

Gamesmanship



I describe elsewhere Tim Gallwey's Inner Game approach to coaching. The Inner Game coach seeks to get their client into the focussed high-performance, rapid learning state Gallwey calls Self 2.

In contrast, the Gamesman (immortalised in Stephen Potter's "The Theory and Practice of Gamesmanship" first published in 1947) seeks to win by shifting his opponent into the self-critical, efforting state Gallwey calls Self 1 and hence destroy their game!

Potter describes gamesmanship as "the art of winning games without actually cheating". Like Gallwey, Potter works with the idea of Flow. But, whereas for Gallwey the aim is to get the player into Flow, for the gamesman the cardinal rule is **BREAK THE FLOW**. Potter uses an example from golf to demonstrate a gamesman at the peak of his powers.

"To break the flow of a golfer who is three up at the turn, select a moment during the playing of the tenth in the following way. This moment must be prepared for by not less than three suggestions that he is 'playing well', 'hitting the ball grandly', etc made at, say, the second, fifth and ninth holes. Then, as opponent walks up to play his shot from fairway, speak as follows:

Gamesman: I believe I know what it is.

Layman: What do you mean?

Gamesman: I believe I know what you're doing.

Layman: What?

Gamesman: Yes. Why you're hitting them. Straight left arm at the moment of impact.

Layman (pleased): I know what you mean. Oh, God, yes! If the left arm is coming down like a flail -

Gamesman: Rather.

Layman: Like a whip -

Gamesman: It's centrifugal force.

Layman: Well, I don't know. Yes, I suppose it is. But if there's the least suggestion of - of -

Gamesman: A crooked elbow - (L. is framing up to play his shot). Half a sec. Do you mind if I come round to this side of you? I want to see you play that shot. (L. hits it) Beauty. (Pause.)

Layman: Good Lord, yes! You've got to have a straight left arm.

Gamesman: Yes. And even that one wasn't as clean as some of the shots you've been hitting.

Layman: (pleased) Wasn't it? (Doubtful) Wasn't it? (He begin to think about it...)"

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