



What Does KAIZEN Have To Do With Improving Your Golf Game?

By Todd M. Kays, Ph.D.

Sport Psychologist

What exactly is KAIZEN and how does it apply to my golf game? Very good question. The law of KAIZEN basically deals with the concept of “continuous improvement.” It is the idea that people will continue to succeed and improve if they are taking small incremental steps toward achievement of a goal or task. If you ever have seen the movie, “What About Bob?”, then you have been exposed to the principle of KAIZEN. It is about taking small baby steps toward the journey or goal of our choice. When a person was asked to exercise 30 minutes per day five days a week, he stated, “No way can I do that every day!” When asked to march in place for one minute per day, he easily accomplished this task. He then proceeded from there to gain the confidence needed to exercise in numerous ways and lose over 100 pounds and change his life.

Some golfers have the goal of making the professional tour while others want to play competitively in high school, college or amateur tournaments. The goals themselves do not matter. The path to the achievement of those goals does matter. It matters a tremendous amount. The path toward any high or long-range goal can be fun, exhilarating, arduous, and wearisome all at the same time. With the ebbs and flows in the progression toward any goal, it is very important to be focused on continuous improvement in your game overall. There are times that your game’s improvement will be more dramatic, such as when making a leap about 3-4 steps up the stairwell instead of the normal one step at a time. There are also experiences that make us feel like we are taking two steps backwards and that the road is filled with despair. It is times like these that we must remember the principle of KAIZEN and how it applies to golf and life.

Taking two steps backwards does not mean failure. It may simply be a part of continuous improvement. Great golfers on the professional tour did not become great without taking many steps backwards. Taking steps backward means they were taking risks, challenging themselves, pushing outside of their comfort zone and were willing to make mistakes. They have probably made more mistakes than any golfer around – that is why they are great – because they make mistakes, learn from mistakes and move forward.

Remember the principle of KAIZEN and ask yourself each day what is one small thing I can do today to improve? Here are some other tips:

1. The greatest golfers in the world have made many mistakes – they have learned, however, to improve no matter what.
2. When motivation is wavering, make a commitment to performing one simple task today that will be a step in the right direction. No matter how small the task may be, it is still a step in the right direction.
3. Fail forward – when mistakes are happening and progress is not what you want, make sure to “fail forward” – learn from the mistakes and move on!
4. Attach to the process of improvement, not the outcome. Positive outcomes do help, but stay connected to the small steps and the outcomes will happen.

Play Hard, Play Smart and Play Well!