

Chapter 14

Lessons from a Dam Builder

“Golf is, in part, a game; but only in part. It is also in part a religion, a fever, a vice, a mirage, a frenzy, a fear, an abscess, a joy, a thrill, a pest, a disease, an uplift, a brooding, a melancholy, a dream of yesterday, and a hope for tomorrow.”

—*New York Tribune* (1916)

My golf career started when I was just a kid. My grandparents loved the game, and my first forays came while visiting them on a nine-hole desert course in the tiny farming town of Wilbur, Washington. Playing golf with Grandpa wasn't easy. To him, golf was a game of respect, not an occasion for horseplay, and getting out of line would likely get my brother and me sent home. I still can't step across a putting line, replace a divot, or rake a bunker without thinking of my grandfather. As I grew older (and inevitably, so did he), one of the proudest—and saddest—days of my golf career was the first time I beat the old man.

Honestly, I don't know what kind of a player he was. I was too young to care when he was in his prime, and he was a shadow of himself by the time I was old enough to give him a run. Nonetheless, he was the inspiration for my career in golf. For many years I thought that he was a professional golfer. Since then, I've learned that many grandsons think their golfing grandfathers are professionals—because that's all they do. I realize now that golf is a reward for the retired, and he enjoyed that privilege daily. Lord knows he earned it.

His self-taught action wasn't pretty, but it was effective. It was quick and herky-jerky, part golf swing, part tomahawk chop. Blink, and you'd miss it. As it does for all of us, his golf swing reflected his personality. He believed in getting in, getting done, and getting on to the next project. He wasn't concerned with aesthetics, just the results. It was exactly the way you'd expect a fatherless, Depression-era high school dropout, World War II veteran, eastern Washington "dust bowl" farmer, and Grand Coulee Dam builder to play the game. Raw. With his guts and his massive hands.

I remember a yellowed newspaper clipping on their refrigerator—a photo of Grandpa holding his lucky hole-in-one ball. I remember the time he made an eagle on the 400-plus-yard blind dogleg second hole. We searched for that damn ball for hours, or so it seemed, and finally found it in the cup. I didn't understand the significance of making a deuce on such a long hole at the time, but I know that I'll never forget his Cheshire-cat grin (which was rare) and boyish embarrassment over the feat.

But, of all of the memories I treasure from my time on the golf course with Gramps, it's the lessons of etiquette and respect for others that still matter most. I hope those are the values I, too, am remembered for having passed on to my daughters and someday, perhaps, my grandchildren.

"Character, not circumstance, makes the person."

—Booker T. Washington

Respect Others and the Course

The behaviors you display on the golf course, and more precisely those that have nothing to do with your playing ability, will pointedly reveal your appreciation of the customs and subtleties of the game. Indeed, as Grandpa always taught me, most of these can be summed up in a single word—respect. Respect means demonstrating unwavering adherence to the principles of courtesy and etiquette, and respect means playing at a proper pace.

Etiquette and pace of play share an intimate relationship. Etiquette leads, pace follows. They're forever intertwined, each dependent upon the other. Golf

has a rhythm. It's a dance. A grand production. It's the interaction of player to player, group to group, and all to the course.

To learn this rhythm, you must be aware of your surroundings at all times—like a defensive driver. Study and practice these principles of etiquette until they become second nature and you're acting on instinct.

“We are responsible for what we are, and whatever we wish ourselves to be, we have the power to make ourselves. If what we are now has been the result of our own past actions, it certainly follows that whatever we wish to be in the future can be produced by our present actions; so we have to know how to act.”

—Albert Einstein

First, Do No Harm

Avoid any action that might have a negative impact on another player or on the golf course. Sounds simple enough, right? There might be more to it than you think . . .

Keep Up with the Group in Front of You Slow play is bad form for which there is no excuse.

Be Still When Others Are About to Swing It's okay to stand or park a cart where you're noticed; just stay still when it's “go time” for another golfer. Don't shift your weight, release or set the hill brake, turn your head, dig in your pocket, or move your shadow. It's okay to be seen. Just don't do anything to change your position once a player is in the act of swinging.

Be Quiet When Others Are About to Swing This includes talking, walking, making chimpanzee noises, slicing cheddar, spikes on concrete, clubs clanging together, cart starts and stops, cell phones, and bathroom doors. Anything that makes noise can be a distraction.