

Mental game

Adapt your game plan to suit your frame of mind and watch your golf flourish as *Golf Monthly's* mental coach, Gary Leboff, explains his 'pacing' technique

Easy as A,B,C



One of the most enjoyable parts of my work is corporate golf days.

Not only do I meet lots of new people but I get to watch their excitement at realising what a new mindset will do for their games.

I must admit that I am often surprised by the choice of venue. Determined to give clients a unique experience, companies pick the most exclusive (toughest) courses they can find. Those same clients are often busy people who rarely pick up a club and are hardly equipped for a championship layout.

I like to give a pre-round pep talk. And one of the topics that I always cover is how the players can get the most from the day even if they are struggling to remember when they last played.

I use a technique called "pacing". It's about matching your game, and any decisions that you make on the course, to how you are currently feeling about the way you are playing.

Here is how it works. I invite everyone in the room to select a letter between A and E. Each letter represents a different level of skill, readiness and confidence. For instance:

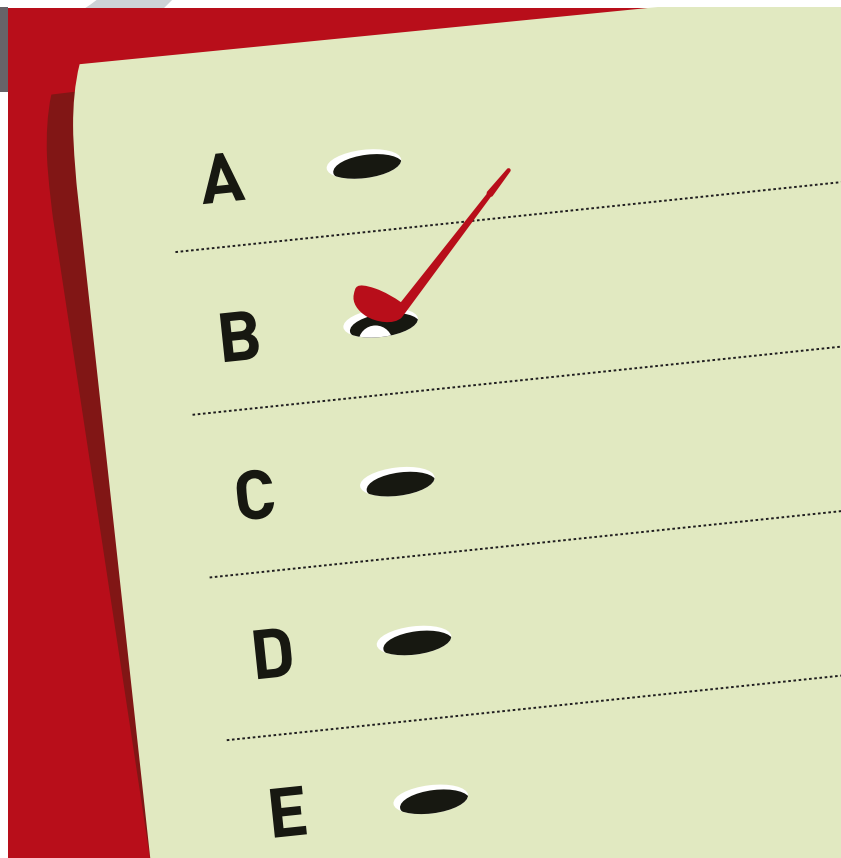
A. I am at the top of my game. I have been playing regularly and practising hard. I am happy with all aspects of my golf and expect to do well.

B. My game is OK. I need to sort out one or two problems but nothing serious. I know I can play to my handicap.

C. My game is a bit in and out. I don't play as much as I'd like. Some of the other people here do seem a bit competitive. At least it's not raining.

D. I didn't really want to come but it's good for business. I'm not a golfer, I've borrowed these clubs from a friend. Still, it's better than working.

E. I was out on the razz until 4 am. Only had a couple of hours of sleep. Pass the coffee.



Adopt and adapt

It doesn't matter which category you fall into. What matters is staying in the present, recognising your position and adapting your approach to match your mindset.

Let's assume the 1st hole is a customary par 4 of around 380-400 yards. Category A golfers can reach for the driver. Those B and Cs should be more cautious. No point putting one in the trees on the 1st. Select a 3 or 5-wood, lay up and take it from there. Pace your way into the round.

Category D and E golfers should be more cautious still. Use your shots, that's what they are for! Tee off with an iron, maybe a 5, 6 or even a 7. Get your swing in the groove and build from there.

The first point of what I refer to as "recalibration" is the 4th tee. Now is the time to assess if you have moved up or down the A-E ladder. If things are going well and you have gone up from a B to an A, you may adopt a bolder, more adventurous approach. The reverse applies too. If you have slipped from a C to a D, play conservatively for a couple of holes and recalibrate again. The 8th, 10th and 14th tees are my other favoured points for this.

Assess how you are feeling and where you are on the ladder each time you play. Amateurs often wonder how pros "go low" when their games are clearly off-colour? Assessing how you feel on the day and having a truly adaptable game plan is a key skill for the professionals on tour.

Calibration can have some unexpected consequences. I was called in by the chairman of one big City bank last year on the eve of his own corporate event. His game was in such disarray that he was concerned about embarrassing himself in front of clients. He embarrassed himself alright. Using the calibration process, he won his own golf day!

Gary's book, *Dare* – a life-coaching book that includes plenty of golf tips – is published by Hodder Mobeus and is on sale for £10.99. You can email him at gary.leboff@virgin.net.