

# Success is a mind game

A Guest Article by Steve Sharpley  
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### An exciting game of golf

My friend and I were fortunate enough to be approaching the 16th hole on the Royal Course at Vale do Lobo on the Algarve in Portugal, rated as one of the best 100 holes in the world – and one of the toughest. This is a relatively long par 3 at 200 yards, but it is also located along a cliff above the beach. Not only that, but to reach the green, your ball has to carry not just one but two ravines that cut into the cliff line. In front of the green there is a large, wide bunker, which your ball also has to carry.

As if all this is not enough, it is the most picturesque of holes. As a result of this and its fame, there is almost always a gallery of other players watching when you get to play the hole, to add to the “experience” – in other words, the stress.

### Pressure situation

When we approached, not only were we the second group waiting to approach the hole from about 30 yards in front and to the right, but there were also two other groups of players around the tee box, many with their cameras out: quite a gallery. So although we were on a golf course, this was just like other pressure situations where we need to perform at our best before an audience.

### A great shot

When it was actually our turn to play, my friend said: “We’ve got to video this!” It was his honours so he proceeded to tee up first. Then, turning to the camera while I was filming, he said: “So this is what I’m going to do: I’m going to take my 5 wood ...”

He then proceeded to describe the left to right slice-drive that is his hallmark, going out over the beach – even more pronounced this time, owing to the strong on-shore wind – and landing on the green.

Then he addressed the ball, crowd waiting, and delivered on what he had announced. The smile on his face was a picture, and, being naturally expressive, he was quite vocal in his savouring of his feat. “Fantastic shot,” I said. “Right, now it’s your turn,” he said, with an equally wide grin.

So I handed the camera to my friend and he continued to video. “What are you going to do?” he shouted to me and the folks around – which I sort of heard in the background. But I had already decided what I was going to do during the long wait. I would take my 4 iron and drive it low, using my natural fade to counter (hopefully) the onshore wind. Now I was entering my mental preparation for the shot.

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### Entering the flow state of peak performance

I'd already decided the shot and committed to it 100% – no questions about whether it was the right club, or nagging doubts about whether I could carry the distance with my 4 iron. Mostly, I'd been hitting the ball cleanly so far and I was feeling good and relaxed. So the intellectual planning and analysis part of my preparation was finished: now I needed to clear my mind of thinking and enter the flow state of peak performance.

Just visualise the shot (without actively thinking or commenting on what I'm doing), steady my physical state, take a practice swing, breathe slowly in and out ... then execute ... and watch for those few delicious seconds as the ball flies off my club head directly on line, heading for the green just on the right edge of the green, waiting for the ball to fade right to left (as a left hander).

It was looking good, but I lost sight of it just before it landed. "It's on the green! Great shot!" whooped my friend and a few others around the tee. "Thanks," I said. But I didn't know – I couldn't see it.

### A memorable hole

When we got to the green, it was indeed on the right hand front of the green. Still 30 feet from the pin, but on the green nevertheless, and my friend's on the back fringe too. Then we both proceeded to par the hole with our putts too. What a hole – etched into our memories, perhaps forever.

Just as important for me, however, were the lessons about the keys to performing under pressure – in any arena, but especially in golf and business – which I later thought about when I reflected on the hole and the game.

### Eleven lessons for business

1. First decide what you are going to do, based on:
  - your level of skill, experience and ability
  - how you are feeling physically and mentally
  - the environment – weather or business/market conditions
  - lie and location – the specific situation you are in
  - the strategy needed to achieve the goal, and hence your plan of attack.
2. Choose the best club or tool for you, based on the above.

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3. Play your own game, based on the above, not someone else's. (My friend had excitedly wanted me to name my shot, as he had done. But that would have got me in the wrong energy to execute my shot and would have been an added distraction and pressure.)
4. Get really clear (no doubts or niggling questions – these will inhibit execution) and commit to the course of action.
5. Visualise in as much detail as you can (sound, vision, feeling, movement) what you intend to execute.
6. Enter the peak performance frame of mind: stop thinking, focus on the execution and not the result.
7. Clear your mind of thoughts.
8. Now be here! Focus 100% on your very next point of contact, e.g. your ball, or the action or conversation you need to pull off.
9. Have a trial run or practice if possible.
10. Execute.
11. Review and adjust. During a game or event, just notice (i.e. don't dissect) what happened. If the situation allows, re-practice what you intended to do. Then forget and move on.

Only analyse the lessons to be learned in detail after the game or meeting – to cement what worked well and correct for the future.

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If you would like more information on any of the points covered in this Guest Article, please contact **TCii** on **020 7099 2621**.