

# ARE WE CERTIFICATION-OVERDEPENDENT?



By Lorin Anderson, *Founder*

Ten years ago, the PGA Show was literally begging Proponent Group to run education events to incentivize our members to come to the Show. At the time, there was almost nothing that would induce a serious instructor to attend the merchandise-focused event. Fast-forward to 2018, and seemingly everyone tied to the instruction industry

was running education seminars and certifications aimed at teachers. Yes, this is great news for any instructor who wants to continue learning. And, for the game's top teachers, the learning should never stop. But, I'm a bit concerned that some instructors are becoming fixated on certification programs as definitive proof of their legitimacy.

Look at any teacher's website these days and you're likely to see five, six, seven or even a dozen or more certification "badges" on their homepage. Interestingly, a lot of the younger teachers turn out to have more of these emblems on display than do instructors with decades of experience. Does this "badge mania" lull some of our members into a false sense of security that they have acquired more knowledge and/or actually know how to dispense that knowledge in an expert way to their students.

I believe that while the "10,000 hours" theory has been somewhat disproven as an ultimate benchmark for developing professional expertise, there is no shortcut to teaching greatness and golf instructors must hone their craft over an extended period of time. They must work on their skills with hundreds and hundreds of different students before reaching a notably high level of competence.

If you visit the Proponent website and open the Certifications menu you will see than two dozen opportunities for our members to gain new insights from these programs. A few years ago it was probably less than 10. Let me be clear: I'm not saying don't pursue any and all of these opportunities, but also understand that going to one- or two- or three-day events does not make you an expert in anything. These programs are really just a starting point toward developing expertise.

As I often do, I will use my wife Cheryl as a case study. She has been trained and mentored by Mike Bender for more than 20 years and uses that very deep knowledge base as the framework for her teaching. She goes to two or three certification programs each year to fill in areas where she would like more information. Every now and then she'll find a certification program that adds significantly to her understanding of a specific issue and she'll follow up by attending additional sessions of that program. She also likes to audit certification programs that are getting "buzz" in the media. That way she will grasp their fundamentals and be able to speak intelligently about them should a student ask her opinion.

Having a mentor relationship with someone like Mike Bender is the ultimate "certification program" and if you look at most of the game's superstar teachers, you'll find in most cases they spent many years working under a top-tier teacher (or teachers) to acquire much of their knowledge base. There really is no shortcut.

Make sure you are developing a deep grounding in a well-developed methodology and that you have a consistent sounding board for your questions – like Cheryl has in Mike – so that you are able to build a consistent framework for analyzing and building golf swings. Don't get tricked into thinking you know more than you really do just because you've spent some money and time on the "certification circuit." **PG**

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