

SCENE

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Lonne Sterling and Christine Michaels, Licensed Mental Health Counselors (LMHC) and Certified Employee Assistance Professionals (CEAP) and the co-founders of the Center for Change of Florida, have worked in the mental health, employee assistance and substance abuse fields for over 25 years. Their Center provides clients with outpatient counseling and area businesses with Employee Assistance Program (EAP) services. Together they have established a reputation as dynamic professionals, each bringing unique and varied experiences to their practice.

The Center services a diverse client population dealing with a broad range of mental health issues, such as mood disorders, relationship and family problems, anger and stress management, grief and loss, addictions, eating disorders and relapse prevention. The Center's staff is highly skilled, utilizing a brief, solution-focused, therapeutic approach and techniques such as EMDR and Hypnotherapy.



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Teed Off

"Let's face it, 95% of this game is mental. A guy plays lousy golf; he doesn't need a pro, he needs a shrink."

Tom Murphy

Ever wonder why year after year your goal of lowering your handicap never materializes. You start out with such high hopes, signing up for a series of lessons, buying another putter, mapping out some new courses, only to gradually settle back into the same old game. Maybe the solution lies closer to home. Ever think it's not about the game at all but about **you**. Alan Shapiro, Ph.D. thinks so. In his book, *Golf's Mental Hazards*, Dr. Shapiro identifies six personality traits that, if not attended to, "can be particularly obstructive to any hope the golfer may have for game improvement."

What are personality traits? Our personalities are composed of a pattern of distinctive and enduring characteristics exhibited in a wide range of social and personal situations throughout our lives. It is how we uniquely perceive, act and think about ourselves, relate to the world, and are often perceived by others. So, for example, when we say someone is introverted, what we actually mean is that person's chosen style is quiet and withdrawn. Conversely, an extrovert will naturally be gregarious and socially outgoing. Even though our personality traits are our *preferred* way of operating, we can adapt and modify them when they do not serve us well.

Dr. Shapiro believes that the personality traits you exhibit on the golf course mirror those in your daily life. With that in mind, he has developed a Mental Hazard Assessment Scale to help golfers identify "self destructive" personality traits that undermine success on the golf course. Here is a sampling from that instrument. For a comprehensive profile, you will need to complete the entire Scale reproduced in Dr. Shapiro's book.

Do you tend to freeze when standing over your golf ball? Do you feel physically anxious when waiting to tee off? Do you have problems sleeping the night before your golf game? If you recognize any of these symptoms, you might fall under Shapiro's **Hazard #1, The Fear of Fear**. These personalities have a tendency to worry and be anxious.

Do you often feel like slamming your club into the ground or wrapping it around a tree? When having a poor round, do you have a tendency to just whack your ball? Are you easily ticked off? If so, Shapiro's **Hazard #2, Losing Your Cool**, might apply to you. These golfers have low frustration tolerance on the course (and in life) especially when things don't go their way.

When you are playing poorly, does a sinking, sick feeling come over you and you think about giving up the game altogether? Does a bad round of golf ruin your entire day? Shapiro catalogs traits such as these under **Hazard #3, Getting Too Up or Too Down**. These individuals will have extremes of emotions ranging from elation to depression dictated by their golf score for that day.

Are you embarrassed and ashamed when you play badly? Does it matter to you that others are impressed with your game? Do you sometimes think that your partners feel you are so inept that you

shouldn't be allowed on the golf course? If you feel or think this way, you are probably self-conscious, sensitive to criticism and ridicule and prone to a feeling of inferiority. These traits represent **Shapiro's Hazard #4, Worrying What Others Think**.

Do you tend to overanalyze your golf swing? Are you a perfectionist? Do you live more by your thoughts than your feelings? If so, Shapiro's **Hazard's #5, The Need To Be In Control**, would apply.

Do you avoid spending much time on the weaknesses of your game? Do you have little patience for going through a routine before every shot? Do you hate to read and follow instructions? Individuals who struggle with **Hazard #6, An Unwillingness To Work**, are easily bored; they want results without working for them.

Despite the hazards, for most players, golf is an enjoyable pastime, relaxing, sociable and pleasurable challenging. However, as any golf widow will attest, golf can become **addictive**.

With some players, golf is a self-destructive, mind altering "substance"; it is no longer a game but an obsession that demands compulsive behavior. These individuals become emotionally distraught when a golf game is cancelled, displaying inappropriate emotions such as irritability, depression, anxiety and anger. The obsession is lifted only when the person is once again able to indulge in the "substance" (i.e. golf). Once on the course, the emotional pain is relieved. Because denial is such an integral part of addiction, golfers, too, will go to any lengths to avoid dealing with the underlying issues fueling the obsession, creating all kinds of rationalizations and justifications for their self-medicating behavior, and denying that it is having negative consequences for themselves and others. These individuals find themselves in a psychological **trap** that might eventually require professional help.

For the average weekend duffer, however, who wants to play through their mental hazards and improve their handicap, we offer the following suggestions:

- Learn mental/physical relaxation techniques (meditation, deep breathing, self hypnosis).
- Stay present focused (play one shot at a time, visualize targets in the moment).
- Practice positive self-talk (affirmations, challenge negative beliefs)
- Confront situations that make you uncomfortable.
- Think less, feel more (trust your intuition and muscle memory).
- Remember it is a game to play not punishment to endure.

"Golf is the ego and the id in a play off that never ends. It's a solitary wandering in the manicured wilderness. It's man alone with his own mind. It's too much time to think and too much to think about. It's more like life than life itself." David Noonan