

Fear of Failure

Fear of failure can affect Golfers of all abilities. So let's look at two extremes we can find in golf.

The Higher Handicap Player

The problem:

For the Higher handicap player, the fear of failure can typically manifest itself on the first tee. The fear, stress and anxiety increases as he or she is about to play their first shot of the day. But why?

Well, negative thoughts about topping the ball, slicing out of bounds or missing the shot completely can all be magnified in their own minds for this level of player when it comes to the First Tee shot because of its very nature:

- Players are normally standing around, watching others tee off.
- The first tee may be right in front of – or close to – the Clubhouse.
- It's the first shot of the day.
- The higher handicapper is normally more inconsistent in their ball striking and so has lower self confidence than the better player.
- Many tie the quality of their first shot to a belief that this will set the tone for the whole round.

The list could go on – but the fact is the FEAR is a direct result of concerns over:

- **Embarrassment:** worry about topping the ball or missing the shot or whatever.
- **Peer Pressure:** your colleagues and other players who are standing around “comparing” what you're doing
- **Self Esteem:** the above two, contribute to tying in your golf game – to your self worth.

The answer:

Create a routine for the First Tee that focuses* on the positives of **your** game. Use Visualisation* to see you playing a shot that you know that you can hit.

Must you use your Driver if you find it difficult to hit? Your mind will only accept thoughts and images that you believe to be true, so if you can't hit your driver – don't use it (especially on the first tee). Using a club that you're comfortable with will give you confidence* – because you will believe that you can use it.

Understand that there will always be players who are better than you (we are talking about high handicappers here, remember!) – So if they are standing around watching you – what's the problem? Do not make the all too common mistake of thinking a poor shot means that YOU - as a person - are in some way inferior. Your golf game is not you!

Unfortunately too many higher handicap players tie their game and self worth together – if this is you – STOP right now. Why do you think you play off 24, 21 or whatever? Because you **WILL** make mistakes. You will top the ball, slice your shots and miss many putts – if you didn't – you would be off 5 – not 25.

So get a reality check.

Remove the pressure that you put on yourself on the first by creating a process* and routine for hitting – not just this shot – but every shot. Use a club that you know you can hit. Learn to reframe* any negative thoughts about the first tee. The pressure and associated stress is all in your own head – no one expects a high handicapper to cream the ball off the first tee – 300 yards. So RELAX*, use focussing* techniques and enjoy your round.

You are there to supposedly enjoy yourself – remember!

The Better Player

The problem:

For the better player, the fear of failure is normally a result of having too high expectations and demands on his or her game.

Setting targets such as:

- X% fairways in regulation per round
- Y% greens in regulation per round
- Always aiming to finish in the top 10.
- Focussing on getting your eclectic down to below 63 or whatever

They all result on you putting too much pressure on your game. Your complete way of thinking is **OUTCOME** orientated and when your “targets” begin to be missed (i.e. you only hit 2 fairways out of 7 on the front 9) you become frustrated and can have a tendency to focus on “mechanical” reasons for your perceived “failure”. Resulting in your focus and game deteriorating, leaving you feeling at the best, flat and at the worst, depressed and even angry with your game.

Many “better” players create this scenario every time they play and eventually end up destroying their enjoyment of the game. Because, even when they do play well and reach their “targets” during a round – they get no enjoyment or satisfaction from it – because they only did what they were “supposed to do”.

To the player who approaches his or her golf game like this – the fear of failing to reach their outcome* orientated targets can end up being debilitating and I personally know of golfers who have walked off the course after 4 holes because of this attitude to playing.

The key thing here, is getting the better player to understand that when his round goes wrong and his play deteriorates – fear is a factor, because many don’t understand this.

Their game “tightens up”, their swing gets shorter and their tempo “quickens” because they are AFRAID to make mistakes. The outcome orientated targets they set for themselves pre-round – virtually guarantees this.

The answer:

Focus on the process* of playing your shots – not the outcomes of your shots*. This will increase the chances of you staying in the present and executing each shot well.

Do this for each shot that you make – and your scores (and % greens in regulation, eclectic etc.) will take care of themselves.

Learn to focus* on the right things and relax* on the course. The tension will leave and the fear of failing to perform will disappear.

Have no expectations*, high self-confidence*, and manageable process* goals. Self-confidence comes from believing in your golf ability and focusing on the reasons to succeed rather than the excuses to fail.

* These phrases and concepts are fully explained in the Inner Golf Coach Audio Program.