

SUCCESSFUL ON-COURSE COACHING: MASTER THE BEFORE-DURING-AFTER



By Andy Hilts, *Director*

In true Proponent Group fashion, our first regional event in years brought together a group of passionate golf professionals who openly shared best practices for delivering top-notch playing lessons. I personally took away several pages of notes filled with fresh ideas and great insights into the playing-lesson end of the business.

My biggest takeaway from the day was how important it is to set clear expectations before and even during the process of on-course coaching. With so much variability in how a playing lesson can be conducted, it is vital that your students know exactly what to expect. I gathered that many of the attendees at some point in their careers had experienced confused and frustrated students who were unaware of what the intended outcome of the day would be—before that instructor could grasp the importance of explaining it. Setting expectations as to what is going to happen in a playing lesson will ensure everyone goes away without disappointment.

Think about all the different options available in executing a quality playing lesson. Should the pro play? Is the student expecting that? Or is the coach there to observe, assess, and take notes, so as to develop a game plan for future work? Do the students know you are out there mainly assessing their performance, or are they expecting you to get busy swing-fixing after every poor shot they hit? Is your primary tactic putting the student in challenging situations to help reveal their thought process and gauge their ability to execute? Do they know that they aren't going to be playing the whole course? How many holes are going to be played? How about your teaching technology—will some of that be brought along and put to use?

Given all this variability, you can imagine how your students might be guessing incorrectly as to how the process will unfold. Bear in mind, a student who doesn't know the goals and procedures that govern their on-course work with you could very easily end up displeased with the result.

Each version of the playing lesson mentioned above can produce effective results. You may be best off laying out the options, or at least some of them, to see what the student prefers. So, even if you strongly favor a certain approach, if you offer a choice and go with the student's preference first, a pair of playing lessons could be scheduled at one time. That makes everybody happy and it potentially doubles the sale over simply going on-course once.

So, explain in detail how things will go, factoring in the golfer's desired accomplishments and the skill-building you as the coach consider highest priority. Discuss with them the number of holes to be played, what they'll be paying (and possibly why the fee is what it is) whether or not you will bring your sticks and play along, what technology you're bringing, how many people will be in the group and what game plan will come from the lesson. This up-front discussion will help you adjust your agenda to make sure they get what they want from the session, even as you are helping them with what their game needs most.

Setting clearly defined expectations will immediately impact the success of your playing lessons and bring additional business from time on-course with your students... plus potential new students. Which reminds me of an additional nugget from the day: If you do this type of coaching in groups, and if the lesson being scheduled isn't full, have one of your students invite a friend to come along. That's an easy referral opportunity. Not only will an up-front agreement help your playing lessons go smoothly, it will help your entire lesson program overall. How this latter aspect works is a topic for another day. **PG**

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