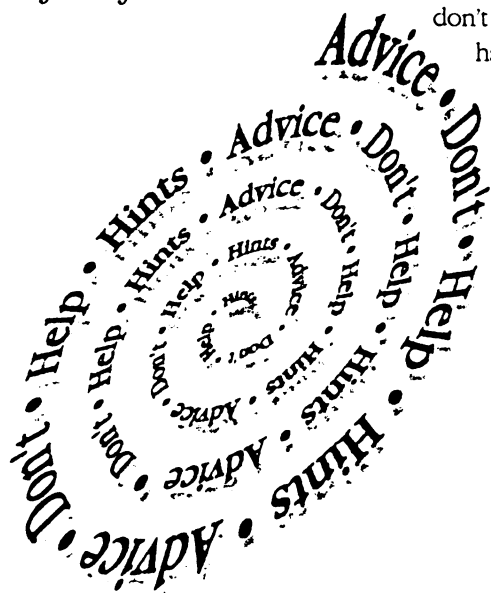


Golfers Share a Kinship — but Please Hold the Advice

BY BARBARA PUETT

Camaraderie and fair play are enduring traditions among even the fiercest of golf competitors. Good breaks — and bad — are shared with the respect and ease of old friends . . .



WHEN IT COMES TO ADVICE, HOWEVER, there can be too much of a good thing. In fact, advice in golf can be positively lethal. Despite the best intentions, attempts to alter, correct, improve or elevate someone else's golf game during a round should be avoided. So incendiary is it, that in tournament play, the *Rules of Golf* set strict guidelines regarding advice. Should you dare tread into this dangerous territory, however, take with you the following tips.

Handle with Kid Gloves

Advice is not necessarily bad. There's a time and a place for it. The time is before or after a round or over a drink. The place is the driving range, the practice green, the 19th hole or basically anywhere *except* the golf course. There's already enough to think about during a round. Impromptu lessons are inappropriate. However well meaning, advice is distracting, wastes time, and likely has flaws. Taking a lesson during a round is like having a swimming lesson during a race. The advice may be wonderful but the timing is awful.

Accentuate the Negative

The last thing a golfer needs to hear, especially when she is struggling, is the word "don't." Tips often serve to accentuate the negative: Don't aim so far left, don't lift your head, don't swing so hard. In their eagerness to share discoveries, golfers tend to forget that what works for them may not work for others. Instruction is dangerous stuff in the hands of amateurs. A knowledgeable instructor will insulate you from the highly contagious ailment known as the informal golf tip.

Harvey's Observation

Harvey Penick used to say that no pretty woman ever missed a shot without a man telling her what to do. It may sometimes seem so, but this dangerous Pandora's shag bag is not confined to men alone. Nor is it limited to newcomers.

Advice pervades the game at every level. The putting woes of Tom Watson, one of the modern greats of the game, unleashed 10,000 unsolicited suggestions. A bombardment of well-meaning golf tips dogged him — and he's a five-time winner of the British Open.

Wolf in Chivalrous Clothing

Perfect strangers who otherwise wouldn't dream of, say, offering a few fashion tips or leaning over to whisper their entree recommendation, think nothing of imposing themselves on others with a few helpful golf hints.

Just remember that however unwelcome, the intention to help is sincere.

What Am I Doing Wrong?

We've all done it, but a plaintive cry of "What am I doing wrong?" after an unfortunate shot is bound to encourage others to heed the call. There's usually no explaining that the question was rhetorical. Polite but firm restraint is your best recourse.

The Best Defense

When someone can't resist getting involved with your game, be courteous but stay in control. "I appreciate your interest. Let's talk about it after the round when we've got the time to work on it, and I can give you my full attention," will deflect the salvo without giving offense. "You're kind to be interested in my game, and the next time I go to the range I'll try your suggestion."

If all else fails: "Thanks, but I only take advice from my golf instructor." ■

Barbara Puett is owner of Barbara Puett Golf School at RiverPlace on Lake Austin near Austin, Texas, and co-author of Golf Etiquette, published by St. Martin's Press.