

The Magician's Way by William Whitecloud

A spellbinding book that helps you discover the gold in your life

“Inspiring, empowering and uplifting.” Brandon Bays – author of *The Journey*

If you are reading this it is highly likely you were motivated to do so because you are someone who dreams of living the richest life possible. You would love to have vibrant health, unlimited abundance, soulful relationships and passionate creative expression. Not only do you aspire to these qualities, but you also prefer to come by them through grace and ease.

For twelve years William Whitecloud has been helping people see that their world is littered with gold, and that they can help themselves to as much of it as they want. In *The Magician's Way* he shares the secret to making this seemingly fanciful ideal a reality by helping us understand just how strongly our focus influences the way things turn out in our lives. You only have to read the first chapter to be convinced that you really are only limited by what you dare imagine.

CHAPTER ONE: The Magic Golf Lesson (in which we learn The First Law Of Success)

For nearly twenty years, golf had been my *bête noire*, my most reliable source of frustration and powerlessness. It felt very personal, as though the game of golf was an entity that had it in for me and no matter how hard I tried, it was not going to let me get anywhere.

I was on my way to the golf course for a lesson with a pro called Steve Addington and I could feel my resentment towards the game beginning to surface. It didn't help that I was stuck without any air conditioning in traffic that was moving fifty metres every fifteen minutes on a sweltering summer afternoon. “Why on earth am I doing this?” I asked myself. I thought I'd promised myself a year ago that I'd never pick up a club again. What sort of glutton for punishment was I? But I had to go. This golf lesson was supposedly going to save my life, and, as sceptical as I might normally be, the truth is that I was in a desperate enough situation to try anything. Every wheel of my existence had begun to shudder and shake and threaten to fly off the axle. In my heart I knew that it wouldn't be long before everything I lived for was torn from my grasp and lost to me forever.

Some years back my wife, Kirsten, and I had decided to leave the city and move to an idyllic coastal community ten hours drive north. Our logic had been that, as my business selling independent financial trends analysis was global and conducted almost exclusively on the phone, we could live anywhere in the world we wanted. Kirsten had chosen to put aside her aspirations of becoming a designer and concentrate her energies on being a full-time mother to our two young children.

Furthermore, with the equity we raised from selling our pokey town house, and paying the same mortgage as we did in the city, we could buy a substantial property in the country. We imagined ourselves living a peaceful life far away from the manic pace of the city, ensconced in a spacious country manor, surrounded by a sea of bucolic tranquillity. There would be chickens in the yard, we told each other, fruit trees laden with exotic offerings, horses coming up at sunset to nibble oats out of our hands. There would be days at the beach; small, personalised classrooms for our children when they reached school age; a guest cottage for our best friends to stay in; a

relaxed, friendly, abundant environment for us to grow closer in. And of course, what a gift to our children, providing them with a safe, wonder-filled world to grow up in.

It wasn't very difficult to convince ourselves, and to the surprise and dismay of our friends and relatives we sold up and moved to the country, where we did buy the country mansion surrounded by acres of dams and rivers and orchards and English-style cottage gardens. But somehow the dream never materialised. We had all the ingredients, only the cake didn't rise – the quality of life we'd imagined never eventuated.

Country life, we were horrified to discover, wasn't just a look or an image, it was hard work. Noxious weeds needed management, trees needed water, animals needed feeding, gardens needed attention, fruit had to be picked, roads fixed, pipes mended, pumps serviced, grass slashed. We were trapped in a bigger treadmill than the one we'd just escaped. Everything we did was a race against time. If animals weren't fed they starved, if plants didn't get water they died, if vegetation wasn't cut back it overran the place, if things weren't fixed early they ended up creating untold havoc.

We were run off our feet from the crack of dawn to the middle of the night, and in between we tried to run a business, care for our children, and have some kind of an intimate relationship. Even the pleasures of life had become a chore. We had to drag ourselves to the beach or to a romantic night out.

Where once Kirsten and I had been the paragons of wedded bliss, our relationship at first deteriorated into being allies in a losing battle, and then finally to suspecting each other of being the enemy. The remedy to our ill-fated move might have appeared simple, but moving back to the city wasn't as easy as it sounded. Our problem was that in the years we had been living in the country the price of property in the city had virtually doubled, while values where we had bought were very weak.

We couldn't afford to move back to the city – not without losing what to us represented a fortune. The only solution, as I saw it, was to make more money. If we made more money then we could pay others to do the menial chores that robbed us of the gentrified life we had originally envisioned.

There were two snags to this solution. The first problem was that to make more money I had to dedicate more time to my business, which meant Kirsten was left to deal with the unwanted burdens on her own. The harder I worked the more she saw me as the real enemy – never mind that I was working for our mutual benefit.

To make matters worse, the gold mine I'd been lazily mining for the previous seven years had begun to dry up. Business conditions had become very tough. Not only had the Internet and online search and delivery services undermined my clients' dependence on me for the most reliable information, the global financial slowdown had meant that the budgets in organisations for external analysis had been cut back to the bone. It now cost me three times as much money and that much more time to make a dollar in the prevailing business conditions.

I was in a terrible fix. Not only would I have to work the phones more diligently to survive, I would also have to begin travelling again to shore up support where I had it and create it where I didn't. It was the only thing I could think of, but at the same time I knew that there would be nothing to come back to if I went down that route. I was doomed if I acted and doomed if I didn't.

I felt absolutely desperate. I couldn't imagine a life without money. I couldn't imagine a life without my family. It just seemed inevitable that a fate worse than death was slowly but surely overtaking me. At sunset I'd watch my little boy and girl run down to the neighbour's fence and feed their horses sugar cubes. How sweet their laughter was, how complete their happiness was, how certain they were that life was only pregnant with wonderful possibility. Little could they suspect that our circumstances were squeezing the air out of that blessed life.

And, even more tragically, that the only way I could conceive of improving our circumstances would make them even worse.

Now here I was, back in the city I had spurned, going from door to door with my cap in hand doing what I could to keep the source of my life from drying up completely. I was staying with my old friend Cliff Bannister, the man who had originally persuaded me to get out of money market trading and into selling the information financial market operatives depended on, a move that had, until recently, been one I had not regretted. One of the first people to call on me at Cliff's stylish inner city suburban town house was another old friend and money market colleague, Kaye Lerner, who had by now graduated to being an associate director with one of the city's most prominent investment banks.

Since Kirsten and I had moved to the country, Kaye had been our most frequent visitor and knew us in our latest incarnation better than anyone else. I only had to tell her the scantest details of our predicament before Kaye had insisted I take the time to have a lesson with Steve Addington while I was in town. "I know how much you hate golf, Mark," she allowed, "But this isn't about golf, this man will teach you something that will change your life completely. It's a technique for succeeding at everything you undertake in life."

When I pressed Kaye for more details she wasn't very forthcoming. "I can't explain it, Mark. It's something you have to experience. You won't believe it unless you actually try it." I doubt I would have gone to see Steve on Kaye's vague say so alone, but everyone I spoke to seemed to have had a lesson with Steve and raved about it as if it were a religious experience. Even my nongolfing friends were going to see him for the sheer inspiration of the experience. In the end it was my own desperation that convinced me. If he was half as good as everyone promised, I had to see him.

And I did. It wasn't about golf, I knew, but the fact that golf was the vehicle really made me cranky. By the time I got to the driving range I was in a state. Thanks to the rush hour traffic I was late, tense and uncomfortably hot. The prospect of hacking ineffectually at golf balls for the remainder of the day didn't do anything to lift my mood. I was feeling very prickly. This Steve guy was on very short probation. The first sign that this was the same old same old "practise this shot till you're a hundred and you'll get there in the end" and I was out of there. I was here for one thing only. The radical result I'd been promised.

It was in Steve's favour that he turned out to be an easy going young guy with a pleasant smile that said, "Hey, this isn't life or death. We're just going to have some fun." Many of the golf pros I'd sought enlightenment from previously had the attitude that golf was an implacable enemy, and that if they didn't impress on me how seriously I had to take their training then the battle was lost.

Steve's attitude seemed to be that golf was a joke and that no matter what, the last laugh would always be on the game, not us. Very quickly I realised there was something quite different about this man. It didn't matter if you were on time or late, or whether you hit a good shot or a bad shot, it didn't mean anything, life was about something else to him.

Every time I've started with any pro the first thing they do is get me to hit a few balls to see how I swing the club and then point out what I'm doing wrong and so begins the long road to correcting my action. They either widen or narrow my stance, get me to flex or straighten my knees, keep the left arm straight, drop the right shoulder, put the weight on the right foot and then transfer to the left, keep my eye on the ball, and so on. Then begins the monotony of practising each of these aspects for hours on end. And just as I begin getting one thing right something else goes off. So it's an endless process of finding a corrective technique and practising it, finding another corrective technique and practising that.

With Steve it was very different. Same as the other pros, he handed me an eight iron and asked me to hit a few shots and nodded sagely as I sliced a couple into a foursome teeing off on a fairway to our right, skulled another ball that dribbled off the edge of the practice tee, and then hooked a couple more into the forest on our left. Immediately I felt that sickening sense of

hopelessness come over me and looked to Steve for the correction that would have me hitting sweet lofted shots straight down the fairway. But Steve wasn't interested in my style at all.

"What were you aiming at?" he asked.

"Nothing," I replied. "I was just concentrating on hitting a good shot."

"Well, there you go. That's why you don't play good golf," remarked Steve very casually.

"But you have to hit a good shot to play good golf," I retorted in that tone that accuses the other person of being an idiot.

"Sure you do," Steve agreed amicably. "Just like you have to throw a good throw to hit that tree over there." He turned and lobbed a ball at a slender gum tree standing twenty metres away from us. The ball hit the tree midway up the trunk. "Try that," he said, holding out a ball to me. I didn't know what he was getting at but I was happy to oblige. Having grown up on a farm in Africa, throwing stones was second nature to me as it was a skill every country boy took seriously and practised all the time. Putting down my club, I threw the golf ball at the tree. Bang. It hit the trunk in about the same spot Steve's throw had hit it.

"Good shot," he cried out very pleased. "Try again."

I threw about four or five more balls at the tree, all of them either hitting the mark or just missing.

"Wow, you can really throw," beamed Steve with genuine admiration. Then his tone changed to one of serious interest. "So tell me, when you threw the balls at that tree, what were you thinking about?"

It sounded like a trick question. I wasn't sure what to say. "Nothing," I answered guardedly.

"Were you conscious of how you were holding the ball?"

"No."

"Were you conscious about bringing your arm back? Your wrist movement?"

"No."

"Shifting your weight from your back foot to your front foot?"

"No."

"Ok," said Steve, "go back to your last throw and feel where your focus is as you throw the ball. What's in your mind as you throw the ball? What can you see?"

"The target," I answered, realising consciously for the first time that when I throw at a target my mind sees only the very centre of that target, as if I'm holding a magnifying glass up to it.

"Exactly!" exclaimed Steve. "You're connected with your target. You're one with the target. And that's what golf is about. The target. People are taught that it's about the swing, that if they get the swing right then they'll hit the target. But that's not true. It's the other way around. If they focus on the target they'll inevitably hit a good shot."

Steve stopped talking and took a good look around us as if he wanted to make sure no one else was listening. I had the feeling he was about to let me in on a big secret. "You see," he began again in a hushed tone, "golf is a big myth. It's driven by fear – the fear that we can't hit a golf ball.

Consequently, we don't rely on our natural ability. We try and control the shot with our rational minds."

"When you're playing a shot, you're standing in an invisible circle. Golfers believe that you hit a good shot by getting everything in the circle right; that if you can simultaneously control every aspect of the swing then it will translate to getting the ball to do what you want it to. But golf is really about what's outside the circle. It's about what's out there. It's about the target. If you can go back to trusting your natural ability and just focus on the target, you'll play excellent golf. You'll be able to do anything you want to."

Mmmmmhhh... That sounded very impressive in theory. I nodded and grunted

appreciatively while Steve spoke, but privately I was very sceptical. Throwing a golf ball or a stone at a target was a relatively simple task. It would only compare to the complexity of golf if you had to hit a target by throwing a small object at another small object and strike the second object so precisely that it was propelled in exactly the right direction with exactly the right amount of power. In golf, you're dealing with an intermediary object subject to an infinite number of variables. Hitting a tree by throwing something at it is easy. Hitting a golf ball is easy too. Hitting it so that it lands precisely where you want it to land a hundred and eighty metres away is another story.

Whether Steve was aware of my scepticism or not, he didn't show it. "Let's try out what I'm talking about," he suggested, setting about ten balls up in a row on the practice tee.

"We'll use the same tree as a target. What I want you to do is walk up to each ball, look at the tree, mentally acknowledge it as the target, look down at the ball and then hit it, but don't think about your swing, keep thinking about where you want the ball to go. It's just like throwing a stone. Just stay connected to the target."

I approached the nearest ball tentatively and stood over it nervously adjusting my stance and grip and aim, wriggling the club about and practising a few back swings. I looked at the tree, and for the first time ever got a sense of how intimidating it was to commit to such a defined target. I quickly retreated back into the comfort of my swing circle and concentrated on looking at the ball and thinking of taking the club head back slowly, letting it fall and keeping my head down. And somewhere in there I thought briefly of the tree I was aiming for. There was a big thud as my club head dug into the ground behind the ball and a tremendous shock rippled up my right forearm almost dislocating my shoulder.

"Holy Cow!" marvelled Steve. "Man, you're trying to hit that ball as if the target is about three hundred metres away. It's only fifteen or so metres away. Just relax. Don't worry about the swing. Just keep imagining where you want the ball to go."

The first ball was still sitting smugly on the tee Steve had placed it on. I began addressing it very deliberately again. "Don't fuss about," Steve cut in. "Just stand next to the ball. Look at the tree. Look at the ball. And hit it. All the time keep the tree in mind. Don't worry about your stance, your direction, nothing. Let go."

I tried it again. I found my mind still wanted to cling to the old focus but at the same time I managed to hold my vision of the target more than the last swing. The shot felt a lot more relaxed and to my surprise there was a sweet sounding 'ping' and the golf ball jumped out at the little ghost gum, missing it by a whisker. I went down the line of balls Steve had set up doing my best to employ his technique. The results were mixed but I had a definite sense that when I hit a sweet shot I was connected with the target and when I hit a duffer I was trapped in my swing circle again.

Steve was very encouraging. He could tell that I could feel the difference. "Ok," he laughed, "you've got it. Now, let's really get you out of your head." He looked up from the end of a new row of balls he had lined up, "This time don't spend any time over the ball. Don't think for a second. Just walk up to it. Look at the target. Lock it in. Look at the ball and hit. Keep the target in mind." I was a little self-conscious at first but after a couple of balls I was just clipping them without any concern of negative consequences. To hell with it, the ball could go wherever it wanted. I was just going to do exactly what Steve suggested. To my surprise the balls went sailing towards the target. None of them actually hit the tree but they all lobbed nicely into the air and fell in a tight pattern around the base of the tree.

A few of the shots felt very awkward. I caught myself thinking that the clubface was too open or that my right arm wasn't far enough away from my ribs. But whatever came into my mind I didn't let it take my attention away from my vision of where I wanted the ball to go. Without having to worry how my swing was going I became mentally very relaxed and, correspondingly, I could feel that my swing was nice and easy. It felt really good to be hitting

balls by deciding where I wanted them to go rather than by trying to force them. After five minutes with Steve I was having fun, something I hadn't associated with golf for decades. Steve was beaming with one of those "how amazing is this?" smiles. He was already satisfied he had shattered another golfer's mythology. I had only chipped twenty balls and I was converted to the mystic's approach. Steve set up another ten balls and I joyfully whacked them off their tees feeling the thrill of each true shot vibrate through my whole body. Every ball sailed through the air seemingly guided by my will. I felt as if I could do no wrong, as if I was one with the game. It was an incredibly good feeling.

I helped Steve set up another row of balls. "Ok," he said, "let's make it a little more interesting. You see the forked tree over there?" He pointed to a medium sized gum tree on the edge of the practice fairway about fifty metres away. "Try hitting them through the fork of the tree."

I stood over the first ball and looked at the target. I swallowed. Two spindly branches grew up vertically from the top of the tree trunk. They were about six metres high and about a metre apart at the widest point. That was my target. Once again I was made conscious of how uncomfortable I was taking on such a narrowly defined objective. The longer I looked at the target the closer together the two branches seemed to grow, and the more clearly my own sense of powerlessness and incapability came into focus. I hit all ten balls employing the technique Steve had taught me, but with a hopeless conviction that I couldn't do it. Each shot was a shocker. The balls went everywhere except near the tree I was aiming for. I felt sick. The magic had evaporated and the curse of eternal defeat weighed on me as heavily as ever.

Steve wasn't at all fazed. He just stood there looking right through me. There was an awkward silence and when at last he spoke I realised he'd been reading my mind. "You don't believe you can do it, do you?" he said.

"No," I admitted, my shoulders hunched in defeat. I was angry with myself for persisting with something I had well and truly proved I couldn't do.

Steve spoke again with a clarity that snapped me out of my pessimistic frame of mind. "That's fine. It doesn't matter what you do, as long as you're honest with me. As long as we go for the truth, then you'll be able to take back control again. You have to be able to see where you are before you can see where you want to be. You're just back in the swing circle now. If you see that then you'll be able to go back to the target. Then you'll hit great shots again. Ok?"

I nodded.

"Good. The thing to do now is just acknowledge that you don't believe you can do it. You look at the target and you don't know how you can hit it. You have no confidence in your natural ability, so you come back to the swing circle. Problem is that I've taken away your tools for forcing the shot. You're not allowed to focus on the swing. So, as you hit the balls where does your focus go? What do you see?"

"The target?" I ventured lamely.

"If it was the fork in the tree, the balls would have gone through the fork. Think about it. Close your eyes and go back to each shot. Notice what you're seeing in your mind. Where do you really see the ball going?"

I closed my eyes and thought about the shots. I was surprised to realise that, while I did think of the target superficially, at a deeper level there was a stronger picture of the balls being pulled off target by some magnetic force opposing my will. "All over the place," I confessed gladly, the insight giving me a renewed sense of hope.

"And where did we see the balls go out there?" asked Steve, raising his eyebrows to indicate that we both knew the answer to his question. "So what I want you to do now is just acknowledge that you don't believe you can do it. Once you do that, your mind does n't have to spend energy coping with your negative belief. Your attention can move on from the swing circle. You can be free to concentrate on the target again."

I eagerly helped Steve tee up the next row of balls and approached my first shot with renewed conviction. But before I had a chance to even look up at the V shaped eucalypt, Steve had another suggestion for me.

“Ok, Mark, what you want to do is become the ball. Be the ball floating through the fork. When you become one with your end result your natural ability will pull everything together to create that result. Just try that now without hitting a ball. Just imagine the ball floating over the fork. Better still, be the ball doing what you want it to do.”

I tried doing what he said but in my mind the ball didn't want to go through the branches. Steve could tell by the look on my face that it wasn't happening for me.

“The problem is that you're too attached to the outcome. Your mind is making it a matter of life and death. It's like you'll only imagine it if you know for certain that it can happen. That means you're still inside the swing circle trying to control it. You have to get out of the swing circle and out to the target. You can't do that if you've got a big investment in the outcome. Your trouble is that you have a fear of failure. Let go of whether it will happen or not. Remember, it's just a game, and the game isn't about a good result or a bad result, the game is in imagining the ball doing what you want it to. Play that game – the imagination game.”

I tried again, this time not focusing on what I felt would happen in reality. I acknowledged that I thought the likely outcome of my next shot would be bad and allowed that possibility to exist. It was like cutting an Albatross from around my neck. Immediately my spirits soared and I was able to imagine anything I wanted. In my mind I sent the ball whistling through the branches or drifting high and slow over the tree. I was one with what I wanted again, not with my negative belief.

“So this time,” said Steve, interrupting my pleasant reverie, “what I want you to do is hold that vision of the ball going through the fork. Acknowledge the target and then keep imagining the ball sailing through the fork all the way through your swing. And to help you with that I want you to hit the ball with your eyes closed.”

“What?” I didn't believe my ears. You could argue about stance and grip and things like that, but everyone knew that the absolute foundation of a good shot was keeping your head down and your eye on the ball. Could I have heard right? Was this lunatic asking me to give up my last shred of control? What control would I have if I couldn't even see the ball? I felt all wobbly just thinking about it.

“Just look at the target. Look down at the ball. Close your eyes and hit it. Just keep imagining the ball sailing through the fork in the tree,” said Steve very evenly. He walked away from the practice tee and it suddenly felt like I was out there all by myself.

Being left alone like that gave me a great sense of freedom. I felt like I could stretch my imagination as far as I wanted. I could let myself dream. I squared up to the first ball again without fussing about my line. I looked at the forked tree and stood there imagining the ball floating through the middle of the gap. Then I looked down at the ball and closed my eyes. There was an instant where I suddenly felt totally lost to the ball, completely disorientated, but I just went back to imagining myself as the ball gliding over the target. With my eyes closed, the V opened up into a huge wide fork that I sailed through effortlessly. I was only vaguely aware of some corner of my mind saying: “This feels weird. I don't feel co-coordinated enough.” I was so focused on the target that the swing was happening with very little conscious effort.

As I struck the ball I knew it was a very sweet shot. An exquisite feeling tingled in every cell and fibre of my body. Even the sound of the club connecting with the ball left a musical note ringing in my ears. I opened my eyes to see the ball arching crisply through the air towards my ambitious little target. The ball cleared the tree about two metres above and to the left of the V.

“Man, what a beautiful shot!” cried Steve, expressing my own sentiment perfectly. I stepped up to the next ball and hit it with my eyes closed again. Same result: beautiful shot; beautiful sensation; missed the target by a whisker. As I went down the line hitting the balls there was always the same curious resistance in the back of my mind that would melt away as soon as I

struck the ball. It was as though a piece of driftwood caught in an eddy was suddenly carried off by the main current of a swollen river. There was that moment at impact where everything was swallowed up and carried off by the vision.

When you hit a great golfing shot, the thrill is unique, but when you hit a ball with your eyes closed and it turns out to be the best shot you ever hit in your life the emotional response is pure euphoria. On the fifth shot the ball cut the V in half. If there had been a bulls-eye between those two branches I would have hit it. As I watched the ball drifting lazily beyond the tree I suddenly became aware of my follow through posture. I was even more amazed. I knew my finish was perfect. If I could have seen myself I would have looked like a pro on T.V.

“Now you’re letting go. Now you’re letting go,” Steve sang out gleefully.

“That’s incredible,” I marvelled. “Look at how I finished up. My weight is on my front foot. I never transfer my weight.”

“Man, that was a perfect swing.” Steve sounded as if he’d just witnessed a once in a lifetime event. “That’s what I said though, isn’t it? If you focus on the target, everything else comes together.

But if you think about ending up with your body facing the target and transferring your weight and using timing instead of force, you’ll end up tied up in knots and hit an ordinary shot.” His words were horribly prophetic. The next two shots were very ordinary. They didn’t stray too far from the target but they just felt awful and had none of the vibrancy or grace of the five preceding shots.

“There you go,” laughed Steve, evidently happy that his premise was so predictable. “Now you’re thinking of how you should be finishing up. You’re back in the swing circle. Your enemy is expectation. Your ally is detachment. The game isn’t the process, the game is the dream.”

Several times now after I had messed up, Steve had encouraged me to replay the shot in my mind and observe what was actually going on in my consciousness as I hit the ball. I did that now voluntarily and saw that in fact my attention was now partly on getting the finish right. I let that go and went back to concentrating on where I wanted the balls to go. What do you know? The next three shots made my heart sing.

I hit another thirty balls at the same target. All but a couple of shots were just brilliant. What a joy it was to open my eyes and see the ball following decisively the path I had chosen for it. More than anything, my euphoria was created by the sense that I could will the impossible to happen. It was an incredible feeling of power, the realisation that I could cause reality to turn into what I wanted it to be. I was connected to my magic.

Steve couldn’t wipe the smile off his face. I could just feel how happy he was, too. It was obvious that Steve’s bliss was shattering people’s assumptions around process orientation and revealing the secret of effortless manifestation to them. Nothing would give him more pleasure, I was sure, than sharing the magical parallel universe he lived in.

Steve’s job wasn’t too difficult either. There wasn’t much for him to do other than make admiring comments about my shots generally and whoop whenever I put the ball through the slot. His favourite cry was, “Now you’re letting go. Now you’re letting go.” As a coach, all he had to do was reinforce the rule that my focus was the only thing determining what the ball did. On the odd occasion that I hit a stray shot Steve would simply get me to replay the shot in my mind and allow myself to see everything I was thinking and feeling. One time I hit a shocking slice that landed ninety degrees to our right on an adjoining fairway. “What the heck were you focused on then?” cried Steve in a tone of genuine awe.

“The target,” I replied, totally bamboozled. As far as I was aware I’d done everything right.

“Well let’s re-run it in your mind. If you take yourself through the shot again, what stands out?”

“When I closed my eyes I saw a group of golfers who’d been on the fairway before I hit the shot.” I told Steve.

“And before you hit that shot you thought, ‘I mustn’t hit those people’, didn’t you?”

“That’s what I thought.”

“Even though they were way off target.”

“Yup.”

Steve indulged himself with a little smile and shake of the head. He was enjoying the integrity of his premise. “That’s your fear taking over, you see. Your mind suddenly recognises potential for embarrassment or disaster. You’re either going to hit a shot that’ll look bad in front of those people or, even worse, you’ll hit one of them and get sued by the lawyer in their party.” Everything Steve said left me in no doubt that he was a mind reader.

“So then there’s a conflict,” he continued, “between your vision and the part of you that doesn’t trust your natural ability. If your fear is stronger than your vision, you’re going to go back to the swing circle and try and control the outcome. When you’re in the swing circle the outcome will more closely resemble what you fear than what you want.

“The interesting thing is that when you played that shot the group had moved on. But the fear had been triggered. It was still hanging about. When you hit the ball you were still thinking ‘I mustn’t mess this shot up.’ In fact, the strongest picture in your mind was where the ball shouldn’t go. And where did the ball end up?”

“Exactly where I didn’t want it to go,” I acknowledged, the truth of what Steve was saying sinking into my bone marrow.

“It’s the same with water and bunkers,” said Steve. “You look at them and go, ‘I mustn’t go there’, and when you hit the ball you’re subconsciously holding a picture of the hazard in your mind. It’s all in the mind. The last message the mind gets determines the result out there. That’s why you can’t just imagine where you want the ball to go, you have to be conscious of what other messages you’re giving yourself. You’ve got to acknowledge fear, doubt – any kind of limitation. We try to over-rule the negative, control it. That just locks us up in the swing circle. You have to learn to love the negative, you have to welcome it, because when you can see it you can take the power out of it. You can let it go.

“The key to letting go is vulnerability. Fear is resistance to a negative outcome. You don’t want something to happen. You’re not going to let it happen, so you take control away from your natural ability. That locks you in the swing circle. There you are trying to get everything right, meanwhile you’re totally stiff with fear. On the other hand, as I’ve said before, if you can be open to the worst happening, then you’re free. If it’s Ok to hit a bad shot then you have no business in the swing circle. You can concentrate on the target.”

At this point Steve chuckled at some image in his own mind, “Fear is like a well meaning but useless friend. It’s trying to protect you from something going wrong. It locks you down, stops your flow. You have to keep yourself open, keep flowing. You do that by allowing the worst to happen. So don’t just lock yourself on the target, be aware of what’s going on in your head.”

Before I hit the next ball I took a moment to notice my thoughts and feelings. The awful slice had rattled my confidence. Even though I’d hit a dozen perfect shots before the bad one, I was suddenly unconvinced that I had it in me to produce a magical shot again. I let myself imagine hitting a pathetic shot and then affirmed to myself that this was an acceptable possibility. That might happen, I thought, but the game I’m playing is imagining a great shot and hitting it – with my eyes closed!

There was a sweet, egg-cracking noise and the ball went sailing through the V. I looked at Steve. He was jumping up and down with his arms in the air as if he himself had hit a hole in one at the U.S. Masters.

After that, Steve had me hitting balls full strength over a grove of big blue gums about a

hundred metres away. Every shot was sweeter than the last. I could have stood there all evening lofting balls over the trees. But I felt ready for something more advanced.

“So, how do you hook or draw a ball?” I asked Steve.

“Same way,” he replied. “You just imagine it. Try that now.”

I thought hitting the ball with my eyes closed was my last barrier, but I was obviously wrong. I was more attached to technique than I realised. It was one thing to hit a straight forward shot intuitively, but in my books there were some things that called for technical procedure, like drawing the ball from right to left or fading it from left to right. As I stood there trying to imagine the ball curving through the air I couldn't help falling back on trying to remember what I had been taught about the hook shot: face the direction you want the ball to take off on and hold your club face in the direction you want the ball to land. Surprising myself, I still hit a good shot, except it went dead straight. There was no spin on it at all.

Steve let me hit a few more balls. “You don't believe you can do it without the technique, do you?” he said matter of factly.

“No.”

“Same principle,” he shrugged. “Let's just say my way doesn't work. So we're not trying to draw the ball, Ok. You don't know how to draw a ball. So we're just going to imagine that it happens – it doesn't actually have to happen. Try that without hitting it. Just imagine.”

As soon as my end result didn't have to happen, I was easily able to imagine the ball curving through the air. “Ok, now imagine becoming the ball drawing through the air.” That too was easy. I was the ball flying over a big gum and banking to the left. There was nothing of me in the swing circle. When Steve could sense I was flowing again he said, “Now just do that and hit the ball. No expectations, though.”

Addressing a loose ball lying on the practice tee I imagined the curved path I wanted it to take, and then I looked down at the ball and closed my eyes. As I swung I kept imagining I was the flight of the ball. There was an extra delicious egg-cracking noise. I felt sensational even before I opened my eyes. I kept them closed for a second longer than usual, then opened them to see the ball rising up into the air. My heart sank for a moment as the ball kept on going in a straight line, then soared again as the ball climbed up over the gum trees and began peeling off to the left. It seemed to hang in the air for a time, then drift down onto the circle of dark green grass I had imagined it landing on.

Steve's excitement had peaked with the last shot I'd hit through the forked gum tree. Now he just let his bottom jaw fall and stood there with his mouth open in feigned disbelief. I continued practising the draw, hooking the ball more and more radically every shot, until I was satisfied it was something I could do at will.

There was still one technique I wanted Steve to help me with: the secret of hitting a number one driver. When I asked Steve to teach me, he looked at me for a while to gauge whether I was joking.

“You're serious,” he laughed. “Holy cow, man, don't you get it? It's the same for everything. What? Do you think your natural ability can play irons but not woods? Do you think it can hook but not fade? Come on, what you learned today is everything you need to know. There isn't anything in life you can't do with what I taught you today.”

And that was the end of the lesson. There was nothing more to discuss.

Continues on to next page...

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