Learning Is Tough

Idea In Short

Embrace difficult new skills to stay humble and curious. The struggle of learning something hard sharpens your empathy as both student and teacher. Focus, patience and community matter more than perfection.

Starting Golf in 2021

Encouragement to pick up golf came for 20 years before it took hold. A pandemic finally provided the push. The greatest unlock was sharing the hobby with a spouse, and it became a weekly adventure. This has nothing to do with consulting and everything to do with life. Getting outside for four or five hours at a time means enjoying nature. Not looking at a phone means real focus. Spending time with a partner driving a golf cart builds connection. Doing the hard work of learning a new skill is humbling. Meeting new people who are also learning something creates community. Being patient with yourself matters because everyone's swing is different. Balancing head for mechanics, heart for calm, and hand for muscle memory takes practice. Sacrificing time and comfort matters, especially in Atlanta summer heat.

Golf Is Like Life

Spend time around golf enthusiasts and you hear this cliche often. While its exact meaning remains elusive, it rhymes with several truths. There are ups and downs in endless variation. Plans formed in the prefrontal cortex do not translate perfectly into the swing. As Roger Federer said in his Dartmouth commencement speech, "it's just a point," meaning you move on. 1 Do not overindex on your score because it is just a metric, not the objective. It is a solo sport, yet who you spend time with massively matters. Effort is required because having fun takes work. It is a game of good misses with no such thing as perfect. Comparison and fear of missing out are bad, so avoid them. Adapt and calibrate rather than repeating mistakes. Keep learning because free education on YouTube is abundant. Not all advice applies to

you, so filter it. Find a friend because doing anything entirely alone is unpleasant. Carve out time for important things. Have fun, because if you are not having fun you are doing it incorrectly. Develop confidence and find what builds you up.

Good for Educators Because Learning Is Tough

Teaching is a craft and a passion that gives energy. It is healthy for an educator to get curious about something new and geek out on the topic. Reignite the beginner mind. The role reversal is valuable because now you become the student. The eager and impatient student wishes it were easier and asks why it is so hard. The student gets frustrated for making the same mistakes. They do not follow everything the coach says. They reluctantly come to the lesson where you learn the same thing again. Each student learns differently. Intellectual understanding does not guarantee execution of the motion. Inconsistency disappoints, whether hitting the ball thick or thin.

It is humbling to get good at something difficult. This healthy struggle and disappointment represents growth. It is what any educator should want for themselves and their students.

Learning Is Experiential

No student wants to be bored while learning. Anything online is typically captivating, so learning needs a higher threshold. It must be good for you and taste good. Golf has the built-in advantage of being beautiful, scenic, peaceful, and relaxing. No classroom can compete with golf, but educators can apply lessons. Explain things in multiple ways rather than assuming everyone learns the same way. Demonstrate what you mean physically. Make it easier to practice and try at home. Increase the dopamine and gamification to make it a journey. Spark curiosity and encourage students to geek out on the topic in their free time. Create group learning environments where network effects multiply contributions. Make learning a lifelong hobby, not just a three-unit class. 2

It Is Humbling

Golf can be demoralizing. You meet many people on the course, and a common thread runs through all of them. They have all been humbled by the golf course. There are good days and bad days. Most importantly, we are all very human. We are not six-sigma robots. We are biped mammals swinging a high-tech stick at a high-tech ball. It is difficult and unnatural,

which is also why it is fun.

Solo Sport That Is Only Fun With Others

Golf is typically not a team sport. It is more individual than tennis or pickleball because you measure your score against your previous average. You are playing against yourself more than your friend, colleague, or spouse. The question is whether you can beat your average today.

Yet nobody wants to play golf alone. Being with other people lets you appreciate the weather, free time, company, and traditions. You commiserate on bad shots, bad luck, and overall human-ness. You take risky shots occasionally just for fun. You take pride in learning something and implementing it on the course. You compliment others and make them feel good about a smooth putt. You find common ground and a sense of community. You laugh together at the absurdity of a game designed for robots. 3

Time Is the Ultimate Luxury

Golf is not cheap because clubs, lessons, and tee times all cost money. However, municipal courses in Georgia let you play on a weekday for roughly $60 including the cart fee. For two people that is $120, which equals a reasonable restaurant date without wine.

More than money, it is the time that matters. Not everyone has the freedom to spend five or six hours on leisure. It is a weekend activity, or if during the week you are likely self-employed. Time is the ultimate luxury product.

Luck and Serendipity

Good planners often forget that luck matters. We all get more luck than we deserve. Things are unpredictable, and we need to be comfortable with that. In golf, shot dispersion is a fancy way of saying your shots go left, right, farther, and shorter. You are not a robot, so you must think probabilistically. If you hit a shot 100 times, what would the spray pattern look like? If you are going to miss, which way should you miss?

Oddly Meritocratic

Unlike many sports, you do not need to be a specific age or shape to play golf well. A gentleman almost 90 years old plays better than most. The golf course does not care what car you drive or how much you bench press. The only question is whether you can hit the six-foot putt.

- 1Roger Federer's 2024 Dartmouth Commencement Address
- 2Cal Newport On Deep Work And Sustained Focus
- 3Tim Ferriss On Routines And Habits Of Top Performers

Summary

Learning something difficult keeps you humble and curious. Golf teaches resilience, probabilistic thinking, and the joy of community. Apply the beginner mind to your own craft and your teaching will improve.