

A low-angle photograph of a golfer in a light blue polo shirt, captured mid-swing. The golfer is holding a golf club with both hands, and the club is positioned diagonally across the frame. The background is a bright blue sky with scattered white clouds. The title text is overlaid on the upper right portion of the image.

THE
HABITS
OF HIGHLY
EFFECTIVE
GOLFERS

Alex Davidson

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The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Golfers

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and

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Introduction

They never said it would be easy...

North Wales, United Kingdom. Many years ago.

I remember the very first time I was out on a golf course to play a round - despite being no older than 7 or 8 at the time.

I forget how old I was exactly, and those who I was with have long since gone to the green in the sky but I'll never forget the day itself or the effect it had on me. I stood as the wind blew through my hair and the bright sharp light of the morning sun illuminated the reeds above the dunes and the open spaces of the fairways ahead.

The air was sharp and salty as it charged over the sandy mounds from the ocean beyond, carrying with it the sound of the tumbling waves. I remember thinking how glad I was to be dressed in these new golfing clothes that my dad and uncle had presented to me on the morning before we set off from the house, because they seemed to be keeping me warm - despite only having one glove to wear!

I had a set of junior clubs that my uncle had borrowed from another golfing enthusiasts son, and I was all set. I didn't know it at the time but I felt a million dollars, or a close to it as any young kid could. I was going to play golf for the first time, and I was excited and full of pride and what I imagine was youthful confidence. I was going to prove my worth as a growing man(!) and show how things were going to be *different* now that *I'd arrived*.

After parking the car and final preparations we collected a basket of balls from the shop and made our way to the practice range. Other than the dramatic surroundings of the links course I also remember the surge of pride at being out with the adults - things were serious and I was growing up despite not having a clue what I was doing!

It didn't matter, I was present and uniquely in the moment with my own version of singular purpose. Little did I know I'd reflect on that feeling for

years to come and strive to tap into that clarity throughout my future golfing days.

While driving to the course my uncle had started to explain the basics about the game. It was easy to digest and he must have done a good job of leaving out the finer points as I soaked up his every word with unusual interest and enthusiasm. It fascinated me how simple it sounded, to hit this ball over to the flag and into a hole. I could do that no problem, heck I'd just finished climbing the biggest tree in our neighbours garden the week before and that was *really* tricky.

I imagine I displayed (understandably I guess) a complete ignorance for the challenge that lay ahead, which he must have read from my face as a cue to offer a friendly word of caution:

“It’s not as easy as it seems son, but you’ll do ok”

The day progressed and I learnt very quickly that getting that very small ball into that very small hole with a very small club was going to be a life-long journey that I had only a moderate amount of control over. I recall other golfers played with almost magical powers that and impressive accuracy that day and I was in awe when they greeted us, gave me a nod and a smile before we politely let them play through.

When the day ended and I was exhausted. It had been mixed as the frustration had ebbed and flowed and the concentration waned, but with each new lie of the ball came another injection of opportunity to get it right and be lifted by praise from ‘the fellas’.

I couldn't express it at the time but the goal of reducing the distance between ones ball and the flag in as few shots as possible was something that grew to fascinate me throughout the day and in the car on the way home.

Me: How do they do it dad?

Dad: What son?

Me: How do the grown ups get the ball to go down the hole really easily?

Dad: Ha ha, well they're older than you son.

... (that was never going to cut it!)

Me: But it's not fair, I want to play better too.

Dad: Well you will. Just keep playing and realise that the best players have a lot of skill and make the least mistakes. Watch what they do and always learn from someone who's better than you. Watch and learn their *best* habits.

Those words stuck with me and influenced everything I have ever sought to do or achieve in all walks of life from that day on. Watch and learn, spot the *best* habits.

I still believe that a few hours observing a great performer followed by action and practice is still the best way to go from zero to competent, and from OK to good. And although you may not think it, pro's and experts alike are always observing and emulating the best of the best, albeit at a highly tuned level.

That goal of reducing the distance still fascinates me 30 years on and over the years I have worked to understand what makes a good golfer play better and an excellent golfer stay sharp.

Along the way, like a sponge I've collected and recorded all the things that stood out to me as 'smart'. The instances and frequencies of actions and habits that made sense and had a clear influence on a player's ability. Where I saw repetition I watched for it amongst others and identified it as a habit that was effective.

My observations and insights total over 100 (and growing) but there are a small collection of time honoured golden nuggets that the best of the best (and the damn good) display time and time again. Most importantly, they're accessible to all.

I've called them The Seven Habits Of Highly Effective Golfers and I believe you can enhance your own game by following these habits and implementing them into your own routine, in your own way. Many of them will make sense and seem obvious but do you practice them, are they ingrained into your routines? Make them habitual and your game will improve.

Many of the habits that I've chosen to share here are anchored in mental disciplines. This is because I believe that once you can strike a ball and play

a round smoothly, the rest of your development potential or the challenge that you must meet to excel and go way beyond your current level of performance is predominantly a mental one.

Once we pull away from the gravitational basics of the game golf becomes a game of mental influence. The best of the best play a mainly mental game. But why do so few players do so little to develop this side of their arsenal? I believe a sea change in this area is coming, and you can be ahead of the curve by starting here with these habits. Are we at the final frontier of golfing by Start to accept this

And when you're out or watching others, remember to spend a few moments to spot something different, learn something new, from players who are better than you.

Good luck out there!

And may you forever enjoy the greatest game on earth.

Alex Davidson.

The Seven Habits Of Highly Effective Golfers

Habit #1

The Fifteenth Club

Befriend Your Greatest Ally

Your mind is effectively the ‘15th club’ in your arsenal – and undoubtedly the most often used. Yet a lot of our conscious thinking is repetitive and useless. Unfortunately in many instances it’s can also be compulsive, negative and harmful. In golf this is highly ineffective and the main reason we try to ‘quieten the mind’ during shots.

For many players pre shot, thoughts that circulate our mind originate from the past or are based upon the future. So much so that the present moment hardly exists! Yet NOW is the ONLY time that ever exists – and in golf it is this moment that is so critical in flawless execution.

Dwelling on past golfing failures or future results or outcomes is a guaranteed way to erode solid focus and the ‘quietness of mind’ which is so critical to getting and staying in the zone. Delve deeper when you’re out and initially identify the past and future based thoughts that invariably de-tune performance capability (in ALL players).

Only once a player can identify those 2 thought processes clearly, can they start to draw lines around the distinctions and begin to ring-fence them, allowing one to gravitate to more present moment clarity and mindfulness.

So keep your 15th Club clean and sharp! Make the most of the present moment whenever you take any shot – free of thoughts from the past, and future. Enjoy the process and the results will speak for themselves.

Taken from ‘The Seven Habits Of Highly Effective Golfers (and 93 more I practice!)’ by Alex Davidson

Habit #2

Get Up To Get Down

The Shortcut To Success

“Drive for show – Putt for doh” It’s an old chestnut of a cliché, but a very wise truism. The short game is your hardcore scoring game. To increase your chance of winning and get your handicap down, you must be able to get ‘up and down’ consistently. Spend the majority of your practice perfecting and mastering the fine art of chipping and putting.

In doing so nurture a strong self-image for this crucial part of your game – it will be your most trusted ally. And remember, every event is an opportunity to observe, analyse and learn so never berate yourself – don’t get mad – get even.

Strengthening your core here through repetition and practice is a hugely under developed area of the game. It amazes me how few players actively use a system to develop this area of their game. Putting and driving dominate in the practice stales but an equal amount of input should be given to chipping and dropping in with accuracy.

Taken from ‘The Seven Habits Of Highly Effective Golfers (and 93 more I practice!)’ by Alex Davidson

Habit #3

Projection

Energy Flows Where Attention Goes

Being present and in the moment are critical factors in eliminating future based thoughts and past performance distractions. However you must also have scope in the moment. That is to say you must allow yourself enough capacity to understand the immediate outcome and project the intention of your action with authority. This 'visualisation' is largely misunderstood, yet is hugely powerful.

But it has to be taken in context and controlled. The mind cannot wander errantly as it is ineffective to give energy to attention which is misplaced. The thought processes must have enough projection to play out the successful desired shot while remaining focussed on the play in hand.

Many golfers think this goes against the total focus discipline, but this is unfair. If you don't 'see' or map out in your mind specifically what you're trying to achieve - how will you hope to achieve it? Lots of golfers do the opposite and try NOT to do what they DON'T want...

By anchoring the goal as a desired outcome and then focussing on the moment, the actual striking moment and playing freely you allow yourself the greatest chance of success.

Where many golfers slip up is on remaining focussed on the outcome during the strike which is not conducive pure play and minimal outside influence.

Taken from 'The Seven Habits Of Highly Effective Golfers (and 93 more I practice!)' by Alex Davidson

Habit #4

Confidence

Fearless Means Formidable

Fear is an irrational yet prevalent emotion on the golf course and it is one of the most destructive emotions that we must deal with effectively.

There is nothing to fear on the golf course – it's just a game no matter how important it may seem – it is not life or death. And yet fear permeates into our psyche wearing its most effective disguise. 'Fear' in golf is usually attributable to a feeling.

Identify this simple yet most guarded inner secret and you will begin to expose it for the folly and distraction it is. Usually the emotion is connected to our embarrassment in front of our fellow players, shot by shot or at the prospect of our standing at the end of a round. This is my confidence is such a desirable attribute amongst golfers looking to improve their game.

But confidence alone will not prevail it will only mask. True confidence comes from self assurance and a heightened esteem which resists the impotence we place on other peoples view of our own ability.

Combat fear however immune you believe yourself to be, by building that strong sense of self. Displaying a solid strength of character and a confident relaxed control of your emotions will hold you in high regard to those around you and most importantly to yourself. Practice this and it will grow over time. Fearless means formidable.....Your scores will drop, as your reputation soars.

Taken from 'The Seven Habits Of Highly Effective Golfers (and 93 more I practice!)' by Alex Davidson

Habit #5

Be Early Be Clear

Preparation

Being prepared is obvious - but it comes down to effective time management and the ability to plan effectively enough 'you time'. Being late for the course and others can be a habit in itself - a bad one! But still it is something that people are challenged with.

If you find yourself rushing to the course even if its for practice, you're not putting yourself in the right frame of mind and you'll find your performance sub-optimal as a result. Do you even know you're pushing yourself in that 30 minutes before arriving?

Time management may not seem related to golf - but if you are one of those who always arrives just in time because you are busy - its time to stop and re-assess your priorities.

Arriving 'just in time' is no way to prepare for a round. Break the habit by arriving early. If you're playing at 9, add in your travel time plus 30 minutes. You will not be stuck for something to do and will play better for it allowing yourself to prepare and be truly present.

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Habit #6

Mindful Self Talk

The Mirror In Your Mind

Effective golfers have mastered self talk - so much so that they don't even engage in it. Long gone is the critical narrative in the head. For effective golfers there is no conscious need.

Effective golfers are 'at one' with their self and do not appraise with a 2 way discussion with their powerful distracting conscious. Their subconscious is in harmony with their output and they have tamed the inner voice to be a silent approving force for good.

But if you have not mastered self talk you must first learn to manage it before you use it to maximise your ability and performance.

The best way to master self talk and to find balance is to firstly recognise that it exists and can affect your output. Secondly to identify it's voice and understand it's strength over you. Thirdly one must realise that it cannot be defeated but must become your ally and fourthly to gain insight into it's vulnerability - by believing and witnessing the power that the 'rejection' of negative self talk can have, and how this can be invigorating and liberating.

Start by detaching yourself from the critical voice. Begin to challenge it's statements and whispers. Conquer it with opposing positive affirmations in the present tense, and master it by bringing it inline with a positive belief system and complimentary values.

Like a new language this can be difficult at first but once it becomes automated and habitual you will not even know you are doing it.

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Habit #7

True & Steady

Consistent Calm

The power to resist and avoid, moving into the elevated risk zone is a valuable discipline within golf. But managing the lure of taking what may seem like very small increases in risk has to be done with the knowledge that risk can very quickly get out of hand and escalate with dramatic and negative consequences. It is these actions and scenarios that see many (even moderate) risk takers games go from bad to much worse!

A consistent calm is a level approach with a relaxed confidence that produces a true and steady output. Sometimes this is at the consequence of settling for a lower placing than you are used to - if for example your performance is off.

If you're having an off day then the chances of you being able to 'step it up' on particular shots is highly unlikely and a risky proposition that seldom has the desired outcome.

There'd no shame in assessing your own performance and adjusting your expectation of the current game to fall in line with a level of play that's easier and more comfortable to maintain.

Playing true and steady means utilising the above approach to plan ahead and make the most of your better ability for the current situation. You may purposefully play short on drives to have a greater margin for adjustment if your drive accuracy is off and susceptible to the errors longer shots amplify.

Remember that the real power in lowering your score or offsetting a bad run lies in making the majority of your putts. If there is a place for lifting your game it's on the green where you can most readily exercise a pre-shot routine or trigger an 'anchor' to mentally enter into a phase of quiet calm and natural ability devoid of distractions.

All the time one must avoid the lure to try a lucky break in order to catch up. That tempting draw that slowly fades away! Effective golfers stay true and steady and finish higher because of it.

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