

SPECIAL FEATURE

WHAT WE'VE LEARNED

A PROPONENT GROUP COMPENDIUM OF MEMBER WISDOM

COMPILED BY CORY LUNDBERG AND MATT WILSON

Throughout the nine years that Proponent Group newsletters have been arriving each month in members' in-boxes, this Q-and-A feature encapsulating one member's career and beliefs has been a staple of the publication.



Matt Wilson and Corey Lundberg

But this month it is veering from its standard format in favor of a "greatest hits" approach. That's based on a realization that so much material has been stockpiled from our "What I've Learned" series that it only made sense to go into the archive and pull out highlights. Staff members at Proponent could certainly have handled that task, but it seemed more appropriate to have members—actual working golf instructors—do the honors.

Pondering who that might be, we were reminded of a Summit presentation to Proponent Group Associate Members of last year. Speaking to the up-and-comer contingent that day were the self-styled "Curious Coaches," Matt Wilson and Corey Lundberg. Matt and Corey urged their young colleagues to "find a Passion Project" to tackle in their spare time. They offered assurances that, fatigue notwithstanding, the project would "re-energize" you and support your career development.

So, back at headquarters, a plan was hatched to give the Curious Coaches a passion project of our own devising. We asked them to read through nearly 50 installments of "What I've Learned" and pull out wise words on every possible coaching topic.

Of course the unsung hero of this special newsletter feature is Paul Ramee, Jr., who actually conducted all these interviews and typed up the text of each one. Thanks go once again to Paul, along with our appreciation to Corey and Matt.

We hope you enjoy these pages showcasing the unparalleled depth of teaching insights and wisdom from your fellow Proponent members.

What have been your keys to business growth and development?

Mike Malaska: You need to build the base and be ready for what is coming to you. Have a good understanding of who you are and how you're going to present yourself. What is your background and how can you work on your weaknesses? For me, the weakness is the business side, so I surround myself with smart business people. It's important to do an evaluation of who you really are and what you want to do. Just because you built it, doesn't mean they need to come—to reverse that famous line from the movie. You need to promote yourself, you need to give some free lessons, you need to approach local companies, you need to look for opportunities to expose yourself that may have no short-term financial benefit, but will have long-term benefits. All companies spend money on their own business, we need to do the same. Lastly, you need to have passion for what you do and not worry about the income. If you are doing it for the income, then you are not going to be successful.



Mike Malaska

Talk about how you were able to modify and then expand your teaching model.

Mitchell Spearman: I made a decision to focus on the individual. Rather than teach 10 lessons a day, I thought I could be more productive if I taught three longer sessions a day. This would allow me to truly develop players rather than give one-hour fixes. If I was charging \$100 for one hour of instruction, I decided that I could invite people to come for three hours and have three people in these small schools. That way I could cover more material and ultimately they could develop as players.

"Rather than teach 10 lessons a day, I thought I could be more productive if I taught three longer sessions a day."

Then one day a client called me and said he wanted the three-hour session just for himself and he would pay for the other students to not be there. After the session he said it was the best lesson he'd ever had. That's where the three-hour, one-on-one format was born. I've now extended the concept to offer annual programs for my students where they see me about 12 days per year, but have access to me through Skype if we're not near each other.

What do you focus on with elite-level players?

Cameron McCormick:

Skills, skills, skills. Everything I do with elite level players is driven by the goal of skill optimization. Almost every coaching session I give begins with a discussion about performance. We talk about KPI's or Key Performance Indicators. They are my drivers of the end results. KPIs are the building blocks of the score a player signs for at the end of the day.



Cameron McCormick

Improving performance is directly correlated to reductions in variability built around refining performance in about a dozen areas. These include movement patterns, psychological processes, physical conditioning, your equipment, tactical experience, training environment and training challenges, and also the social, family and peer environment a player finds himself or herself in. All of this is very individualized for each player and each session. I'm like a gardener, you might say. A coach in many ways is a cultivator of skills. Within this scope of cultivating skills there are techniques you come to trust to provide the desired results.

How do you balance your time between teaching, building your business and your brand, and then managing staff?

Todd Sones: If you you want to grow your brand and build your reputation, you are going to need the help of others around you. You are going to have to train them as a team. That team needs to represent your particular ideals. You cannot have the group doing its own thing, the group needs to be working together in a system. For example, I've worked with V1 to install a system where a student signs up for a series of five lessons and they take the first session

with me. I will then prepare a video summary and email it back to the student and I will carbon-copy the instructor who will take over and work with them. As the second, third and fourth sessions take place, the assigned instructor will use V1 and take video and give the lessons, and I will be c/c'd on each lesson. This provides me some oversight and also allows me to make comments on the progress the student is making. My instructor knows I am inspecting his or her work and the student knows I am genuinely concerned for them, based on my comments about their improvement.

What are some of your keys to running great group programs?

Gale Peterson: What's most important, from the start, is to know your group. Second priority is the teaching area and the setup of it. Make sure the short-game area has room for all the various shots. Do you have the necessary teaching aids for the shot you are teaching? Do you have handouts ready? Do you have drills and games they can play after they leave? Are you using block drills? Random drills? All this preparation is vital. Jim Flick was the best at structure and time management. Jim would first define the shot, demonstrate the shot, then give one very specific assignment. Then the group would break up and Jim knew how many times he was going to see each individual in the prescribed time frame. And while Jim was with one player, he had his eye on the prior player and was previewing the guy he was seeing next. He had great observation skills.



Gale Peterson

How does an instructor distinguish himself or herself from the pack?

Andrew Rice: Pick one or two aspects of golf performance that appeal to you and really specialize in those categories.

Become an expert on them. I would also suggest that you seek out knowledge and challenge what is widely believed. Listen to the best, take what you like and try to present it in a new way. A bit of guidance I give myself is this: "Try not to be normal." If you can specialize, challenge information and "not be normal" you will be able to differentiate yourself from others.

"And while Jim was with one player, he had his eye on the prior player and was previewing the guy he was seeing next."

Do you believe teaching will always be part science and part art? How do you train your instructors with this question in mind?

Eric Apenfels: I look for someone who enjoys teaching and gets frustrated when they don't achieve results. I can train people and they can learn about swing plane and how to use video, but the love of teaching is an innate characteristic. Not everyone possesses that. New instructors have so much more material to learn now.



Eric Apenfels

They need to grasp the process of motor learning, which is so complex. They need to develop the craft of communicating, as well. At our academy it's my job to expedite this learning.

Fred Griffin: One great quote I always remember relates to progress: "If you can't measure what you're doing, you will lose interest in it." So, create a program to improve for your students, then be sure to measure and catalogue their improvement. Sit down with them and show them that indeed they are making progress. Also, read everything you can, watch others teach, get better at it by doing it. Always remember, if you get



Fred Griffin

your students to play better, they will keep coming back. Another great quote I always share is this: "The mediocre teacher tells, the good teacher explains, the superior teacher demonstrates, the great teacher inspires." Phil

Rodgers and Butch Harmon inspired their

players. To this day, Butch gets a lot of people to the top of their game.

Martin Hall: I would share with them the simple thought that "Life rewards action." I can say that because my story exemplifies it. I saw a tiny ad for the Golf

Digest Golf Schools in the classified pages in the back of Golf Digest and wrote to Golf Digest expressing my interest. At a later date, I called Jim Flick and got a job with Nicklaus-Flick Golf Schools and that exposure led me to Golf Channel, which led me to a membership at the Medalist, which allows me to be on the range with Tiger Woods and watch how he practices. I would encourage anyone seeking career advice: Push yourself to take action. Another example: I was filming something with Lee Westwood and when we were done I asked him if I could come and watch him hit balls. He told me he was going to Asia for five weeks but when he returned I should send him a text. So I waited about six weeks and sent him a text and two minutes later he shot me back a text and we set up a date to watch him hit balls. Two things I try and remember, "if you wait it will not come" and "if it's going to be, it is up to me."

Cameron McCormick: Seek knowledge. Seek it in every form, from every source. I find myself continually aware of "knowledge width" versus "knowledge depth." In general I seem to favor knowledge width, or diversity—drawing from a range of sources. At times a subject will come along that draws my interest and pulls me deep into its details. Good instincts and confidence will come as a result of passion. Basically I would say: Get out there and do it. Don't waste time in work or tasks that fail to make your heart sing. It is "time in the saddle" that will develop your subtle knowledge. Time in the saddle converts what you've cognitively learned into behavioral knowledge. Plan out your career with defined goals and steps to get there. Give yourself a road map for success.



Gary Gilchrist with Yani Tseng

I find myself continually aware of "knowledge width" versus "knowledge depth." In general I seem to favor knowledge width, or diversity—drawing from a range of sources.

Gary Gilchrist: Young instructors are way more knowledgeable today than when I started out. The advantage is they can learn from and get modeled by the best in the industry, thereby accelerating their learning process. However, there is no better teacher than experience. Only time and experience will make you a master coach where you have the golf coaching IQ to be able to give the player exactly what they need. By finding the "it", which many times is not technical, you will have the leverage to make a difference.

It's often said that success brings distractions. How do you stay focused?

Pia Nilsson and Lynn Marriott: It goes back to your vision, values and priorities. As with any career, you identify what is your vision and top priority. We are very stubborn to stay on track! You can always go back to one question: What do you want to be? The other reminder is to ask what beliefs you stand for. We had a gentleman



Lynn Marriott and Pia Nilsson

approach us and ask us to relocate our business to his resort property, so we could start a large golf academy there. We discussed it and decided that if we made the move, we would not be able to do the other things we wanted to do. It was a good offer but it was not a fit for us. It takes a certain strength to step back sometimes, rather than just jump in.

Michael Breed: I use the idea of “motion with direction.” At the same time I think about what to me is a “life” question: What kind of person do you want to be? Do you want to be a person who delivers what he or she says they are going to deliver? I would recommend to others that if they have a desire to accomplish a large task, find someone who is doing what you want to do and then ask them how they did it. If that general advice isn't getting through I might explain to them about the remora, which is a fish that essentially lives off the back of a great white shark. A remora's livelihood is based on the food by-product a shark creates. So, I tell people all the time to be a remora. In other words, it is OK to ask others how they accomplished their various goals and then go out and do the same.

Talk from your experience about methods of preparation, especially for appearances.

Martin Hall: I learned early on that if you are ever invited to speak to a PGA section or chapter, make sure you are prepared, because it is a privilege to get that opportunity. You might think about this axiom: “You aren't truly prepared unless you are over-prepared.” Another great quote I heard was “For every word you are going to say, you need to have researched 100 words.” Only once did I go into something where my preparation

was not 100 percent, and to me it was regrettable. I was presenting something I had presented a few years earlier and I was busy at the time. I gave the material a summary review and figured that once the session started it would all come back to me. What happened was I got on stage and realized that this material was less than my best work. I don't think anyone in the audience knew, but I did and I was mad at myself. We have to prepare for what we do the way Jack, Tiger or Phil would prepare for a major.

What do you do to help instructors improve communication skills?

Eric Apenfels: We do a lot of mock scenarios and situations. The bulk of our training happens in January and February, when traffic is down. We will also do a pre- and post-lesson analysis of the teacher's technique and presentation. That's our opportunity to focus on communication skills, how they deliver the information obtained from video analysis or how they create a practice plan. We record their interaction and make an assessment. From there we put together training guidelines, let them execute that, then do a follow-up assessment.

Are the skills that television calls for any different than what you imagined?

Martin Hall: The question reminds me how strongly influenced I was by an article about the comedian Rodney Dangerfield. Before reading the article I had assumed Rodney's



Martin Hall

act was very off-the-cuff. That wasn't the case at all. He would go to comedy clubs and study very subtle details in the performance technique of top comics—how they walked on and off the stage, how they stood, how and when they took a sip of water.

This is actually what anyone going into a new venture should do. You can learn all the content you want from the best teachers in the world, but you should also watch how they stand, how often do they speak, when do they move in and discuss something, when do they back off? These traits are worth learning.

“In other words, it is OK to ask others how they accomplished their various goals and then go out and do the same.”

It seems every accomplished teacher or coach develops a unique approach to game-improvement. Could you describe yours?



Cameron McCormick and Jordan Spieth

conditions that you're always working toward—the golfer becomes fully immersed in what they are doing. The sensation they get is of energized focus, total involvement and increased success. To help my students reach this level of golf experience, I set clear goals, provide direct and immediate feedback and create what I hope is the ideal balance between their natural ability and the training challenges I'm creating for them.

TrackMan produces a lot of information. How do you pick and choose what to share with the student?

Andrew Rice: I like to use the analogy that when I go to my accountant, there are lots of numbers floating around, but it is his job in five minutes or less to relay to me the important information. He has to filter what's there so I have what I need to understand the situation. TrackMan is like that, in our profession. It also keeps the golf instructor accountable. If we have a goal



Andrew Rice

Cameron McCormick: My coaching philosophy is all about creating a plan that aligns with the student's goals and their commitment level. Under my program, when everything comes together the student will be able to practice and play in a flow state. This is vitally important. It's a set of

to move the club path from -7 to +2, it's up to me to prescribe the drills and coach the player through the change. So I am getting constant feedback as to whether what I am doing is working. In the end, the student must take ownership of the drills. Think of the process in relation to Rubik's Cube. You're making various moves until you succeed in getting one side of the cube to be all one color. Now it's time to work on other side. But in doing so you find that you have to break up that first side, the one you thought was all set. That's when you realize how intertwined the entire process is. I compare that to a golf coach using TrackMan. The data is all interrelated and it takes time to learn how the numbers relate to each other.

Talk about content creation as a business-builder—and tell us what you've done or not so well.

Jeff Ritter:

There are enough golfers for all of us, as long as you know how to leverage them. You need to have passion and inspire people. You need to learn how to create content and you need to learn the power of branding yourself. We have to switch



Jeff Ritter

our mental attitude and absolutely not apologize for promoting ourselves. I was pretty typical in that I didn't have the entrepreneur's mindset. I only saw the money going out, not the potential for money to come in. It takes an investment of time and money to create content. I had the mistaken idea that I couldn't afford to do that. It was actually the opposite: I couldn't afford *not* to create content. What do we imagine the consumer is looking for? Obviously, they are looking for value and if your message looks and feels like it is quality, then they will come back and view other content. Our consumer is very smart and has a lot of options. By using a diverse social media offering I have learned how to leverage a larger clientele, through an e-book and through an iPhone App which returns me income on a daily basis.

“The sensation they get is of energized focus, total involvement and increased success.”

Where do you envision future business opportunities coming from?



Mitchell Spearman

Mitchell

Spearman: Junior golf should be our focus. We have to tell young kids they can play golf for the rest of their lives. We need to be mentors for these young men and women. We need to remind them to take their hats off, shake hands and use proper manners.

These are life skills that will stay with

them the rest of their lives. Plus, the connection you make with junior golfers will circle back to you. Soon you will be teaching the mother, then the dad and ultimately his business clients. We need to really focus on helping people enjoy the game. Rather than tweaking launch angles down to the half-degree. We more need the mindset of hit it, go find it, hit it again.

What are some typical mistakes golf instructors make working with younger children?



Kate Tempesta

Kate Tempesta:

The language they use needs to be chosen more thoughtfully. My sense is that whether a golfer is age 4 or age 40, they are unique individuals

and as you guide them through the process you need to talk to them on their level. You have to find things in their world that they can relate to. With the young kids you can do a lot of that by drawing on their imaginations and the fantasies they create. Second, you need to tell them what they can do, not what they can't do. You're their guide, their educator. You're their coach. These children are able to do things adults

cannot or would not feel successful doing. We are tapping into a younger mindset and I think the coaching paradigm needs to shift in a way that reflects that. It's about the children not feeling afraid to fail. When they fail, they learn, and then we make it better. Most adults are afraid to fail.

Based on what you've achieved, you could be showing a lot more ego. It seems you're able to keep things in perspective—how do you go about that?

Michael Breed: I used to drive on Interstate 95 every day to work and when I got off the exit I would see a man holding a sign that said "I Need Money for Food." The first time I saw him, I rolled up my window and locked my door. Second time, the same thing. Third time, same deal.

Eventually I am timing my path down the off-ramp so I don't have to stop at the light and make eye contact with the guy. Then I start thinking about what is going on at the top of this exit ramp. I mean, I get to where I'm thinking about this guy when I'm 10 miles from the exit, then 15 miles, then right when I'm leaving my house. Then I start thinking about his life, how did he get there?

This guy being on that ramp every day was something I took as a message to me. One day, I handed the guy three dollars. For some reason that felt amazing. I got to where I looked forward to seeing this guy. It made me feel good to help him. So I continued to think about him, how did he get to where he is? Did he have a learning disability? Did his parents die when he was young? Either way, this is where he is, he didn't ask for it, but he has a lot of courage to stand out there and ask for money. I would say it's important to remember how much support we've received along the way. None of us knows how fortunate we really are.



Michael Breed

"Junior golf should be our focus. We have to tell young kids they can play golf for the rest of their lives."

For more insights from your Proponent Group peers, log on to the members' website and visit the Newsletter Archive where each What I've Learned interview is archived for easy downloading. PG