Golfers 'tap' into psychology

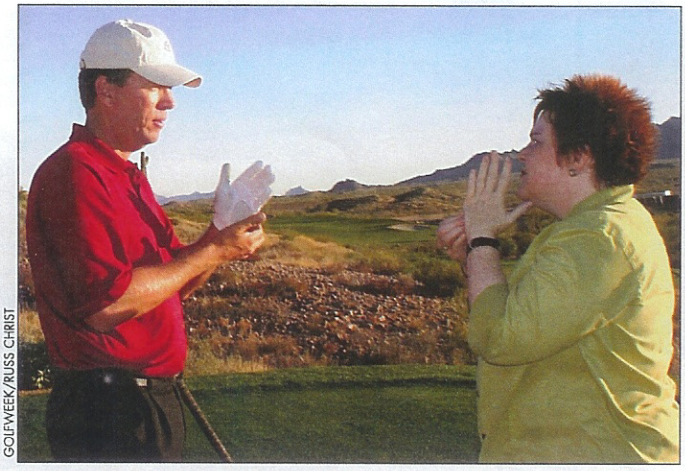
By James Achenbach

SCOTTSDALE, ARIZ.

Here in the desert, where the only thing rising faster than the golf scores of pale-skinned tourists is the price of housing, a quiet revolution in golf psychology is gaining momentum.

Led by a distinctively upbeat psychologist named Stacey Vornbrock, this movement is based on a discipline called Emotional Freedom Technique. Forget that name, however, because everybody calls it "tapping."

The idea is to physically tap on a series of acupuncture points, or pressure points, using two fingers (index and middle). According to Vornbrock, this triggers a physical reaction that discharges biochemicals and negative energy from the body.



GOLFWEEK/RUSS CHRIST

Golf professional Barry Conser and psychologist Stacey Vornbrock work on manipulating pressure points on the hand to relieve stress.

"All of us can be affected more than we realize by what is happening in our lives," Vornbrock said. "If you feel overwhelmed, if your life is full of stress, if it seems like you can't handle certain things that happen on the golf course – it's not your imagination. And there is something you can do about it."

Eight prominent pressure points are frequently used in tapping. They are located on the eyebrow, at the outside corner of the eye, under the eye, under the nose, on the chin, on the collarbone, under the arm and on the side of the hand.

An individual taps seven to 10 times on each of the pressure points, repeating certain key phrases during the tapping. The phrases relate to what is happening in the person's life.

For example, a golfer might say: "Even though I am scared silly about the tee shot on the 10th hole, I love and accept myself. Even though I never seem to be able to hit the fairway on the 10th hole, I love and accept myself."

The goal, achieved through a biochemical release in the body, is to lessen or eliminate the apprehension of playing the 10th hole.

Although this therapy may sound something like meditation or even hypnosis, it has a directness and a repeatability that seem to appeal to many golfers.

Because this tapping revolution is occurring within the ranks of very serious golfers, more and more people are paying attention.

Vornbrock won't identify her clients because of patient confidentiality, but a few have publicly stepped forward.

Barry Conser, 44, has been a professional for half his life. He has entered 19 PGA Tour Qualifying Tournaments, but has never made it through Q-School and has never played in a Tour event.

Conser, now competing on the Gateway Tour, is not ready to give up his dream. After all, there have been highlights – such as the 59 he shot in the last round to win the 1994 Wyoming Open.

"I met Stacey last year (2005), and it has helped me tremendously," Conser said. "I think tapping allows golfers to have more fun. It think it helps them focus more on one shot at a time instead of being focused on anxieties. I've worked with a couple of sports psychologists in the past, and it helped, but this (tapping) goes deeper. It helps you deal with things that are in your subconscious and are limiting your performance. "

Seth Joyner played 13 NFL seasons, mostly with the Philadelphia Eagles. After he joined the Eagles, one of his teammates dragged him (all 245 pounds) to a practice range.

"I told him I didn't even like to watch golf," Joyner said. "Why in the world would I want to hit golf balls?"

His teammate persisted. Two days later, the All-Pro linebacker had a bag and full set of clubs. He was hooked. And now he's hooked on tapping.

"It's been great for me," said Joyner, whose best score is 67. "It has helped my golf, but it goes way beyond that. It has helped me in a lot of different areas in my life. My addiction is anger. I think it had a lot to do with the sports I played. Tapping has enabled me to step back and evaluate how I deal with different situations in everyday life.

"I find myself tapping all the time. I'm calmer. I'm a better golfer."

Golfers don't have to tap on the golf course, although some do. If they choose, they can tap subtly as they stand on a tee or green, but the entire routine usually is performed indoors.

Tapping, although not universally endorsed in the scientific community, is gaining converts. It was popularized by Dr. Roger Callahan, a clinical psychologist, and engineer Gary Craig.

Vornbrock, whose business is Breakthrough Performance, calls herself a "sports performance pioneer." She has a program for curing the yips, and also can help golfers overcome the lingering psychological effects of injuries. Focusing on range of motion in the golf swing, Vornbrock and golf trainer Troy Anderson have developed a program with a mental and physical emphasis on flexibility. Working with former major league infielder Dave Hilton, she has added tapping to a performance enhancement program for professional baseball players.

If most golfers construct their own biochemical roadblocks, Vornbrock and her philosophy might be viewed as the road crew.

"It's a matter of moving all that stuff out of the way," she said. "I can give you a tool that will do it. After you neutralize it all and your body is in balance, everything is easier. This will allow you to play your best golf."

For more on Vornbrock's business, visit www.breakthroughperformance.net

What's new

Wilson Dd6 driver

>> Specs: Available in 8.5, 10 and 11.5 degrees. Aldila NV Series shaft is standard in regular, stiff and extra-stiff flex.
>> MSRP: $279.99

>> Availability: Now in Sunbelt markets and nationally April 1
>> Noteworthy: Featuring Energy Transfer Frame (ETF) technology, Wilson's new 460cc driver is designed to maximize energy in the clubhead. According to company officials, it creates a line of resistance behind the club face, directing energy back toward the ball. A pair of 6-gram nickel tungsten alloy screws in the sole enables golfers to optimize trajectory. Wilson Staff member Padraig Harrington already is using the club.