

CURIOUS ABOUT MATT AND COREY'S BOOK?

PROONENT EXCLUSIVE: A PEAK INSIDE "BETTER, FASTER"

Newly published—and certain to find a receptive audience of golfers and instructors—is *Better, Faster: The Modern Golfer's Blueprint for Getting More from Less.* The authors are Proponent Group members Corey Lundberg and Matt Wilson, with an assist from Golf Digest editor Matt Rudy.

It was probably destiny that this tandem would build on their online collaboration as the "Curious Coaches" to co-write a book distilling their carefully developed research and beliefs. The finished product, currently available in paperback format, is polished and punchy and enjoyable to read. The excerpt that follows comes from the first third of the book and will likely entice many a member to order their own copy of *Better, Faster.* You can do that by going to either curiouscoaches.com or amazon.com.

So many golfers hit a good shot and have no idea what they need to do to reproduce it. When they hit a bad one, they don't know what went wrong. That's when paring down the difficulty and instability of tasks can be helpful. What skill are you actually trying to learn? Are you clear on what you need to do, and do you know when you're doing it right or wrong?

Here's a common example. Say you have a massive slice that shows up on the tee, and you have no idea how to fix it. For this, the first step is to clarify a concept. What about the club delivery is producing the miss? In this case, the face is pointing too far to the right of the path. This discrepancy between face and path is the concept the player needs to understand.

The way out is to experiment with different ways to produce an opposite result—a face that's closed to the path. This new swing might produce a pull hook at first, but the goal isn't to hit perfect shots. It's to concentrate on using one club from the same lie on the same shot and getting one sensation. The task is pretty easy, and the directive is simple and straightforward.

Once you gain that understanding of your big miss, you're on the way to self-diagnosing and self-coaching on the course. This is the first step—doing it on the range. Now it's time to add new levels of difficulty.

One essential piece of skill development often gets overlooked. So many golfers practice one way of performing a shot, but when they get to the course, they aren't ready to make the subtle changes to their

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technique required for the demands of a certain situation. Our students hear it from us a lot: If all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail.

The best players don't have one solution to use for an on-course situation. They have many.

Once you've developed the base version of a skill to an acceptable level, it's time to take it and use it for a variety of situations. For example, you might use the same short

game shot to attack a variety of different lies and hole locations, or use a variety of different shots to go at the same pin.

If you asked every golfer you know if confidence is an important element to their performance on the course, you would get a resounding and unanimous answer. Of course it is.

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If that's the case, why do so few golfers take action to develop this essential component? You work on your ball-striking skills, short game and putting. You should be spending equal time developing practice strategies designed specifically to improve your confidence on the course.

To do this with our students, we decrease the difficulty of a practice task while adding more instability to it.

For example, partial wedge shots can produce uncertainty because you're not comfortable with a specific distance. How much speed will you need to produce to hit a shot 63 yards instead of, say, 71? We lay out a set of cones in ten yard increments from 30 to 100 yards, and prescribe tasks designed to answer those questions. Our players walk up to those scoring shots on the course with the swagger and certainty that only come from practice aimed specifically at building belief.

Even if that's all you did—practicing to build that “I got this” attitude—you'd be better off than if you spent all your time grinding away on some specific mechanical element of your technique.

This is where skills get integrated into your on-course game. In traditional practice, you're doing the same things to solve the same problems over and over again. This can help you re-fine your technique, but it doesn't do much to get you ready for the course—where you get one chance to make the right decision and hit the best shot.

Instead of practicing the same solution over and over, we want you to practice finding the solutions. This means spreading balls out over different random lies and going through the process of picking shots and executing them just as you would on the course. The shots are hard and the environment is unstable, because we're working hard to transfer those skills into your real game.

Chapter 4 is filled with great challenges that will specifically help you do this. As you succeed through the different levels of these games, you'll be systematically building what we call a “performer psychology”—a mindset that has intense focus on processes and solutions, not just individual mechanics.

What happens at the end of this journey—when you've found a practice plan that clicks? You enter what the researchers in psychology call a state of flow. It's when you become so engrossed in what you're doing that you don't notice time clicking by. According to an extremely influential study by Dr. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi for his book, “Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience,” athletes and other performers get into the flow state (or

the zone, as you've probably heard of it on sports TV) when they are able to focus on one thing and give their total attention to it. The task at hand is challenging enough to demand their full attention—not boring or so challenging that success would be almost unlikely.

To see this all happen in front of you, on a little stage, watch a teenager play a video game he or she is totally engrossed in.

The game makers are geniuses at producing the perfect challenge points and feedback loops for players—cycles that offer hard-but-not-impossible obstacles, instant feedback about how you're doing and progressive levels of difficulty. The games are designed to get a player hooked by the exact brain mechanisms designed to absorb new information. (For a fascinating look at how those games are made, and how they are changing the way we think, check out “Reality is Broken,” by Jane McGonigal.)

There really is a switch of sorts in our heads that engages us in “peak learning.” But it does come with an important condition that is almost impossible to trick or fake out. The task also has to matter. Apathy is worse than boredom. If you don't care about what you're doing, and it doesn't matter to you if you get better or not, you're not going to have the motivation and attitude it takes to get into that flow.

Need proof? Watch that same video game teenager who has no interest in golf get sent to a lesson against his or her will. We've seen it hundreds of times at our facilities. That's a mountain even the best teacher in history would have a hard time climbing. We're going to assume you're here because you want to be (you bought the book, after all!). And all of the research and observation of people

doing lots of other things besides golf is nice, but what does it look like when it's put in practice, for actual golfers? Does it actually work?

You're not getting some beta testing version of “Better, Faster.” The practice plans and strategies in this book have been fully developed from the programs we've put in place in Texas and California. They've produced Division I college players, tour golfers, club champions—and just plain old happy-to-be-five-shots-better players.

The proof is in the results. And now it's your turn. PG



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