



LEADERSHIP LAB

What golf has taught me about leadership

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Rudyard Kipling must have been a golfer. In his famous poem, *If*, he wrote:

*"If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two imposters just the same ...
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it
..."*

I'm a golfer with only one year of playing under my belt. In fact, I took up the sport in my 60s, which shows that it's never too late to try something new. But what a learning experience this has been.

It wasn't until a trip to Florida in February that I managed to shoot par on the first hole of the day. Triumph at last. Of course, over the rest of that round I took seven or eight shots on each hole. Disaster! However, the possibility of being a golfer who shoots par has stayed with me. This is what keeps me coming back for more.

When we returned to our home in Toronto and, with the arrival of spring, my husband and I were eager to start playing on local courses. We cleaned off our clubs, dusted off our bags and golf shoes, and dug out our golf apparel. We were ready to get onto the course.

Naturally, I have taken lessons. I was lucky to have an instructor who was not daunted by my inexperience and lack of ability. He got me to change my posture,

encouraged me to stop bobbing my head, and taught me techniques that have served me well. One of the most important was having a mental model of how I would set up each individual stroke. Another was to focus. It occurred to me that many of his instructions also apply to the business world, especially in terms of leadership and leading teams.

First of all, the instructor said that I needed to take more time to set up my stroke and then focus. In focusing, I needed to remember three simple things:

1. Have your weight on the balls of your feet, so you're not planted back on your heels.

This may seem trivial, but it's important. In golf, it means that your body will align properly as you follow through with the club. It's important as a leader, too. It means that you are always ready to move, to take the action required, and to be agile. Thus, you can react to a variety of situations because now you are ready.

2. Let the club do the work.

When golfers try to hit the ball too hard, we risk throwing our weight off balance and wind up not hitting the ball at all. The idea is to decide on the distance and on the club and then, if we are aligned in our body and our direction, the club will do the work. But we need to trust it. Likewise, a leader in business must decide what direction to take, but also needs to let the team do the work. You have to trust your team. It's crucial that we set the direction, be clear

about expected results, and then trust them to follow through.

3. Take it all one stroke at a time.

An 18-hole round of golf takes about four hours to play. It's important to focus on the stroke and make sure that each shot you take has the best chance of success. That means you have to let go of a bad stroke and play on without getting discouraged. Have each stroke you play be the only stroke you are playing. Take your time and do it well.

Similarly, a leader in business can take only one action at a time. You should take time to share the importance of the action with the people who need to know. Set your direction and set up your actions so they will be successful. Do whatever it takes today, right now, at this moment, to make it happen the way it should. Although you are aware that the game is in play and a longer game is happening, you must make sure that each action, each shot, counts.

Just like golf, leadership is a game that provides a lifetime opportunity for improvement. To improve in golf requires a focus and a willingness to make mistakes in order to progress. Leadership also requires a willingness to make mistakes and to focus on one shot at a time. This way you make every action count.

As Rudyard Kipling says, there will always be Triumph and Disaster. The trick is to not let either of them throw you off your game.

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