

THE BIG IDEAS

Shrink vs. Expander

Which are you?

What Do You Think

Of yourself? (<— It matters. A lot.)

Small Targets

Are good.

Your Short Game

How's it?

Fear vs. Nervousness

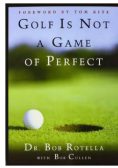
"I'm excited!" (Again. :)

Paying a Caddie

To berate you is crazy.

Expectations

The good and the bad.



Golf Is Not a Game of Perfect

BY DR. BOB ROTELLA WITH BOB CULLEN · SIMON & SCHUSTER © 1995 · 224 PAGES

"Sport psychology, as I teach it, is about learning to think in the most effective and efficient way possible every day. It's the psychology of excellence. My job as a coach of mental skills is to help players go where they might not be able to go on their own, given their old ways of thinking. . . .

Though I teach psychology, I have never known for sure where the mind ends and where the heart, soul, courage and the human spirit begin. But I do know that it is somewhere in this nexus of mind and spirit, which we call free will, that all great champions find the strength to dream their destinies and to honor their commitments to excellence. All great champions are strong on the inside."

~ Bob Rotella from *Golf Is Not a Game of Perfect*

I read this book years ago when I was on a bit of a golf kick.

It's not only a golf/sports psychology classic, but a great primer on approaching life with the right mindset.

If you're into golf and haven't read it yet, I think you'll love it! (Get it [here](#).)

(And, check out our growing collection of [sports](#) + [mental training](#) books. These are some of the most popular and perfect to share with spouses or kids who may be into sports but not *that* into optimal living.

For example, basketball fans might dig [The Hoops Whisperer](#) + [The Mindful Athlete](#); tennis players might dig [The Inner Game of Tennis](#); swimmers will enjoy [No Limits](#); martial artists [The Way of the Fight](#) + [My Fight Your Fight](#); football players [Win Forever](#).)

The book is packed with Big Ideas and I'm excited to share some of my favorites so let's jump straight in!

ARE YOU A SHRINK OR AN EXPANDER?

"The world is full of people happy to tell you that your dreams are unrealistic, that you don't have the talent to realize them.

I never do that. Whenever someone introduces me or identifies me as a shrink, I am tempted to correct him. I'm not a shrink. I'm an enlarger. I am not in the business of telling people that they don't have talent, that their dreams are foolish and unattainable. I want to support people's talent. I believe in human abilities.

If someone came to me and said, 'I'm forty-five years old, my handicap is 25, and my dream is to make a living on the Senior Tour,' I would say, 'Fantastic! You're just the kind of person who excites the living day lights out of me. Just the fact that you're shooting 95 and you're talking about being able to shoot 70 every day means you have the kind of mind that has a chance. I live to work with people like you.'

"The challenge lies not in understanding the concepts I teach, for, as I've said, they're simple and make common sense. The challenge lies in thinking this way every day on every shot."

~ Bob Rotella

"But they and other champions all have a few common characteristics. They are strong-willed, they all have dreams, and they all make a long-term commitment to pursue those dreams."

~ Bob Rotella

I would not guarantee this fictitious duffer more than a chance. The next question would be whether he could keep that dream in front of him for eight or fifteen years. The right thinking can quickly and substantially lower the score of any golfer who has been thinking poorly. But there is no rapid, miraculous way to go from a 25 handicap to scratch, no matter how well a golfer starts to think. Improvement takes patience, persistence and practice."

So much awesomeness there.

First: Are you a shrink or an expander?

When others come to you with their big dreams how do you respond?

And... When YOU come to *yourself* with big dreams, how do you respond?

I LOVE Bob's response.

Reminds me of [Joseph Campbell](#). In [The Power of Myth](#) (see Notes) he shares this: "When I taught in a boy's prep school, I used to talk to the boys who were trying to make up their minds as to what their careers were going to be. A boy would come to me and ask, 'Do you think I can do this? Do you think I can do that? Do you think I can be a writer?' 'Oh,' I would say, 'I don't know. Can you endure ten years of disappointment with nobody responding to you, or are you thinking that you are going to write a best seller the first crack? If you have the guts to stay with the thing you really want, no matter what happens, well, go ahead.'"

<— That's one of my absolute favorite passages. Remember that Campbell instructed us to follow our bliss AND to follow our grunt. :)

So... What do you REALLY want?

Are you willing to keep that dream in front of you for the next 10+ years?

P.S. Remember [John Eliot](#)'s wisdom from [Overachievement](#): "You will not do incredible things without an incredible dream."

+ An incredible tenacity to stick with it through the inevitable ups and downs. :)

P.P.S. [Robert Greene](#)'s [Mastery](#) is a must read. Chew on this: "The road to mastery requires patience. You will have to keep your focus on five or ten years down the road, when you will reap the rewards of your efforts... In the end, the money and success that truly last come not to those who focus on such things as goals, but rather to those who focus on mastery and fulfilling their Life's Task."

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF YOURSELF?

"People by and large become what they think about themselves.

The idea is so simple that it is easy to dismiss. People become what they think about themselves.

It's almost all a person needs to know about how to be happy.

If someone came to me and asked me how to be happy, I would reply that it's simple. Just wake up every morning thinking about the wonderful things you are going to do that day. Go to sleep every night thinking about the wonderful events of the past day and the wonderful things you will do tomorrow. Anyone who does that will be happy.

John Wooden, who won nine national basketball championships at UCLA, expressed the same idea; maybe he also read William James. Winners and losers, Wooden said, are self-determined. But only the winners are willing to admit it."

—> "People by and large become what they think about themselves."

That's some wisdom from William James Bob picked up early in his career.

"There is no such thing as a golfer playing over his head. A hot streak is simply a glimpse of a golfer's true potential."

~ Bob Rotella

"Courage is fear turned inside out. It is impossible to be courageous if at first you weren't afraid."

~ Bob Rotella

James also said: *"The greatest discovery of my generation is that human beings can alter their lives by altering their attitudes of mind."*

Both of those gems are so simple that they're easy to dismiss.

NOTE TO YOURSELF: Our self-image is HUGE.

What do YOU think of yourself?

Can you see how this is either helping or hindering your process?

We become what we think of ourselves.

Let us expand our vision of ourselves and live in integrity with that ideal.

P.S. Another gem: In *The Science of Being Great* (see Notes), [Wallace Wattles](#) puts it this way: *"There is, as Emerson says, some central idea or conception of yourself by which all the facts of your life are arranged and classified. Change this central idea and you change the arrangement or classification of all the fact and circumstances of your life."*

THE SMALLER THE TARGET, THE SHARPER THE FOCUS

"The brain and the nervous system respond best when the eyes focus on the smallest possible target. Why this is so is not important. It just happens to be the way the human system works. Perhaps it has to do with the evolutionary advantage enjoyed by those cavemen who focused on the hearts of attacking tigers, as opposed to those cavemen who merely looked in the tiger's general direction and hurled their spears."

It is true in virtually every sport. We teach basketball players to look, not at the backboard, nor even the rim, but at the net loop in back of the rim. We teach quarterbacks to aim, not at the receiver, nor even his number, but at his hands.

The smaller the target, the sharper the athlete's focus, the better his concentration, and the better the results. When an athlete locks his eyes and mind onto a small target, the ball naturally tends to follow."

Rule #1 of golf: Take dead aim.

The smaller the target, the sharper the focus.

Meditation teachers agree. Leading motivational psychologists agree.

Notice how much better your days are when you have clear targets.

What's YOUR target for your life? For today? For THIS moment?

Get super clear. And rock it.

HOW'S YOUR SHORT GAME?

"How do you develop a good short game if you didn't grow up on a golf course, have a backyard bunker, or have Harvey Penick for a teacher?"

First of all, you practice it. The professionals that I work with all do. If you're not spending 70 percent of your practice time on shots from 120 yards in, you're not trying to become the best golfer you can be."

All serious golfers know that scoring is all about the short game.

"Drive for show. Putt for dough."

Yet...

"Before playing any shot, a golfer must lock her eyes and mind into the smallest possible target."

~ Bob Rotella

"A golfer must learn to enjoy the process of striving to improve the short game."

~ Bob Rotella

It's the rare golfer who actually focuses the bulk of his practice time on his or her short game. It's so much more fun (yay!) to hit the ball long. (hah.)

Bob tells us: "All I can say is that if you want to score well, attach your ego to how well you think, how well you manage your game, how well you hit your wedges, how well you putt. The long-drive swing won't be in the slot every day. But you can always think well, manage your game well, and play the short game well."

Guess what?

It's the EXACT same thing with life.

We're not going to have the "long-drive swing" in the slot every day. Aka: We're not always going to wake up on fire and feeling ready to simply crush it.

Only the amateurs wait for inspiration though.

The Pros? We know it's all about our short game. We get up, get our minds right and do the little things that put us in the best position to get the most out of that day we can.

We meditate. We eat well. We exercise. We identify our most important task and resist the urge to hop online. We do our 5-minute takeoff when we feel stuck and shut-down early to make sure we get a good night of sleep and give ourselves the best shot at coming back strong the next day.

That's significantly less sexy than just simply letting it rip when (/if) we feel super inspired.

But, we know (!) that, as [Darren Hardy](#) says: our *"only path to success is through a continuum of mundane, unsexy, unexciting, and sometimes difficult daily disciplines compounded over time. Know, too, that the results, the life, and the lifestyle of your dreams can be yours when you put the Compound Effect to work for you. If you use the principles outlined in the The Compound Effect, you will create your fairy-tale ending."*

#shortgame

<— How's yours?

P.S. [Eknath Easwaran](#) is one of my favorite spiritual teachers. Here's a great line from [Passage Meditation](#) that comes to mind: *"As systematically as a professional athlete, I worked on my daily life, building it around the regular daily practice of meditation."*

FEAR VS. NERVOUSNESS

"A golfer must train his swing and then trust it."

~ Bob Rotella

"It's important to differentiate between fear and nervousness. Nervousness is a physical state. It's sweat on the palms, adrenaline in the bloodstream. There's nothing wrong with it—it can even help a golfer.

Fear is a mental state. It's being afraid of making a mistake when you swing the club. Fear causes golfers to try to guide or steer the ball, rather than swing freely. That doesn't work. Swinging freely makes the ball go straight. Swinging carefully causes disasters. To play his best, a golfer has to feel that once he's aligned himself and picked his target, it's as if he doesn't care where the ball goes. He is going to trust his swing and let it go."

Fear vs. nervousness. It's all about how we PERCEIVE our physiological arousal.

Here's how [John Eliot](#) puts it in [Overachievement](#): *"The physical symptoms of fight-or-flight are what the human body has learned over thousands of years to operate more efficiently and at the highest level. Anxiety is a cognitive interpretation of that physical response."*

John tells us to eat that stress LIKE AN ENERGY BAR. Use it!

Gold-medal winning [Lanny Bassham](#) puts it this way in [With Winning in Mind](#) (see Notes): *"Recognize that pressure is positive and something that you can control. ... pressure is not*

"When great athletes stop trusting, they stop being great."

~ Bob Rotella

in your imagination. It is real, a good thing and you can use it to your advantage. You must accept that it is normal to feel something in a pressure situation. This is your body saying, "This is important. Pay attention."

Plus: "Focus on what you want to see happen, not on what is stressing you."

My favorite approach to nerves these days?

"I'm excited."

Here's how [Amy Cuddy](#) describes it in [Presence](#) (see Notes): "As most of us know, stage fright can feel like a paralyzing overdose of anxiety. And what do people tell us to do when we're anxious? They tell us, with good intentions, to calm down."

As it turns out, that might just be the very worst thing they can say. You see, anxiety is what psychologists describe as a high-arousal emotion. As I've explained, when we're anxious, we occupy a heightened state of psychological vigilance. We're hyperalert. Our hearts race, we break out into a sweat, our cortisol may spike—all of these reactions are controlled automatically by our nervous system. And it's virtually impossible for most people to shut off that kind of automatic arousal, to abruptly de-escalate it. Not only can we not calm it down, but when someone tells us to calm down, it also reminds us of how calm we are not, which stokes our anxiety even more.

But there's another high-arousal emotion that's not so negative. In fact, it's quite positive—excitement. Brooks predicted that we may not be able to extinguish arousal, but we should be able to change the way we interpret it. So rather than fruitlessly trying to change the arousal level of our emotional states from high to low, what if we try to change them from negative to positive? From anxiety to excitement?"

Remember that nerves are part of the deal.

Accept that. Recognize how excited you are to crush it. Focus on your target and let it rip.

PAYING A CADDIE TO BERATE YOU

"Shooting the best score you're capable of on a given day requires that, to paraphrase something that's become trite, you become your own best friend—or, in this case, a caddie and pro to your self. Can you imagine someone paying a caddie to berate him after a bad shot in this fashion: 'You left that putt short! You're a wimp! No guts!' Can you imagine someone paying a teaching pro to get apoplectic and tell him he's an idiot for slicing the ball? Or to visit his hotel room after a bad round and remind him of all the mistakes he made that day?"

No one would do it. Yet, every time I play golf, I see people doing it to themselves."

Hah. Imagine that: Hiring a caddie to follow you around and BERATE you after every poor shot. Then, follow you to your hotel/house after the round to remind you of all the mistakes you made.

That's nuts. And, it's precisely what we do to ourselves with an untrained mind.

Reminds me of [Michael Singer](#)'s great metaphor in [The Untethered Soul](#) (see Notes). He tells us we have two aspects to our inner being: the part of us that watches what's going on and the part of us that never shuts up—talking incessantly about all its likes and dislikes.

He compares that voice to a super annoying roommate and says: "How would you feel if someone outside really started talking to you the way your inner voice does? How would you relate to a person who opened their mouth to say everything your mental voice says? After a very short period of time, you would tell them to leave and never come back. But when your inner friend continuously speaks up, you don't ever tell it to leave. No matter how much trouble it causes, you listen."

"A golfer can and must decide how he will think."

~ Bob Rotella

"If a golfer chooses to compete, he must choose to believe that he can win. Winners and losers in life are completely self-determined, but only the winners are willing to admit it."

~ Bob Rotella

It's time to give that crazy voice the boot. Let's quit paying our caddie to berate us.

(Check out the Notes on [What to Say When You Talk to Yourself](#) by [Shad Helmstetter](#) for another great perspective on cultivating positive self-talk.)

EXPECTATIONS: THE GOOD AND THE BAD

"Expectations are great if you confine them to long-range considerations. It's fine, for example, to expect that if you work at your game intelligently for an extended period of time, you will improve. But expectations can hurt you if they are narrowly focused on the results of a particular stroke, hole or round."

Expectations.

They're GREAT if you confine them to long-term goals.

Not so good if you become attached to immediate-term performance.

Keep this in mind: "If you must have expectations about results, expect to make some mistakes. Walter Hagen once said that he expected to make seven mistakes per round. When he hit a bad shot, he wasn't bothered. It was just one of the expected seven." <-- :)

Here's to dreaming BIG and living baby step by baby step. KNOWING we'll continue to improve over the long run if we show up diligently, patiently, and persistently, while letting go of the manic need to achieve.it.all.right.this.second.

Golf is not a game of perfect. Neither is life. Let's embrace that reality and have one heck of a good time on this preciously brief round of ours! :)

B

Brian Johnson,
Chief Philosopher

If you liked this Note,
you'll probably like...

[With Winning in Mind](#)

[Mind Gym](#)

[The Art of Mental Training](#)

[Attainment](#)

[Unbeatable Mind](#)

[Overachievement](#)

About the Author of "Golf Is Not a Game of Perfect"

DR. BOB ROTELLA



Bob Rotella is a consultant to the PGA of America, the PGA Tour, and the LPGA Tour. He is the author of several bestselling golf books including *Golf Is Not A Game of Perfect*.

About the Author of This Note

BRIAN JOHNSON



Brian Johnson loves helping people optimize their lives as he studies, embodies and teaches the fundamentals of optimal living—integrating ancient wisdom + modern science + common sense + virtue + mastery + fun. Learn more and optimize your life at brianjohnson.me.