

WHAT I'VE LEARNED: WILL ROBINS

WILL ROBINS GOLF, FOLSOM, CA

INTERVIEW BY PAUL RAMEE, JR

Like a superhero from a comic book, golf coach Will Robins has an origin story. It dates to December of 2004 and a honeymoon trip with his new bride, Amanda, to an island resort off the Thailand coast. The British-born Proponent Group member embarked on the trip a still-aspiring tour player, but after multiple near-death experiences amid the chaos of an epic tsunami he returned home to California with extensive bodily injuries and a sense that his life had changed course.

Recovery and healing was Will's primary activity, but he mixed in some golf instruction to help the process along. And a golf instructor he did become, but not like most. Seek him out today for a private lesson on swing technique and he'll politely decline. At which point you'll surely hear his highly persuasive alternate vision for how golf performance improves, including how coaches and students can best use their time together.

It's a completely results-oriented program, with a guarantee that goals will be achieved. If they aren't, the student continues training but stops paying. In one of his presentations to a Proponent Group audience, Robins laid out a guiding principle: "Stop giving the player what they want, or say they want,

Robins' success has been based on guaranteeing that specific goals will be achieved and then building a system that delivers on that promise.



such as 'fix my slice,' and start giving them bigger benefits, such as all-round better golf, more confidence and lower scores."

The process favored by Robins involves "pulling the results from the player" in a manner that minimizes the amount of how-to information dispensed. The reported results—as measured in score reduction, referrals and revenue—are impressive indeed. According to his website bio, the concept has basically never failed, even in its earliest deployment, which Will describes in this interview. RGX, his training program for golf coaches, is spreading successfully to multiple continents, based on that original model.

Recognized last year as a Golf Digest Best Young Teacher, Robins doesn't have to work quite as hard anymore to convince instructors his approach spells success. That approach is explained in further detail in this interview, conducted by Proponent member Paul Ramee earlier this fall.

Will, your biography and your coaching concepts are interwoven in a unique way—so, your personal story is fairly well known. But please give us a summary of it.





Robins has devised a unique scoring system that helps his students make better decisions on the golf course.

I played golf growing up in England, and came to America when I was 17 to play college golf in the Monterey Peninsula before I transferred to Northwood University in West Palm Beach to finish off my business degree. I played two years of golf there then moved back to California and caddied at Cypress Point for three years. Basically from there, I got a three-year sponsorship deal to go play professional golf. I then played in one tournament and that was it—before the Thailand trip, the tsunami and all that.

And by “all that,” you mean a 9.1-magnitude earthquake 1,000 miles from your hotel off Thailand, which triggered a phenomenal tsunami and floods that caused some 230,000 deaths and long hospitalizations for you and your wife.

Well, yes. So anyway, I couldn't play and I was offered a job teaching, with the idea that I would do it for about a year before getting back to playing. I played and taught for maybe six months and quickly realized I liked coaching the game more than playing it. This had partly to do with the injuries but it was greatly due to the success I was having on the coaching side.

You've said in the past that you felt free to go about the process in whatever manner seemed most effective, notwithstanding the many traditions of teaching.

One thing I realized, after teaching for just a few months, was that I did not want to be standing on the range, spending an hour at a time trying to get these people to get better at a golf swing. I didn't really believe in that and I didn't really enjoy doing it. What I enjoyed was getting on the course with my players and competing with them. So I got 16 players together, and said 'you're going to

each give me \$1,000 and I am going to teach you over the next 12 weeks. You're going to play, practice, and we're going to be a team and whatever help you want, I'll guarantee it."

What was the response?

I had guys who never played golf break 100, players who had never broken 100 shoot in the 80s, players who had never broken 90 shoot in the 70s, and so on. So that's when the coaching programs were started and that was kind of the beginning of the journey. At about that time, my best friend was struggling with a business and he was making only \$17,000 a year so I brought him into the fold and taught him my approach. He ended up making \$57,000 that first year working only one day a week. His daughter, my goddaughter, was suffering from a medical condition that required his ongoing attention, so that's why he stuck to his one-day-a-week schedule. Eventually he went more full-time and tripled his income.

So, very early on, you were a coach but also a trainer of coaches.

Right. The training I did with my friend was the starting point for RGX, a shortened form of Robins Golf Logistix. It was clear to me that there are a lot of instructors out there who wanted to be effective coaches but they hadn't quite figured out how to get around the obstacles to becoming a good coach. So that's kind of where it all started off.

Could you speak a bit about the tsunami and the perspective it gave you on life?

That experience gave me the perspective that golf isn't everything and it's just a vehicle to help others achieve

Will works with golfers of all ages and abilities and is skilled at providing a realistic plan to juniors who aspire to move on to the next level of competition.



their successes and unlock their potential. It made me realize we've all been given certain gifts and we should focus on those gifts as much as we can and help as many people as we can. I remember one day—and this was 12 years ago—making notes on a pad and actually writing down: "Revolutionize golf instruction worldwide by guaranteeing results."

A dozen years later, we now have coaches in South Africa, New Zealand, Australia, and all over Europe and all over America. So we're slowly but surely on that path.

Can you tell us about the certification process?

We don't have a certification process, because I don't think the actual certification represents an inherent value for the coach. We're a consulting company that helps golf professionals transition from the instruction model to the coaching model.

What does that look like?

We start by helping them build their financial goals and their time goals. How much do you want to work and how much money do you want to make? So the first part is helping them become successful, and the second part is we're not a franchise, we brand the coaches. Gene Bakkum Golf, Jess Hansen Golf, Parker Hammond Golf, etc. Your golfers aren't buying products, they're buying you. So we figure out how to make you a better coach, a better salesperson, a better mentor, a better listener and a better question-asker.

Sounds like RGX is the B2B brand and the B2C brand is the individual coach's.

Right. We have a system everything is run through with scorecards and workbooks and everything. But the coaches put their own branding on it and their

logos, so we're trying to remove ourselves from the picture. To me that's the appropriate way to communicate value to golfers, because in most cases golfers aren't going to know what all those certifications are and what they mean. So we have to show the customers that these coaches are good listeners and they solve problems and get results, so go ahead and give them your trust. I have guys with no certifications and no technology and they make five times the money that someone else with a stack of certifications is making.

Are you saying you don't actually question the training and information, just more the business premise of these programs that certify people?

Yes, that's it. Once you have the skill sets we focus on, you can go and get those certifications. But people think their business will grow once they get these certifications, and I greatly disagree. Your coaching business will grow once you understand how to communicate with people, listen to them, and build products around them to get results. Programs like Operation 36 and TPI are outstanding additions to your business, but they aren't a substitute for the basic entrepreneurial skills I'm describing here.

How did you develop the scoring system you show on your website?

When I first started coaching I did focus on stats, but it was the traditional numbers such as GIR and so forth. But what I quickly realized was that if people can avoid three simple things—three-putts, lost balls and double bogeys—they will shoot good scores. About 90 percent of the people we teach shoot 90 or higher but I tell them if you make just bogeys out there you cannot add that up and



Consulting other teachers has become a big part of the Robins industry persona, as instructors around the world have engaged him in helping them rethink their business plans.

get to 100. And so my thought was how do I make this whole thing so blatantly simple that anyone can do it. Stats use hindsight and what you use on the course is foresight. You need to actually look ahead and know when it's not safe to take out a driver because it's more likely you'll make a double if you do. So really it was all about how they coach themselves. It shows them what they should and shouldn't be doing and then allows them to just base themselves on checkmarks showing successes and feedback.

What kind of evaluation do you put someone through when they start with you?

Every player starts by playing nine holes in teams with the coaches, and we help them fill out the scorecard for that round and sort of benchmark where their game is at. Then we sit down with them and review their goals and their practice commitments and show them how to record it in their workbook. It lets them know what they need to work on, so they fill out the workbook as they go. Then we build a plan for them and basically say we'll guarantee that you will complete this goal as long as you guarantee you'll work on whatever you need to work on. We tell them to come to a certain number of sessions over a certain amount of time and then here's your price and here's your product and invite them to become part of the team.

What percentage of people don't follow the plan?

It's all in the role of the coach to get people to follow the plan. So the approach would be, how would you get the person to sign up? It's all up to how equipped you are to set the right goals for your players. And if the coach does that the right way I would say it's 100 percent of the time. We get younger players in high school who come up to us with all these things that they

want and say they want to play Division I golf. And I show them the practice schedule and show them what it's really like, and usually they think they can do it. After three or four weeks they lose the commitment, because the goal and the effort aren't in alignment.

What do you do then?

We'll sit with the parents and say look, we have three game plans: one is a D-1 scholarship, one is college golf, and one is to play community college golf. If the player isn't following the plan, we're honest and we tell them their original goal is probably beyond reach. They're spending a lot of money with us, so we are not going to sell them on a fake dream. That isn't good for anyone.

What advice would you give somebody who likes what you say but isn't sure how to adopt the principles?

It's kind of like golf, it's always the opposite. You know, someone slices the ball and thinks they should do one thing when really they should do the total opposite. In that context, a coach will ask how to build their business and do better. My answer is: Stop talking, stop telling people about your programming, because nobody cares. Until you listen to them and understand them and prioritize them, they don't care what you have because they don't see how it's going to be of value to them. So the first thing you should do is stop selling, and like Brian Tracy says, telling is not selling. It's about asking questions and befriending people like we do here. I really build relationships. I want to support them and truly want to see them get better. You do enough of that and people start to sell your business for you, just by spreading the word. **PG**