

What I've Learned: Michael Breed

Manhattan Woods G.C., West Nyack, NY

Interview by Paul Ramee, Jr.



Last month's newsletter contained Part 1 of this two-installment article, and since then Proponent member Michael Breed has kept up his busy schedule—including a high-profile gig at the just-concluded PGA Merchandise Show in Orlando. The 2012 PGA Teacher of the Year and host of Golf Channel's "The Golf Fix" served as master of ceremonies at

the 13th PGA Teaching & Coaching Summit, which took place for the first time as part of PGA Show week. As we mentioned last month, the original article transcript submitted by interviewer Paul Ramee was too much to fit into one newsletter. So, we took a front nine-back nine approach and divided it up. Here's what Michael and Paul discussed in the home half of their lengthy session:

Talk about the driving force behind leaving Sunningdale, one of the great old-line clubs in New York, and just teaching at Manhattan Woods and working for the Golf Channel?

Well, the Golf Channel wanted to add more shows and I was certainly up for that. Meanwhile, I was spending more and more time presenting to PGA Sections, so time management was getting more and more challenging. At home I've got a 10-month-old and another one on the way. I needed to make a change and carve out some time for myself. I looked at what I wanted to do and what was most important to me and it was family, teaching, the Golf Channel and presenting to sections. The motivation was I needed a lifestyle change and this new opportunity at Manhattan Woods would be a key to that. My new schedule and new orientation was to provide a first-class instructional experience at Manhattan Woods on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, work for the Golf Channel on Monday and Tuesday, and get Saturday and Sunday off to spend with my family. As everyone knows that is a very rare opportunity in our industry.

How were you able to fulfill the duties of a head professional and still carve out all those long hours on the lesson tee?

It's largely a question of attitude. I would wake up every day and say to myself "I am going to have a great day." It also comes down to being open-minded. This for me is the tough part, because it requires that I admit to myself that I don't have all the answers. Again, there's that challenge of maintaining your perspective and your humility. So, being open-minded is critical to success and it mandates that you become a good listener and stay that way. If you are a good listener, you may just learn

something. One point I go back to involves the New York-Orlando commute and all those hours on the airplane. I tried to devote most of that time reading about how to hire and train staff, mentor assistant professionals and create a staff that would allow me to spend more and more time on the lesson tee. Authors like John Maxwell and John Wooden taught me a lot on those plane trips. John Maxwell talks about spending one half-hour a week and one day a month organizing your concepts about where you are going. I call this "motion with direction." This creates your values and also saves you so much time, it creates your path.

You have the opportunity to speak to a lot of PGA Sections around the country, what is your message?

My first message is to be grateful. I had been doing "The Golf Fix" and I received a call from the Foutty family, they lived in Akron, Ohio and they wanted to bring their son, Blake to me for a lesson. The father, who is an attorney, asked how to get to me. I told him their best bet was to fly to LaGuardia, rent a car and drive to Sunningdale.

They told me they were going to come by car, which is a drive of seven or more hours. Their plan was for the three of them to leave at 7 p.m., get to Scarsdale around 3 a.m., check into a hotel, wake up at 6:30 am, get showered, get dressed and come out to the club. That morning I was thinking about how I was going to greet this family, most of us would usually start with a "good morning", but I thought I needed to thank these people.

"It goes back to attitude and in the year 2013, we are all already a brand, Facebook, Twitter, your own website, you have created a brand. The big question is, how do you want to be branded?"

- Michael Breed



Why was that?

I thought to myself, how many golf professionals do you think they passed between Akron, Ohio and Purchase, New York to take a lesson with me? Could it be 2,500, or maybe 4,000? And they chose me, that is the greatest compliment. That is my message to my fellow golf professionals: Our members choose us and we need to be incredibly thankful. They have options. Even if the head pro and two other assistant pros are occupied and they take a lesson from the third assistant, they still chose you, they had an option to not take a lesson. So when you see that you have a 5:00 p.m. lesson and it creates that feeling of "This is the last thing I want to do at 5 o'clock on a summer day," remember that the person taking the lesson feels your enthusiasm

and studies have proven that the best learning environment is one that has enthusiasm and a great attitude.

My second message is to have an awareness of what is happening in the social media world. There is a lot that could be said on that topic, which I try to go into as I speak before my fellow PGA members.

What is your secret to time management?

The key to life is taking advantage of every moment, I have become very good at defining when I am going to work and when I am going to relax, if I am getting onto a plane and am a little run-down, I may spend the first hour relaxing and then when that hour is over spend the rest of the flight getting some work done. If you think about getting lost on a road, you never really get lost, because you can always get back to where you made the wrong turn, you only lose time.

So if you want to become a better speaker and you sit down and create a plan, your plan would include developing content, working on entertainment value, learning how to make eye contact, along with other items, creating this plan would take time. Or, you could buy a book and learn from the book or be a remora and learn from others. Abraham Lincoln had a great quote, when asked if you had 8 hours to cut down a tree how would you do it? He replied, "If I had eight hours to chop down a tree, I'd spend six hours sharpening my axe."

Do you want to be branded as an Instructor? Golf Pro? Person?

I do not use Facebook, I use Twitter and I represent myself as a person and I am honest. I may Tweet about the New York Giants, because I am a New York Giants fan, I never Tweet anything malicious or bad, because that is not the type of person I am. In hindsight, I took the opportunity to create a brand, I wanted to be an instructor and I followed the avenues, in 1994 I was writing for a local newspaper, in 1996 I had a radio show, in 1999 I was on a TV instructional video. So by the time I got to the Golf Channel, I had experience in the writing, in speaking without video and then in speaking with video.

When I speak to Sections, I tell members to create their own website or buy a video camera and film themselves and how they embrace the camera. This will allow them to speak to the camera without it being intimidating. As Lincoln said, three-quarters of your time should be spent, "sharpening your axe".

The final point I would like to make with your branding is, that the world is trying to be complicated, we need to figure out the grade level to speak to people on, I have always wanted to be a normal, approachable guy and the teacher to the average guy. Many teachers want to complicate their instruction delivery, I am continually trying to simplify my approach.

How did your opportunity to join the golf staff at Augusta National come about?

When I was still working at Birchwood, in Connecticut, we had a gentleman by the name of Larry Tedesco working in our bag room. He had attended Furman, where his roommate was Steven Spencer, Dave Spencer's son. Dave was the head pro at Augusta National at the time.

That January I went to the PGA Show and was fortunate to have dinner with Steven and his parents. After dinner I was hoping Dave would ask me for a resume. He didn't ask. So as the evening was winding down, I approached Dave and told him that if he had any openings I would love to be considered.

Some time later I got a phone call from him. It was an offer to come and work the 1989 Masters. Dave told me that he would like me to work the two weeks before the event and then the week of the Masters. So I went to Augusta and while I was there a member was on property and had three guests. The member was ill and needed an assistant pro to fill in and play with his

guests. So I went out and played with his three guests and while I played well, I made it more about them and their experience, I told a few stories, gave a few tips and made sure they had a nice time.

After the round the member came into the shop and told Dave Spencer that "the kid" who had played with his three members was a phenomenal young man and provided his guests with a great experience. A few months later I got a card in the mail. On the card were the words, "Call me" plus a phone number. It was

signed, "Spence."

When people ask you about your time working there, what's a story or anecdote you like to relate?

One afternoon I was scheduled to play with three guests and our foursome was gathered on the first tee. I was about to hit my drive—I had addressed the ball and was about to take the club back—when I detected a powerful presence. Turns out it was Jack Nicklaus, who had started on the back nine and was making the turn onto No. 1. So, it came about that the situation I had always dreamed of, but never thought would happen was a reality: Jack Nicklaus and I standing on the first tee at Augusta.

Another memory dates back to January of 1991. I am playing with Ray Floyd. It so happens this is three months before he would lose the Masters to Nick Faldo in a playoff.

Anyway, we are on the first tee and he tells me he wants to play a \$5 Nassau and I ask him how many shots he is going to give me, and he tells me "zero." I tell him he has won two Majors and I am an assistant golf professional, so he tells me he will give me two shots on the front and we will negotiate on the back. On the 9th hole, I have a five-footer to get to 3 under and Raymond makes a 25-footer for birdie and he says to me "enjoy your putt, Pro." I make my five-footer and we make the turn with me 2 up. He tells me he is going to give me one shot on the back nine. I shoot 68, he shoots 64. He birdies 12, 13, 14, 15, 17 and 18. Three days later, he sends me an autographed picture of the two of us out on the golf course. Even without the photograph, that's a day I wouldn't ever forget.



Mike Breed successfully juggles his time between students and Golf Channel.