

THOSE WHO CAN DO, CAN'T TEACH



By Lorin Anderson, *Founder*

Adam Grant is an organizational psychologist at the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania and he recently made an observation in *The New York Times* that caught my attention because it was a concept I've always felt was generally true in golf. His thesis: *Those Who Can Do, Can't Teach*. While not true in every

instance, I would say the vast majority of former PGA or LPGA Tour caliber golfers I've watched teach over the years have been below-average golf instructors. Again, not always true. World-class instructors Pia Nilsson, Mike Bender and Larry Rinker all played on Tour. There are others who have successfully made the transition, but a lot have never become competent teachers.

Grant draws some interesting parallels with the academic world. He poses the question: What could be better than studying physics under Albert Einstein? A lot, it turns out. Three years after publishing his landmark paper on relativity, Einstein taught his debut course at the University of Bern. He wasn't able to attract much interest in the esoteric subject of thermodynamics: Just three students signed up. The next semester he had to cancel the class after only one student enrolled. A few years later, when Einstein pursued a teaching position in Zurich, the president raised concerns about his lackluster teaching skills. Einstein eventually got the job after a friend vouched for him, but the friend admitted, "He is not a fine talker." As his biographer summarized, "Einstein was never an inspired teacher, his lectures tended to be disorganized."

Although it's often said that those who can't do, teach, the reality is that the best doers are often the worst teachers.

We often gravitate toward prodigies like Einstein because their expertise seems so effortless. That's a mistake. We should be learning from overachievers: the people who accomplish the most with the least natural talent and opportunity.

In high school and college, Grant competed as a springboard diver, and he once asked an Olympian if he had a trick for learning to do three-and-a-half somersault. His answer: Go up in a ball and spin fast. The Olympian was so naturally talented that he never had to learn the mechanics. He simply did it. The most useful explanation Grant got was from his coach, who had spent seven years trying to get that dive right and was able to walk him through the physics with stunning clarity. The physical limitations that prevented him from becoming an Olympic-caliber diver led Grant to gain the knowledge to become an Olympic-caliber coach.

So be proud of your teaching skills even if you never played at the highest levels. It may actually be making you a better teacher. It's not just about what you know; it's also about how recently and easily you learned it, and how clearly and enthusiastically you communicate it.

Studies of world-class scientists, musicians, athletes and artists reveal that they rarely had top teachers or coaches from a young age; they started with a teacher or coach who made it fun and enjoyable to learn.

Being a great physicist doesn't make you a great physics teacher. You don't want to take your first physics class with Einstein. You want to learn from his protégé, who has spent years figuring out how to explain what it would be like to chase a beam of light. **PG**

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