

# Teacher Stories

Everyone Has One. What's Yours?

## Teacher Story Podcast Episode

Interviewee:

Fred Shoemaker

Founder, [Extraordinary Golf](#)

Interviewer:

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### **Ken Futernick:**

Hi everyone. Welcome to another episode of Teacher Stories. This is your host Ken Futernick, and my guest today is Fred Shoemaker. Fred is the author of two books. The first one is [Extraordinary Golf: The Art of the Possible](#), and the second, [Extraordinary Putting](#). Fred as you might guess is a teacher and a coach. He's given thousands of golf lessons not just to amateurs like me but to golf professionals to and to other golf teachers. But Fred is no ordinary golf teacher. Unlike most other athletic coaches, he doesn't try to fix what's wrong. Doing that, he says won't make you a better golfer or a happier golfer. Fred's books and his teaching are really about how we learn and things like judgment and fear, the kinds of things that get in the way of learning.

He writes and talks about what it means to be a good teacher and a good coach. I asked Fred to be part of Teacher Stories, this Teacher Stories podcast, because I think much of what he has to say can be applied to teaching and learning in academic settings, to being a parent, even to the way we lead our lives. So, Fred, welcome to Teacher Stories.

### **Fred Shoemaker:**

Thank you, Ken. Great to be here with you.

### **Ken Futernick:**

Can you provide a little background on who you are and what you do?

### **Fred Shoemaker:**

Well, I make a distinction between teaching and coaching, and in my profession, a teacher is someone who says I have an answer for you, and I'd like to put it over there, and that's fine, but I don't consider myself that. A coach is someone who says basically you are something already and you have something already and let's bring it out. So, that's what I've been doing for most of my adult life. I was a college golf coach back in 1974, 5, and 6 in there, at the University of California at Santa Barbara and realizing I didn't know my rear end from first

base about coaching or making a difference in another person's life or anything, and what do you do when you don't know what to do with your life? Well, you go into the Peace Corps.

So, I did that for a few years, and I learned something there that neither am I the center of the universe nor is the culture that I brought up with necessarily the way the world ought to go. And I came back in from that realizing it doesn't matter so much what you do in life. It really matters what you bring to it. I always thought doing golf for life would be a ridiculous profession, backswings and downswings, talking about compression on a four-iron. What a wasted life. I'd realize it didn't matter. What mattered is what you brought to anything. So, I began to take a look at being with people in the game in such a way that the purpose of a game could get fulfilled, and most of us consider the purpose of a game is to teach you something about life, to make life better.

So, when you leave the golf course, when you leave the athletic field, or you leave the chess board, whatever you want, you somehow are a better person in life from what you've learned. Now, it also just so happens that pointing it in that direction, being able to learn how to learn, develop self-trust and self-awareness, reveal yourself to yourself, be more present and 100 other things we could talk about actually is amazing access to performance by the way. So, I've spent most of my last, I would say, 30 years doing golf schools and workshops on learning how to learn, and we've done workshops with companies on coaching, companies on continuous learning. So, it's been using golf as a medium and a grounding board because it's great to talk about things in a board room for three hours, but you have someone stand up in front of a golf ball, then you really get their relationship to failing and really find out what they trust.

So, that's why I like a practical venue to use with things like that. So, I've been doing that for a long time.

**Ken Futernick:**

I benefited from three days with you, and my brother was there. It was a number of years ago down closer to where you live in Carmel, and I remember one of the things that you talked about then, and you write about it in your books, and that is this idea of a triangle -- that if you're going to play golf well, I guess, you have to be performing, you have to be learning, and you have to be enjoying the process, and if any of those three components are missing, the other things don't happen. Can you say a little bit about that and maybe how that could apply away from the golf course in an academic setting for instance?

**Fred Shoemaker:**

Well, when you walk off a golf course, what's the question everybody asks you? What would you say? What do people ask you when you walk off the course?

**Ken Futernick:**

They say, "How did you do?"

**Fred Shoemaker:**

Which really means, "How did you score?"

**Ken Futernick:**

Yeah, how did you score. Yeah.

**Fred Shoemaker:**

Have you ever walked off the golf course and anybody asked you, "What'd you learn today?"

**Ken Futernick:**

Very seldom.

**Fred Shoemaker:**

It's a rare thing. So, we think the access to performance is keeping your eye on performance, which is a big mistake and I think in any endeavor. So, it's possible that the access to performance has everything to do with new learning. I'll say it this it's that you have no right to expect your performance to improve by keeping your act, your attention, solely on, "What did you shoot? How did you do today?" So, if in fact you could put your attention to learning, and learning in my sport would be something like growing your awareness of critical variables of both with your golf swing, how you see the golf course, and to be with yourself. So, when you walk off the golf course, the only question that's really going to make the difference to the largest extent is, What'd you learn today? What did you become aware of that I could learn with you?

**Fred Shoemaker:**

You see, I used to do some work on bringing this back onto other setting with the First Tee with kids, and I would work with their coaches, and I would hear that the student would walk off the golf course, and the coach would ask them, "Well, how was it today?" The kids would say, "I get so nervous. When I play with people who are so much better than me, I can't play at all." Then the First Tee coach would say, "Well, you concentrate, and you'll do fine," which just seems like a beautiful little statement except it's total baloney. See, I walked over to the coach, and I said, "Don't you feel nervous when you play with people a lot better than you and are unable to perform?" He says, "Yes." I said, "Well, how about if you went to the kid and said, 'I'm the same way too. What do you think we ought to do?'"

See, one of the things about teaching, it's given that you're going to give something away, but suppose you could be the most fascinated student as the teacher. I'm going to just share another story. We did a parents and kids workshop. So, we had 50 people come in for the day. We had them all day. I mean, I took the parents on a walk on the golf course, and we did separate exercises with the kids apart from the parents, and I said to parents, "Would you be willing to have your kids contribute to you today?" They weren't sure what that meant. I said, "Would you willingly be open to their coaching, be willing to tell them what you got out of it and acknowledge when you did get something out?" They said, "Okay."

**Fred Shoemaker:**

So, we got the kids. Then we brought them back to the kids, and the kids coached them in putting, and it was really, first of all, you got to see a mirror of how you've coached others or taught others, and they said, "Now, I get to tell you what to do," among other things, but it was just delightful. See, my experience of young people is that they want to contribute. They want to know what they say matters to another. They want to be heard, and if it does make a difference, it just turns them on just like it does to you and me to know we've made a difference for another person.

See, I know this is going to sound silly, but as a teacher, do you ever ask a student, "How can I be better at what I do?" What do you all see? How can I coach this better? Who are you that would allow us to go in deeper? I mean, that's a moment of extreme vulnerability, but if we're not that open, to be the avowed expert, the cult of the expert is a dangerous position because we just get stuck there, and we're afraid to look into places or to be vulnerable or to see that what we're saying may be done in a different and better way, and towards the end of the day with the kids and parents, there was a certain openness. We had questions like, "Tell me something I don't know about you."

So, parents would tell that. The kids killed some of the parents, and kids would stand up and say, "My dad played saxophone in college," or something like that, and then they began to share more and more, and to me, that was the whole purpose of the day, to have quality time to produce quality time. So, I hope that makes sense to people because, see, it was something you said in your opening that we have something that asks

people not to fix. We don't fix people, we look for another direction, and I know people listening, and they'll say, "What kind of a golf coach doesn't fix people? That just seems stupid."

**Ken Futernick:**

Well, Fred, one of the things that classroom teachers do, and I think are expected to do is to judge the work of students. They comment on what students say in class. They grade papers. They give grades at the end of a course. They're constantly judging, and yet I've heard you say and write that judgment is often a huge impediment to learning, and if that's true, I think teachers listening to this and anyone that's involved in a teaching relationship with a student would be curious to know what you mean by that or why that's the case.

**Fred Shoemaker:**

I started doing golf lessons in 1974, and I copied my mentors, and I thought my job was to evaluate students and to judge them and to make corrections, keep a model in my head of how they should be, have them adjust to the model, put the model in their head afterwards, so they can now adjust this new model in their head. So, I did a few thousand golf lessons that way. Nothing much happened. People got a little better, a little worse. They always thought it was their problem, and they didn't practice hard enough and so forth. So, I was the answer machine guy. You had a problem. I had an answer. Pretty snappy.

Then I really got to a point of it was despair, and I said, "Is this all there is?" So, what do you do and what you're doing doesn't work, you do more of it. You get better at the same thing. That's what I did. So, I got the best information. I studied all the old guys. I got the clearest model I could get. I judged and assessed and evaluated people and nothing much happened. So, I really got, "Well, what is the issue here?" I had a golf lesson from a fellow named Tim Gallwey who wrote books called *The Inner Game of Tennis*, *Inner Game of Golf*, brilliant man, and he asked me... I'm going to make this short as I can. "What do you really want?" I said, "I want to be the best I can, who I can be. I want to reach my potential," which is what students might say. He says, "You sound like an advertisement. What do you really want?"

I said, "I've been doing this thing the same thing for 22 years in my golf swing. I want to stop it," and he said, "What is it you actually do?" I told him, and he said, "Do you actually experience in the moment that you're doing it what you're doing?" I said, "No. People tell me about it. I've seen it on camera. My divot's changed. My ball flight changed, but I don't experience it." He started out a process. He said, "How about if you just allowed it to happen and you can experience it in the time that it's happening?" He created an environment for the first time without evaluation or judgment in which curiosity became more valuable to me than doing it right.

So, I began to swing, and I felt this thing happening for the first time, and he says, "There it is." We got interested in it. We laughed about it, and it took about 45 minutes, and the thing that was happening in my swing disappeared forever, and just this statement has blew me away. I didn't know what to make of it, so I went back and began to look at it. What did this man allow for that I had never done? See, what teachers don't get, or well, they may get, they are environmentalists more than anything else, and I mean creating an environment in which learning can happen, and it got very clear to me after that lesson, and I parsed it out as best I could rather than just blowing it off as some anomaly that the very thing I had been trained for, judgment and judgment. What is the greatest barrier to learning? Good, bad, right, wrong, should, shouldn't, comparison to somebody, using a model of a golf pro or something.

So, I said, "Okay. I don't know quite what to do without that, but I'm going to withhold my judgments of people and instead of saying that was good or give me another one that was better, I decided to ask people a question after they hit to see what they experienced." You see, how the subject is occurring for the student. In other words, let's say you teach math. If it occurs for them that, "Math is hard. Math is difficult. I'm not getting it. I'm not that good of a student," that will supersede any learning that happens. Until you can get to how it occurs for the person over there and then maybe offer different possibilities, like math as an adventure, math

as a puzzle, math as a possibility of discovering things about yourself that you never knew before. Math is opening up a party of those kind of things.

Until you get to that, if it's occurring for the student that this is hard and difficult and I'm not good at it, no matter what you coach, it will be put into that space to be learned. So, I began to take a look at withholding judgments. They would arise in me. I just wouldn't say them, and lessons began to take off. I would say, "Well, what did you experience there? How was that one? Was that more than the last one?" The word came up is that instead of a judgment, an assessment. Oh, I saw the ball go there, and I saw that in the swing. Oh, your swing went that way, not that it was good that it went there, but how bad that it went that way.

See, in the beginning of this opening when you introduced me, you said, "Oh, Fred, you don't work on fixing people's swings." See, and yet swings get changed. Now, that sounds stupid to people who don't quite get this point, and the point being is that how can you possibly change something that you don't experience? It's insane. People take a club up, and it goes up too high, and the coach says to take it lower. So, while the coach says it, they go lower, lower, lower, and they go away, and it goes high, and they don't know where it is. So, the first thing like your GPS on your car tells you is where you are. An accurate assessment of where you are. Then you see a new possibility and to distinguish the difference in the two is my experience of learning, to know where you are without a judgment, to see what a future possibility could be without a judgment, and be able to sense the differences in the moment that it's happening.

So, what would it be like for a teacher to have an environment in which people can have new experiences, replace old beliefs, without the fear of making a mistake and looking foolish and embarrassed, being able to stretch into failing in such a way that they stretched and stretched and stretched and be lauded for the stretch? See, one teacher told me, "Fail as fast as you can. Fail in the direction of your intent, but stretch that way," and that's been a guiding principle for me that if I do offer, which you could say instead of good or bad, if I do offer some credit to someone, I will go laud the effort and not the result necessarily.

So, see, I give praise. I said, "Way to go. That was a real good stretch you made there in terms of pushing yourself, but I found that praise especially with kids holds them back more than criticism."

#### **Ken Futernick:¶**

Fred, I have a story about praise. It just made me think of it. I many years ago was teaching fifth grade, and I had set up an art activity, and the activity involved kids having a few primary watercolors in front of them, and the idea was to see how many different colors you could create by blending the few colors you had. So, I did what I was inclined to do back then when I was a young teacher. I did the same activity with them, and I was really enjoying myself and got about 30, 40 minutes into the class, and there was this nice buzz in the room, and teachers have very quickly learned the difference between a good noise and bad noise, and there was good noise in the room. People were really enjoying themselves, and I was too, but then I had this little pang of guilt and said, "I'm the teacher. I'm supposed to get up and do something."

So, I remember holding up one of the students work. I think her name was Angela, and I wanted the class to notice what great work she had done, and I said, "Look everyone. Look what Angela has done. She's created all these colors and isn't that nice?" And within seconds after I did this, the noise in the room changed in quality, and people who had been very interested in their work suddenly said, "I'm done," and one kid held up his painting and said, "What do you think of my work?" I was really frustrated by this because I thought that I was being helpful by offering praise of the performance and in fact what I did was turn what had been an opportunity to experiment with lots of joy and interesting things coming out of it to an activity that became one that was being judged, and even though I was being positive about one student, I think the others were thinking, "If Angela's can be good, then maybe mine isn't good, or I want to know what he thinks about mine."

So, it became about the quality of the performance and what my judgment was rather than mixing of colors... So, everyone stopped doing what they were doing. They weren't learning anymore. So, I suspect that's an example of what you're talking about.

**Fred Shoemaker:**

Yes. There's a thing that rarely do teachers do is in golf. I'm not sure in your profession it's as much, and that's be quiet. When the hum of learning is there, and you know it. You can sense it. One of the most difficult things is to let it alone because we think teachers ought to teach, and my experience, the one of the greatest leaderships I've ever seen is leading by listening, leading by allowing others, and that's rare in golf because when you see a golf lesson, who's doing all the talking? So, it's assumed that the teacher will give the advice and explanations and so forth, but who's having the experience? See, one of the jobs is to have after the teacher could illuminate the experience more, what was it like? What did you notice there?

See, there's a real different thing between thinking and having thoughts? I'd like to just go in there for just a minute. See, most of the time, things pop into our heads all day long. These are thoughts. They're just pretty much the same ones as yesterday. I've read where we pretty much have the same thoughts every day, and it's very different than thinking. See, human beings rarely think, and one of the jobs of teachers is to get people to think, to generate and create and look for themselves, not just look for the right answer, but just look in terms of how the process takes place. So, we wake up in the morning, and we start to have these thoughts that go through one after another after another.

We're going to take a look at, What is an environment that can generate real thinking to think for yourself? See, there's a massive difference in my sport between taking someone's knowledge and applying it and creating it for yourself. See, when you create it for yourself, it's yours. There's an ownership over it, and if you simply take someone's knowledge and apply it like you think is the right answer, you never quite get the whole benefit of it. I mean, I read philosophy in college and fancied myself a philosopher. I could get an A in a philosophy test, but I knew nothing about the process and the thoughts these great thinkers went through that had them come to the realizations that they came to, and to me that's the power in what school could provide --that someone goes away. We're having an incredible crisis in our country right now about people accepting anything they call news that hits their silo as the truth, without really thinking about what's actually happening here. So, our thoughts that pop into our head all the time are simply from the past. It's the only way the brain can work. It's a past space mechanism. So, having thoughts is simply past space. It doesn't design something new. Thinking comes from the future. Being able to create and think and look and connect things together. So, how about a life that's generated by thinking versus a life that's generated by having thoughts? To me, if I could have walked out of school, really getting a sense of instead of trying to get answers, but to open up my capabilities and to generate my own life, now that would have been incredibly powerful for me.

It was offered to me, but I thought the object was to get it right so I could get the job, so I could get the next thing. So, I spent a lot of my life looking at the power of language and how it changes everything. So, can I just talk a moment about that?

**Ken Futernick:¶**

Please do, yeah.

**Fred Shoemaker:**

Okay, so my job is about performance. It's about change. Those two things have occupied a lot of my attention for the last 35, 40 years. So, how do people actually change and how do you actually get a person to perform in anything better? Whoever's listening to this has to be pretty sharp in order to... because it took me a lot longer to get these things clear for myself. Okay, performance is a function of action, and what you wish, what you hope for, what you commit to, where the rubber meets the road is how you act in life. Okay, so if you look at

how we act in life... I mean, for let's say a thousand generations of human beings they thought the sun moved across the sky. The sun doesn't move across the sky. The earth turns. We know that now.

So, it's this notion that we act in life according to how we feel about things in our internal experience. I felt confident, so I acted confidently. I felt scared, so I acted tentatively, and whatever science is showing, that's now showing that's not true. Our internal experience. When your students are in the class, their internal experience is not the sources or actions in the future. It's not the source of their performance, and most people believe it is. It's so common that to say anything the opposite of it would seem counterintuitive to people. So, I'm getting back to the power of language here. You and I have grown up with different points of view, family, culture, heritage and so forth. You see a different world than I do. I see a different world than you do. Everyone's world is completely different, and we believe that people see the world like we do, and we're shocked when they don't.

Of course, that car is good and that politician's not so good, and that book is brilliant and so forth, and we're always surprised when no one actually thinks like us. So, if you really looked at that, you have to realize that we are all making it up all the time. We are 24/7 creating machines of how the world... I mean, in the backyard, one could say, "Oh my gosh. It's fire season still," or one could say, "What a beautiful summer day." It just depends on what your point of view is. So, I really got that my job as a teacher or a coach would be to notice how the situation is occurring for people and offer other possibilities.

Here's an example. Let's suppose, Ken, you go to the driving range. You hit. We're working in a golf school. We say, "We're working on solid contact with three woods." You go out there, and you hit 20 of them. You come back, and we're in a little circle, and I say, "Well, how was it?" You said, "Man, I'm terrible. I couldn't get one in the air. It was awful." So, that's your truth, so to speak, right? I said to you, "Well, is there any other way you could see that, any other perspective?" You say, "I don't know what you're talking about. It was terrible," and I'll say, "Okay. I'm going to be you for a couple of minutes again. Say hi, I'm Ken. I hit 15 three woods. I mishit all of them. I lost energy and went into resignation." I said, "Is that true?" You said, "Yeah, that's true. That's what happened."

I said, "Okay. Can I be you again? Hi. My name is Ken. I hit 15 three woods and mishit all of them." I'm not altering the facts, okay? However, I'm at the beginning of solid contact. This would change everything from my golf game, and at the beginning of something there's always mishits, and I'm in that process, and I'm starting it. That's, see, a whole different perspective. Another perspective is I mishit 15 three woods. I was doing the best I could with the awareness that I had in the moment. Each one of those perspectives, those two, I can make up five more, would empower you more than the perspective that I suck and I'm no good.

So, what you train people in is to begin to take a look, Is your interpretation... since it's all made up and all interpretations. We say, "People are greedy." We will see greedy people then. People are kind. We will see kind people. So, if it's all interpretation, and I'm the one interpreting it. The first one that reaches me because of family and culture, heritage, and so forth is a default interpretation. In other words, I have no choice about it. I mean, someone cuts me off in traffic, I'll be a little pissy, but then the next interpretation, well, that person's in really in a hurry to get to the hospital, or that looks like my grandmother, or it's whatever. The next interpretation is the created one that can make life great.

So, you coach people constantly. Is that the only way you can interpret that situation? Is there any other way you could do that? See, the thing that we're gifted with from birth, called language, is the only thing I've ever seen that transforms a person. I mean, I've worked on all sorts of actions and all sorts of other stuff, affirmations, you name it, but when a person changes their language, they change their world, and it's the only thing that ever did. Now, a person sitting in a classroom thinking, "This is hard. I might not be good enough. I don't have the time. Given that background of language and that interpretation, it will be played out that way

exactly. Another way could be like, "Okay, this is an adventure. This is a chance for me to really build a little grit here and see what I can do. This is a chance for me to solve a puzzle."

Those ways of focusing changes the actions immediately. So, I'm going to go through the whole thing about performance here. Performance whether it's in school, whether it's in golf, whether it's in work, anything, is a function of the actions that a person does. The actions are a function of not the internal experience but how the outer world is occurring to the person and how they occur to themselves. In other words, if I step to the first tee, and I've been practicing letting go and freedom, then I step to the first tee and it looks scary to me, I might lose my self-concept and my ego, or I might be embarrassed. I will never swing freely. Then the final thing, how the world occurs is through language.

So, my experience, if a teacher isn't getting the interpretations that people are making up and offering new possibilities, then they're stuck in the way that it's going to be instead of opening things up. I don't know if that made sense. It was a big idea. I tried to be done in a short time.

**Ken Futernick:**

It does make sense to me on some level, but I'm thinking let's try an experiment here. Let's imagine that the Ken that you were referring to that wasn't able to hit a solid five-wood is now a 10-year-old fifth grade student, and I've submitted something to you where I've attempted to try to add fractions together, and you look at it and just like my five-woods, most of my answers are wrong. So, you see this, and how might you respond to me in the same way that you responded to me on the driving range, but now I'm a fifth grader?

**Fred Shoemaker:**

So, first of all, have we set the environment that it's safe to make mistakes? That's the big thing. If he's coming up wondering if he's going to be reprimanded or something's wrong, we've lost. That doesn't work. Let's assume it is. So, I would say in the beginning, there's lots of mistakes that are going to happen. Great. So, there's no issue. That's really cool. Now, take me through what you see. Tell me what you're noticing because I got to learn too about what you're learning. So, I would get more on an even plane to... See, until I can see this student, and this is going to sound ridiculous and overblown, as the genius of the universe... This body's gone through a million years of evolution. It is really the most amazing thing I think it's ever been, great brain and body.

Until I can be with a student like that, then I probably should not be coaching them. So, if that's the case, how is it occurring for them? What do they see? What do they go about? The young boy, person may say, "Oh, I just got so afraid." So, there are things that stop learning, doubt, fear, lapses in concentration, anxiety, et cetera. That's just interference. So, the art of coaching or teaching would be to create an environment in which it's not coming from the teacher, that interference. If there is interference, and if there is judgment, it's coming from the student to the student. So, you could ask the student who is attempting to do a problem, "So, is there a lot of stuff in your head about worry and fear? Is it confusing right now?" So, the person gets a chance to talk out their experience, and you just get it.

See, listening is the, in my experience, is a great step in providing the environment. So, if each student is a quantity to be known, and if you could be with them in such a way that you could get what's actually happening there. See, in the art of teaching and coaching, all ways of being need to be open to the teacher. It isn't like I teach this way. See, the student is coaching you how to coach them, and people say, "How can I do that with 40 people?" Well, do it. Figure it out because I have workshops with sometimes with 25, and that's what I do. You ask a person, "What do you see now? How is it occur for you? Well, how can I be a better coach here? How can I support you in this?"

So, those kind of things open up the environment, and I can't talk about that I think too much in that the environment is probably more important than what you do. See, what you say about what happens is more important than what happens. So, if a student walks out of a class, missing 6 out of 10, which would give them a failing grade, but they get excited about what they saw about learning, you've won because what's the object of it all? How do you want them to end up when they complete their academic journey and are released into the world? If you keep that in mind, your actions are appropriate to that.

**Ken Futernick:**

I think good math teachers often take the collection of problems that a student missed and focus on those rather than the ones that they got correct and say, "Let's look at the ones that where the answer wasn't correct and see if there's something that they have in common, and let me listen to you. Talk to me about how you got these answers." But there's something about being a teacher, there's something very enticing about doing what you described earlier, which is to give them the answer, to show them how to correct it, but it can create a kind of dependence on us and that feels good.

So, I'm sure you've coached lots of teachers. You were that teacher at one time when you were giving the answers away and yet, while students may have appreciated what you were giving them, in the end it ended up not being very satisfying to you as a teacher, and I suspect classroom teachers might experience the same thing that here they are giving answers to their students over and over, and in one way, it feels good, but in another way, it gets boring, it gets a little bit frustrating because you don't necessarily see your students learning that much. What you do see is a dependence upon you, the teacher.

**Fred Shoemaker:**

Yes. So, I think it comes down to is, What is your life about? Why have you chosen to do this? What's the purpose of it all for you? You see, in the moment of action, if your created intention for being a teacher is stronger than your addiction to look good, you can come out with the appropriate way of speaking and acting. This fellow Tim Gallwey I talked about... I said, "I like to be better at what I do." He says, "Okay, tape a lesson." So, I did. I taped a one-hour golf lesson, okay? We got there, and he put up these flip charts, two of them. He says, "Tell me what you intend in a golf lesson." I said, "I intend to empower people." "Okay." He says, "What are you avoiding in a golf lesson?" I said, "Well, I'm avoiding fostering dependencies like you said, and I'm not that interested in looking good."

I know the limitations of that. He goes, "Okay, so we turn on tape. Bam. First thing you hear is a golf ball being hit. That was cool," and I said, "That was a wonderful shot. Well done." That's what I said. He turns off the tape, and he said, "Well, why did you say that it was a wonderful shot. Well done?" I said, "I just wanted to enjoy something that they did really well." Sounds normal, right? He said, "What was the lesson?" I said, "The lesson was feeling the club head...that you can feel it throughout your swing." So, he said, "Why did you say, 'Wonderful shot'?" I said, "Well, I wanted them to like the lesson." He said, "Why did you say, 'Want them to like the lesson'?" I said, "Well, I want them to like me."

He goes, "Okay. We'll put that up under fostering... wanting to look good." It took about 10 minutes before I wanted to just crawl under a chair. I remember it now. Even as I'm speaking it, I feel embarrassed. The memory comes up because who I said I was and what I actually did were very different. Very little what I did back then was empowerment. It's mostly about looking good and spouting off grand theories and being the answer man and so forth. So, I think it comes down to if you're going to be good at what you do, and some people are great at what they do, and I think the source of greatness is always the same. It's when people are committed to something bigger than themselves. There's nothing wrong with being committed to yourself. It's fine. We will meet many people in life who are like that, and we all have been like that at times.

But being committed to something bigger than yourself has an advantage that is enormous. First, it's the source of passion. I mean, you see it with people who go through Gandhi or somebody, Martin Luther King, and when you hit that trough, when you're uninspired, you're exhausted, there's nothing, no good, no-how, which teachers get. It's the thing that gets you through the trough. See, and this being committed to something bigger in yourself, there's no right answer for it. It's a total act of creation. See, I've read that eons ago there were societies. They got jobs, and they had kids and families, but that was not the purpose of life. The purpose of life was to find your purpose of life, and when you find that, remember, there's no right one or wrong one. When you find that, there's a certain energy you get from that.

See, this guy... I just keep going back to Gallwey. It made a big impression on me. He said, "Do you find your teaching golf endless? Would you like to be endlessly interesting or endlessly boring?" Ridiculous question. I said, "Well, endlessly interesting, of course." This is about three years into it. He said, "Well, how is it?" I said, "Well, the truth is it's kind of boring. I'm saying the same thing to the same people or same thing to different people." He says, "Okay, you now have a purpose, to make it endlessly interesting. Go find out how to do that, and that's the thing is that until you have created a purpose for yourself... I mean, Ken, we're not going to get into this here, but why play golf?"

Big deal, so you get a piece of rubber around the park and chase it for four hours and talk about it endlessly. So, what would be the purpose of it all? I mean, it doesn't serve humanity. It doesn't make your bank account any better. It doesn't make you a better citizen. In one way, spending four hours out there is a ridiculous use of your time unless there is some value to be achieved that you say is valid. Being with friends, getting a good walk, learning something about yourself, handling breakdowns with grace and ease, learning how to be present, finding the source of excellence, whatever you may say, but there is no answer for that.

So, yeah, just in terms of being the answer man, which was the antecedent to this question is that once you go down that road and you get de-fascinated with learning, it's a hard road to leave because you get that... It's like a little ping on your phone that you can't stop from looking at your phone when you hear the ping comes up. Those, "You're really good, and you're terrific." It gets deep in the brain stem, and it begets to get the thing that you go for. See, if someone tells you what a great teacher you are, you're not that good. If someone sees what a great student they are, then you've done your job, and that's a tough one to get.

#### **Ken Futernick:¶**

Fred, I don't know if you are familiar with this quote. When I was reading something that you had written, this quote by an ancient Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu came to mind, and it's one that I've thought reflects a lot of what you're talking about, and it is the kind of leader and teacher that I think I learned to try to become, and what Lao Tzu said was a leader is best, and he could have been talking about a teacher. A leader is best when people barely know he exists. When his work is done, his aim fulfilled, they will say, "We did it ourselves." I think that captures what you're talking about.

#### **Fred Shoemaker:**

Yes. Well, going back to Gallwey one more time, there was a point in which he asked me, "I was thinking of starting the Inner Game of Golf School, 1978," and Tim, because he had the ideas about the inner game, would recruit a lot of money from this. So, we got together, and we're going to talk about this, but he coached me in such a way that he really listened and asked poignant questions, and he coached me like there's no skin in the game. What do you see about this? What would be the benefit? What would be the cost of all of this? I began to look at really clearly what is it that would be useful to me, what wouldn't be useful to me, how my life would be, and after this two-hour conversation, and it was the first time I'd ever been involved in real coaching.

In other words, without someone pushing me or nodding quickly like that's the right thing to say or interjecting or making a good-bad, right or wrong about what I said or having their point of view going through the labyrinth of their comments. When someone's really coaching me, I could begin to see for myself things more clearly that I've never seen before, and it was like someone held up a mirror to my own mind, and it was a clear mirror, and I made a choice that day not to do this Inner Game of Golf School because I wanted to find my own voice and bring in some of the things that I saw were useful.

So, I lost access to a man who was my mentor at the time. That was part of the consequences of this. No problem, but it was like, really, what I walked away with, it wasn't how great Tim did his thing. I can see now how useful it was. It was that I really thought for myself through something that I probably would have never been able to alone. But I saw my own power and thinking from that, and that was a time that life changed in two hours just like that. It was a really interesting time. There was the fact that quote you said. So, what is leadership anyway? I mean, some could say it's to bring into existence a future that was never going to happen on its own.

It's also examining one's actions in light of one's intent. Well, those have those two things, bring into the future... to exist into the future that was never going to happen in the normal course of events. So, how does a person lead? Well, we think of leaders. We think of Norman Schwarzkopf or Jack Welch or somebody like that. The greatest leaders I ever saw, as you said, had people walk away seeing how great they were and how great they were as a manager, how great they were as a line worker, and someone who has now being able to examine their own actions in light of their own intent rather than the coach examining it with them. So, they transfer to power, so to speak, to the person who is actually doing the action.

So, a leader could be a person who is caretaking the future. This is the future that you have created, and I am going to be with you related to that future at all times, and if you say your actions are to empower people, we examine what the words are to find their own extraordinary nature and have the action to act into that nature or having the energy to act into that nature.

**Ken Futernick:**

Fred, you say an interesting thing about coaching, and it is that coaches need to seek permission from their students before they begin coaching, and most coaches just jump right in and say, "Here's what you need." Talk a little bit about why that's important, why a coach or a teacher might need to wait until they get in some form or another permission to engage in that activity.

**Fred Shoemaker:**

I've done about 1,200 golf schools and about 55,000 individual hourly lessons. Okay, so I'm not going to say I have anything handled, but in this, I'd like you to just briefly do... I will shorten the first five minutes of a coaching encounter. A person walks up and you basically ask them, "So, how can I be of service to you? What's worth your time here?" The person may say, "Let's do golf. I'm just not hitting it solidly. I need to hit it better because I got to play in the Men's 18-Hole tournament." See, if this is the moment, the crucial moment of the lesson. You either give in and say, "We'll hit a few balls, partner. We'll see what we can do," or you start empowerment from the first moment, and that is, "What do you think we ought to look at? Where do you say we ought to go?"

The person says, "Well, you're the teacher. You're the one who's supposed to know," and I'll say, "Well, there's a lot of possible places to go. What do you see? You've had some experience. What do you think is going to make a difference in solid contact?" Then you sit back and have them think. Okay, so they go, "I don't know. Maybe where the club is hitting the ground. I don't know where the club is hitting the ground." So, then you got there. You start to ask permission. If you could coach yourself and where the club hits the ground in this hour, would it be worth your time? Person says things about it, said, "Yeah, that would be great."

Okay, so this time is about self-coaching and solid contact. Now, if you get concerned about the ball going left or right, do I have your permission to bring you back to solid contact? You ask permission to handle the first breakdown, which is inevitable. A breakdown is when someone leaves their original intent and gets caught by sparkly things. Let's say, "Oh, I like this," or, "I like that." Okay, so they say, "Okay." So, you created first of all the intent of the lesson to have the person, the thing that would allow for solid contact. I know teachers can bring this into their subjects. It's the same process in the world.

So, I would say this to them. "In this process, you're going to have to feel this for yourself. I'll be with you, but when you can sense it for yourself what allows for solid hit physically and what doesn't and feel it in the moment, you can walk away being self-coaching. If you just hit it good in front of me and then can't when you leave, we have failed. So, everything I'm going to do today is about self-coaching. Does that work for you?" Okay, so you've set up, first of all, the parameters of the lesson is that success is when they can coach themselves in solid contact. You set the roles of the lesson. It's on their shoulders to experience, not on mine to be all the smart stuff to stay, okay? You've handled the first breakdown of the lesson that when they leave it, you can bring them back to solid contact, and the envelope of expectations would be such that the lessons over when they can coach themselves.

It just seems if it starts like that, we have great velocity rather than this mess of hit a few balls, partner, and we'll just see what we can do here and give you some tips.

**Ken Futernick:**

We're talking about getting permission to teach. I'm thinking about [a podcast episode I did recently with a guy named Victor Rios](#) who's now a professor at UC Santa Barbara, but when he was 14 years old, he was living in Oakland and had been convicted of three felonies by that age. He wasn't going to school much, but he was going to high school, and he would occasionally show up, and the teacher-student relationship is different than the one you described because he didn't really want to be going to school. He wasn't going to a golf coach and to try to get a teacher or coach to help them resolve their problem. He was just showing up because he was told that's what he was supposed to do, but he had a teacher named Ms. Russ who welcomed him every time he did show up, which wasn't very frequently, always communicated that she was glad he was there, cared about him, but never really taught him directly for a number of weeks.

It might have even been months, and what Victor says about her is that she didn't begin to teach him until he gave her permission to teach him, and he gave her permission because it took weeks and months before he trusted her enough to let him teach, and what he said happened because of that permission to teach, and it was a technology class of all things. It saved his life, literally saved his life. He said he was either going to go to prison, or he was going to be dead because of his involvement with gangs at the time, but it was that same dynamic for different reasons, maybe different reasons than the one you described. He had to have trust in his teacher, and she understood that and didn't attempt to try to move him in one direction or another until he allowed her to do that.

**Fred Shoemaker:**

That's a great story, and I have one thing I would like to talk into that story. His name's Victor?

**Ken Futernick:**

Yes.

**Fred Shoemaker:**

Let's suppose Victor took months or years even to get to that place. Think of all the Victors who went to prison who didn't get to that place. See, that one of the things that a coach or teacher can do is have a sense of

urgency without appearing urgent. In other words, how can you get to Victor? See, in my field, people come, and they've already chosen to be there. In your field, it may be less of a choice, but how can you be with Victor in such a way that you begin to get who he is? Victor, what fascinates you in life? Who the hell are you? What do you say about stuff? See, suppose if a person never played golf and said, "Golf is ridiculous. This is for rich people, mostly guys, and mostly they're overweight."

Okay, so you could say, "Okay," and they talk to you about their life, and you find they're interested in learning. They're interested in being there with their friends. They're interested in being outdoors. They're interested in being able to have a challenge and to get through it. They're interested in finding out things about themselves, things they never knew. See, if you tailor golf to that, then you have them in a... See, golf is just a Rorschach. There's no the thing. It can be whatever you want it to be, and I think there's something about the story with Victor that it was a great teacher and a great thing, but we lose a lot along the way because the time it takes.

I think there's a way to probe in and reduce that time by finding out what it is that lights this person up, and that's not an easy thing to do. It takes a person who's actually truly, truly interested in that because students don't care what you say. They don't even really care much of what you do. They watch who you're being. The being always shows to that. If a person says, "Well, I'm supposed to ask them three questions," then they'll pick that up. But if you look at this and say, "Who is this person?" and are really there with the person, they'll pick that up. See, you can't fake listening. You can try, but you can't fake... Neuroscientists say we have mirror neurons that when we see a person who's really listening, it brings into our memory when we've listened to something. So, you can't fake it.

You've been in enough parties where somebody's talking at you but looking through you with a drink in their hand, looking for somebody more interesting than you and me. So, we know, but when it's truly there in someone and you're really getting them, there's something that happens, which I would call the miracle of communication. It's when someone has gotten and when someone has really gotten and when they get through with it, the conversation is complete, and they can start a new one. See, I would say there's something with Victor that he's never been gotten up to that point about who he is, and that may be the job of anyone in education of anything is to create fascination with human beings rather than just with the subject.

**Ken Futernick:¶**

The teaching isn't telling. Teaching may be more about listening. More often, it's about listening than it is about telling.

**Fred Shoemaker:**

And how many people have been trained in listening? I mean, we have two ears and one mouth. That should give you at least a clue of what would be more of... But the typical listening is waiting to speak, and the typical good listener is patiently waiting to speak or evaluating what someone is saying while they're saying it, good or bad. See, the art to listening is to give up your reality and to be in theirs as the reality, not a reality, the reality, in such a way that people realize there is no judgment or evaluation going on and to be over there in that reality, like living the world from their place and then asking appropriate questions from their place, and that is a rare thing. That takes training, lots of it.

I mean, wouldn't it be great if the first thing we get as a teacher is training in listening? We went through, with our coaches, a couple days on it, and we started out. I evaluated myself what kind of a listener I am. Just starting out, I'd say I'm about a seven on a one to 10 scale. We had a nine with a bunch of stuff, and we always thought, "Well, listening is listening, getting what the person has to say and then giving them some feedback." Then we went through some of the things that I talked about, and each of us had a chance to really tell our

stories about really being listened to, and I told mine about the one I said and that's about Gallwey listening to me.

Then at the end of the day, we re-rated ourselves as how we really see ourselves as listeners after going through this two-day thing or in the two days, and I rated myself a two on one to 10 because most of the time, I'm bubbling, waiting to talk versus just getting the other person's experience fully, and I thought two might have even been high. So, that was 22 years ago, and all I can say is something I work on all the time. See, in this podcast, I know I'm talking a lot, and it seems like it's opposite of listening, but that's what I'm required to do here at this time, but in a golf workshop, what you'd say, if the hum of learning is there, shut up and allow the student to learn without the interference from the teacher.

**Ken Futernick:**

I remember when I took a class with you, I remember going out maybe the second day, and you were standing behind me, you'd sort of wander around and spend time with the few students, and I remember hitting a really great five-wood and really great solid contact that I looked back and I just hoped that you would say something. "Great shot, Ken," and you just stood and smiled and didn't say anything, and then I realized you were very deliberately wanting me to experience what I had just done and not have that be about what you thought, but you wanted me to experience it and not have it be about impressing you or to give you credit for having me gotten there because had I done that, I think the chances of my hitting more good five-woods especially when you're not around would not go up.

**Fred Shoemaker:**

Well, if you'd hit a good one, and I said, "Great shot, Ken," your next shot, you probably would have some attention on me, and you'd have less attention on what you're doing. So, I have interfered my... who has interfered with your process. See, the basic foundation of all golf schools is awareness is developmental. Awareness is the capacity to be present to something over time. You could call it a form of concentration. So, the reason I play better golf than you do a little bit at this point is I'm aware of things you're not aware of, and the reason you're better at math than I am at this point, you're aware of things I'm not aware of, and the seminal question becomes, I would say, "Ken, coach me to see what you see. How do you do this? Where should I put my attention to make a difference?"

You may say, "Put your attention here. Try it out." As a coach, I might make suggestions. How about put your attention on your alignment with your shoulders? Let's see what you can experience there. So, making suggestions, fine, may not be the definitive answer. It's a place to put it because of experience. So, it's when my awareness has grown of a critical variable. That's a huge learning for me. See, I want people to translate this if they can into students. I don't see anything wrong with golf swings anymore, like really do not. That's the truth. It's taken several decades.

What golf swings are are something like this. There are blind spots that a person has that they don't experience, like the club is here and they don't know it, and then the solutions that the body makes up afterwards to do the best they can. So, if the club face is open, the body usually stops and does something like that. So, the game would be: get to the original blind spot, and what comes downstream will no longer need to be there. Well, it's like this. You've been in a party where somebody does inappropriate humor. That's a blind spot. When they did it when they were young, they got some attention or some shock, and now they're 35 and 40 years old and still doing it.

So, given the fact that that happens, what comes downstream is people avoid the person. You want to make sure that they don't... They all know we've heard that before, stuff like that, and the person just doesn't get it. So, if you could get back to the beginning of I want people to notice me, you could start that conversation. What do you think would allow for that and what have you done and how is it reacted and so forth? Then we

could get somewhere with it. So, there's just blind spots and solutions. That's all there is, and either the solutions really make a difference or they don't, and if the blind spots are big enough, people get stuck with the same golf game for the rest of their lives. It has nothing to do with knowledge and knowing more.

Our blind spots own us, and they run us. That's pretty clear. That's true in life and it's true in anything. If I'm just not a good student and I don't see that I made that up and it's not accurate, I will approach every new endeavor.... Uh-oh. I'm going to be embarrassed and look stupid here, and that's a blind spot.

**Ken Futernick:**

I'm recalling an experience I had that was born from frustration on my part back when I was a fifth grade teacher. I'd assign my students essays to write, and I really wanted them to write about things they cared about, and what I discovered was that I would spend a lot of time commenting on their essays and pointing out things and then returning them to the students, and they would fix them and turn them in again, and after three or four iterations, the essay was pretty good, but I realized it was frustrating because I'd assign another essay and then make the same mistakes. So, I tried doing something that ended up being successful, and it occurs to me that it is connected to what you're talking about in terms of awareness.

But what I would do is ask my students before they turned their essays in to go outside, find a quiet place on the playground and read their essay out loud so that only they could hear it and to bring a pencil with them and to make whatever changes they wanted to. The quality of the essays and the number of improved dramatically, the number of really obvious mistakes went down because as soon as they heard themselves reading what they had written, they knew immediately it wasn't how they wanted to express themselves, but what they were used to doing is just getting to the final page of their essay, putting the final period on it and then turning it into me to fix what they had done, and then they'd get frustrated, and they'd have to fix it, and none of that was resulting in much better writing, and I was doing lots and lots of work.

What happened after this occurred was, as I said, the quality of their writing went up, and the obvious errors went down, and it is really similar as I think about it now to what you asked golfers to do, which is to experience what they're doing rather than for you to tell them what's right or wrong about what they're doing

**Fred Shoemaker:**

Yeah, and I'm going to take what you said and bring it back in my field and then back into your field, I hope. See, in my experience, the golfers are afraid of accurate feedback. I mean, I'm going to be on a driving range this afternoon. No one will have a camera out there. No one will be swinging slow enough that they can feel it better. They won't be looking at their shadow. They won't sometimes be stopping and looking. It's keep hitting balls and telling myself stuff and hope it works out. Now, there comes a point I think in each great player or great teacher that you crave accurate feedback.

It's like I imagine the military. When you shoot a bullet, a gun off, everybody wants to go in the other direction, but something about the military, they have to charge into those bullets sometimes, and the training that it takes to do that is incredible. See, we would have coaches training sessions in which we would get on the hot seat, and in the hot seat, you would ask a person, "What do you see in me that I might not see in myself? I ask you to be honest, and I'll take whatever you say is a gift because this is the most important time for me." That's called accurate feedback.

Well, in this, but it's called feedback, and if enough people give you the same thing, it's probably true. So, I mean, how many teachers get filmed for a day and can see it themselves? Not the principal seeing it, just themselves. Boy, that's a shock. I didn't know I spent all that time looking at one person and ignored everybody else basically and tried to make sure that the lesson went well because I kept calling on that person. So, this notion of feedback is critical. Absolutely. In the absence of accurate feedback nobody develops, and

yet we live in a world where people are afraid of it by being embarrassed. I mean, I've sat next to, I told you, thousands of people watching them watch their video, and almost always they're hoping for something good and fearing something bad that they're going to see.

Rarely does a person say, "Oh my God, whatever I see will illuminate me where to go next," and that ability to crave feedback takes time.

**Ken Futernick:**

Is it that the feedback is not really feedback, it's often a form of judgment?

**Fred Shoemaker:**

Yes, yes, and that's the thing is how to give feedback to someone. You give it like you'd like to get it yourself, but when you have a camera there, a camera isn't judging you. You just see the video. You judge yourself after that, but then when you can get through that, you realize, "Wow, I could have gone on for months and months and never known that." Now, it's like this. It's like you go down the street and you smash into a pothole, and you go out all upset. Then you go down the street and right before you go into the pothole, bam, you hit it again. Now, you're even crazier. That's getting feedback and doing the same thing again, and then pretty soon you go down the street, and you see the pothole, and you swerve around it, and then pretty soon you go down a different street. That's how feedback works. At some point, you just start being more effective. That's all.

**Ken Futernick:**

Well, Fred, I really want to thank you for being part of Teacher Stories. I think we'll wind up. There's plenty of things for all of us to be thinking about, but I really want to thank you for being part of Teacher Stories and for encouraging us to reflect on some of our common assumptions about how we learn, the identities we pick for ourselves, and how we can be better teachers and coaches. I don't think you have to be a golfer to benefit from that. I think this value and that kind of reflection whether one's a parent or a grandfather, a grandparent me, a teacher or just a human being looking to squeeze a little more meaning out of our lives and to be a little more helpful to the people we care about. Teacher Story listeners, if you enjoyed this podcast with Fred Shoemaker, I hope you will share it with your friends and colleagues and will tell us about your own stories on [teacherstories.org](http://teacherstories.org). Bye everyone.