

What Makes a Great Golf Coach?

The 10 Qualities That All of the Best Teachers Possess

By Dr. Paul Schempp



For 10 years, I was the lead consultant for Golf Magazine in the selection of the publication's Top 100 Teacher lists. After evaluating hundreds of top coaches during that period, recommendations were made to the editors as they vetted potential candidates to determine their rankings. I also served in similar roles with Golf Digest magazine and Golf Monthly in the U.K.

Studying the characteristics and performance traits of elite professional coaches, athletes, and leaders has been a passion of mine for more than two decades, and has made me an expert, if you will, on experts. I've had the great privilege of working with such legendary coaches as Jim Flick, Butch Harmon, Bob Toski, Jim McLean, Bobby Bowden, Dean Smith, Vince Dooley and Bill Bowerman, and have come to understand not just what makes them good at what they do, but what makes them consistently and extraordinarily successful coaches.

In your search for a coach, however, don't simply go by reputation or a coach's success with others. Rather, look for the right coach for you. A great coach is someone with whom you can establish a nurturing relationship with, and you feel always has your best interests at heart. They are the conduit to you achieving your goals on the golf course and, in many cases, life.

“A great coach sees their success as a teacher measured only in your success as a student.”

Here are the 10 most common traits I see in all great coaches.

A Great Coach Is. . .

Knowledgeable: Has extensive knowledge about the game of golf, his or her students and golf instruction.

A Good Listener: Will attempt to discover who you are, how you best learn, and what your goals and dreams are for your golf game.

An Experienced Instructor: Has extensive experience in teaching a variety of students in different circumstances. They will usually have taught beginners, intermediate, and advanced golfers in recreational, competitive, rehabilitative, and indoor and outdoor settings, as well as students from different cultures. Their breadth of experience gives them a wealth of skill and knowledge to help you achieve your goals.

Approachable: They like people, and they particularly like people who love golf as much as they do. If you have questions, concerns, or are confused about something, do not hesitate to ask your coach. They will be glad you did, and so will you.

An Analyzer: Is a keen observer and will analyze your strengths and weaknesses, and will use this information to create a plan to improve your golf game.

A Clear Communicator: Will identify the most important things you need to hear and convey that information in a way that's easily understood and remembered. Rather than overload you with information, they will tell you only a few things, but repeat them in many different ways to make an important point.

Positive: Believes you can learn and be successful at the game of golf. Goals will be set and you will know when you have achieved them.

Willing to Accept Responsibility: Will try many different ways to help you succeed because they see their success as a teacher measured only in your success as a student.

An Innovator: Because they are committed to your success, and always looking to find more efficient ways to help you master the game, they are not afraid to try new teaching methods. Therefore, what they ask you to do in a lesson may seem unconventional, but it will help make you a better player.

Is Invested in You: Will identify what you need to do beyond the day's lesson to continue on the path of improvement. They will go the extra mile with you to make sure you improve. They understand that improvement, success and satisfaction take time to achieve and are, therefore, with you every step of the way on your journey to achieve your goals and even beyond that.



Dr. Paul Schempp is a Professor at the University of Georgia in Athens, Ga., and is president of Performance Matters. The author of six books and more than 125 articles, Dr. Schempp has spent more than two decades conducting award-winning research into the characteristics and development of expertise. He has coached champions on the PGA, European PGA, and Web.com professional golf tours, and has served as a Performance Coach for the Swedish Golf Federation. To learn more about Performance Matters, please visit performancemattersinc.com.