of all the swings I see day in and day out on the range all have some sort of manipulation of the club through the rigidity of the shaft. Yet I see very little coaching in the industry that focuses on teaching players how to eliminate leverage to the shaft.

This is highly problematic, because any leverage force applied to the club “feels” like power and speed, but is preventing the natural acceleration we attain from gravity and our ability to extend its inertia to the ball through rotation. Manipulating the club through leverage slows the club down AND creates a club path that is highly unpredictable. It's ironic that most average players that I coach in the first lesson say they want to be more consistent, yet they are highly consistent in the way they manipulate the shaft, but the results are always chaotic. Even if you practice leveraging the club over and over, you get better at it, but it always has a high degree of variance in result of contact, direction, and speed.

The rigidity and weight of the club sends signals to the body that the easiest way to move it is to contract the muscles in your shoulders, arms and hands and “force” the club to make a swinging motion. All typical struggling golfer problems such as “going over the top”, “casting”, “early extension”, and “flipping” all have their roots in a powerful misconception of how to move the club. But for many rigid objects we use on a day-to-day basis, work well with leverage – like a crowbar or a seesaw. It's critical for a player that wants to improve to become aware that applying a leverage force to the club is extremely inefficient and will put a cap on how good you can ultimately get. Very few people who play golf, other than mostly elite players, truly understand how to move the club properly. And they do it because they make the club a PART of their body – NOT something their body applies FORCE on! An elite player could not be elite if they didn't make the club a part of their body – just like Steph Curry makes the basketball a part of his body when he performs his effortless shooting motion.

I believe a huge problem we have in golf is that we call it a “golf swing”. It's easy to use the rigidity of the shaft to make the club “appear” to swing. I prefer to call what we do a “golf motion”, because this concept makes the club a part of your body. A proper “golf motion” is all about understanding how your whole body moves to create the “swing” that we see performed by elite players, the positional swing is an illusion and the subject of an upcoming chapter.

The rigidity of the club and thereby it's improper use is a huge reason golfers struggle. It is vital that you learn how to hold the club and move your body in such a way that the motion makes the club perform through a transfer of energy – not an application of force. This is a concept that the golf industry doesn't address adequately. The golf instruction industry spends tons of time talking about the effects of transferring energy, such as ground forces, shallowing the club, lag and so on, and confuses the effects with the cause of good motion. But it's the other way around – and this really can confuse the average player. And for the newer player, the golf industry works in the world of teaching new golfers to get the club to hit the ball and get the ball airborne, by any means necessary. This does very little to help newer players understand that leveraging the club is the worst thing they can do when trying to perform the proper golf motion. Golfers need to be coached from day one that trying to *make* the club swing with your hands and arms is easy to learn but is extremely poor technique and causes

inconsistency. Every average golfer who is struggling to improve is applying leverage to the club and very few of them are being taught how to eliminate this problem. Focusing on movement sequence, when to “press” the ground”, specific body positions, and so on do little to change the players tendency to manipulate the club. This must be addressed early in the development or lesson process for there to be long term growth! When the correct motion is learned properly and early, everything has a chance to fall into place!

Misperception of the Motion

At a very base level, the average player does not perceive the golf motion in the same way the elite player does. They have very strong misconceptions of what the elite player is doing, and slow-motion video analysis often makes these misconceptions stronger. Furthermore, these misconceptions are repeated by the very confusing language and terminology of the game. Things like “keeping the head still” or “leaning the shaft forward at impact” are things that can be seen in the elite player, so the average player believes they must “do” them. But when they attempt to do them, the result often stifles and complicates the golf motion and leads to poor habits. These things we see in the golf motion of the best players are ***forms as a result of function***, not function that comes from copying form.

The elite player developed by focusing on understanding the function (which is mostly perception and proprioception, not analytical processing) and the forms appear as the function improves. This is how we learn all physical skills that require a high level of selective precision. We clearly understand the task on an innate level and allow our wonderful ability to develop motion to meet the task. As discussed in the previous section, we improve with successive practice sessions. We get more fluid and graceful. We sense ease and effortlessness. We are all capable of this type of learning!

While mimicry is an important part of human skill development, golf is one of those motions that is hard to mimic because our eyes can only see the parts, not the whole. When we watch a motion that has a time cycle like a golf swing, we can only see one part at a time. Our eyes can easily lock in on a specific movement of a body part or the club and believe that it is something that needs to be “done” as opposed to something that “happens” naturally because of the motion. Often what we perceive to be true we believe to be true. Once we believe it, it’s very hard to see it in another light for what it is. I believe that successful coaching isn’t so much about changing the motion, ***but it’s about changing the student’s perception so their motion can change on its own.***

In a nutshell, visual misconception can really hinder progress if the mimicry is locked into something that looks like something it isn’t! And the golf swing is full of “illusions” of what appears to be happening vs what is actually happening. All of which will be explored further in the book!

Here is a typical example of how mimicry can hinder the development of the average player.

Let’s call our average player John. John plays golf once per week in his foursome and is very passionate about the game. He and his golfing buddies constantly talk about what they believe to be the key moves of the golf swing. John in particular is very insistent that the head must stay very still throughout the golf motion because he sees this characteristic in the tour pro swings that he admires. While John’s

observations aren't incorrect, he assigns an assumption to what the tour pro is doing that keeps their head to appear still – locking his eyes in on a dimple of the golf ball. While John's intention is good, he doesn't realize that his neck needs to be free of tension so the head can slightly rotate back to accommodate the full turn in the backswing needed to have a solid motion. He doesn't understand that the still head of the pro is a form from the function of a centered motion, and that the tour pro is actually seeing the ball from the peripheral vision which allows the body to turn easily in the back swing with no resistance from the neck. He also doesn't see that the head is tilting to the side in the back swing to accommodate the motion – he just sees it staying in a relatively fixed position.

As a result of this focus to keep his head still, John's torso isn't able to open up enough on the backswing, and his arms fold into his body and then he lifts his arms up high with his shoulders. This puts his arms and club into a place where he can only cut across the ball. He persistently hits a fade because it's the only way the club can get back to the ball.

If he could experience the elite players swing first person, he would recognize that the ball moves to the peripheral vision (or possibly even out of vision) which allows the neck muscles to not interfere with rotating the torso into a place where the arms and club can function properly. The elite players eyes are in fact not locked onto the ball. He is aware of the ball as a result of how he set up to it, not really focused on it as a "target" like our subject John is making it.

John's whole golf swing would have so much more potential if he understood the function instead of locking in on the form. This is just one typical example of how mimicry can be completely misleading and stifle improvement. If John could get an accurate understanding of the function, he would understand the form he sees in an accurate light. His misconception would not hinder his development if he really understood the motion as a whole instead of making assumptions based on what he sees.

In the golf motion, I'd say there are 10+ misconceptions the average player has regarding the golf swing that are not what they appear to be! Here are a few of the most common:

- *Quickly Rotate the Pelvis to Start the Forward Swing.*
 - Many Elite players appear to make a shift to their lead foot while their pelvis rotates before the forward swing. While this is often the case in appearance, the average player assumes that the lower body shifting and rotating powers the swing. While the elite player indeed moves his pelvis in the swing, it is not the POWER of the swing, it is a PART of the total efficiency of the motion. It is a strong misconception of many golfers that thrusting or forcing the pelvis to rotate somehow makes the rest of the body unleash more power.
- *Lean the shaft forward at impact.*
 - Visually, this is correct at impact for an iron shot of the elite player, the shaft is leaning towards the target in line with the lead arm at impact. What causes this is allowing the radius of rotation to freely extend all the way to the ball relative to the total rotation of the motion. It is a consequence of elite motion, not something the elite player "does" to the club. The average amateur player sees this as something that must be done and tries to push the handle as they arrive at impact – or hold the club so tight that the clubhead has no chance of ever passing the hands. Either way, this destroys the natural

energy available to the golfer from understanding the total motion. Another visual misconception that leads to very, very poor technique.

- *Hold The “Lag” Angle as Long as Possible on the Forward Swing*
 - Again, visually this is what appears to be happening in the elite player’s motion – the angle between the club shaft and the forearms stays acute for a fairly long time in the forward swing. The problem is the idea of “holding” the angle. This makes the average player try to use their forearm strength to hold the club back as long as possible, which then leads to applying massive leverage on the shaft to catch it back up to hit the ball. While this is what appears to be happening, it is happening again because the elite player has conditioned their arms and wrists to fall freely and only un-shape due to the horizontal extension created by their rotation – it’s actually a very passive concept, not actively applying a force to the club shaft. When the average player doesn’t understand the total concept of WHY the “lag” angle appears to hold longer, they make an assumption again that it is something they must be “done”.

There are certainly several more “illusions” in the golf swing that really confuse the average player based on simply not understanding the total concept of the motion.

Conclusion

Now that we have a good understanding of all the things that hold the average player back from progressing, it’s time to move forward and learn how all of us can start unlocking our TRUE efficient swing. It’s time to let go of misconception, “golfisms”, doubt and over-thinking. Let’s start with understanding the REAL golf motion and then learn how to train and develop it so we can own it!

So how does one gain true understanding so they can transform and have lasting change once and for all?

Simple...reach out to me when you are ready to begin the fun and rewarding journey of uncovering your TRUE swing! Through my unique approach to coaching and guided use of my proprietary elite swing development device – the PRO (www.swingthepro.com), I will facilitate the transformation of your perception, intentions, and ultimately the acquisition of YOUR best golf swing!