



Thoughts from Linda:

Harvey Penick's Little Red Book Lessons and Teachings from a Lifetime in Golf

Harvey Penick & Bud Shrake
1992

This book is about coaching. But it is about so much more.

Like the popular Apple series *Ted Lasso*, it focuses on a sport secondary to the real event. In the case of Harvey Penick, his life's work as a golf coach was first and foremost about helping people develop into worthy human beings. Golf was the vehicle for his lifetime of brilliant mentoring.

The small book contains the wisdom of one of the world's greatest teachers of a sport: Harvey Penick. It became the highest-selling golf book ever published. The content came from a small red notebook that he maintained from his very young days, in which he wrote with a careful cursive script. He kept it in a roll-top desk at the Austin Country Club in Austin, Texas.

It was full of specific observations and sayings, developed over the many years as he coached players and professionals at the Austin Country Club and The University of Texas. He had a long career at the university, where he was the golf coach from 1931 to 1963, taking the Longhorns to 21 Southwestern Conference championships. Following his retirement, he became the "Professional Emeritus" at the Austin Country Club, where he continued to teach until his death in 1995. It was here that he was convinced to write the book.

He had begun his career at the Austin Texas Country Club at 8 years of age. As a teenager, he became the club's assistant pro and, after graduating from high school, was promoted to head professional in 1923 at age 19. His students are legends of the sport. He coached The World Golf Hall of Fame members, such as Tom Kite, Ben Crenshaw, Mickey Wright, Betsy Rawls, and Kathy Whitworth. He also coached Sandra

Palmer, Judy Kimball, Wes Ellis, Terry Dill, Don Massengale, and Davis Love Jr. In 1989, the PGA honored Harvey Penick as Teacher of the Year.

There is much to be learned about golf in this book, to be sure, but along the way, his gentle spirit and kind nature show up in every lesson. To quote Ben Crenshaw, "A good friend once remarked about Harvey, after a lengthy conversation with him, 'he seems to be the most contented man I have ever known.'" Crenshaw noted, "...Harvey's teaching philosophy, as well as his simple outlooks on life...have helped me immensely to understand how we can, after all, make the most out of life..."

The book is divided into 89 short lessons, such as *Golf Medicine*, *The Three Most Important Clubs*, *The Waggle*, *The Easiest Lesson*, *Beware*, *Psychology*, *Instant Humility*, *The Magic Move*, *A Practice Rule*, *Out of Sight*, *A Golfer's Poem*, *Titanic Thompson*, and *A Life in Golf*.

While Penick was a strong all-around technical teacher of the game, he was perhaps the most gifted instructor of the mental game who ever lived. Tom Kite tells a story in the *Introduction* about how he and others, on rainy days, would gather around Harvey and spend hours trying to get inside his mind. Penick would say that one of the things that had helped him become a better teacher was that he had probably seen more golf balls hit by more students than anyone else alive.

But, as Kite noted, many golf instructors have spent innumerable hours on a course, working with thousands of students, yet have little to show for it. Tom Kite noted, "Harvey's students always improved, and at the same time, Harvey improved as a teacher. Even later in his career, he said he learned something new about golf every day." And Harvey was not just a pro's teacher but also enjoyed the thrill of helping a 21-handicap golfer improve.

There are good stories in the book from Tom Kite and Ben Crenshaw about how Harvey taught them and helped them emerge as terrific professional players. However, they have yet to work with them together, always focusing on each individually. Kite noted, "...in my 30 years of playing with Ben, I have never been allowed to watch Ben take a lesson from Harvey, nor has he been allowed to watch me. Contrast that to some of the teaching today of the 'method teachers' who say there is only one way to swing the club. Harvey allowed the swing to fit the student--his or her personality."

Ben Crenshaw tells several great stories in this book, and what emerges is the profile of a lovely human being and gifted teacher who had an amazing impact on each person

he touched. Crenshaw noted, "...what sets the great teachers apart is not merely golf knowledge, but the essential art of communication. I know that Harvey spent much of his lifetime teaching golf, not thinking of what to say to a pupil but how to say it. His messages always came across in soothing tones, for he knew how fragile our psyches were when we played poorly. His mere choice of words suggested the direct antithesis of commanding tones."

Tom Kite commented, "Harvey is so careful in choosing what he says that I have often seen him fail to respond to a question until the next day for fear that his answer would be misconstrued. And I can assure you that every answer he came up with was always expressed positively. Never would Harvey say, 'Don't do that,' but rather, 'Could we try a little of this?'"

I love his stories of Ben Crenshaw, with whom I once had the opportunity to play and who actually autographed my own copy of this book. I had that chance in 2006 at a Pro-Am session in California prior to a tournament to spend time with Crenshaw on the course and at a private dinner. It was wonderful to discuss his mentor with him. In the book, Harvey tells stories of his "boys and girls," and he considered Ben to be a son to him.

Here is a short piece he wrote on Ben Crenshaw that clearly indicates the precocious future golfer he was to become. "Ben came to me when he was about 8 years old. We cut off a 7-iron for him. I showed him a good grip, and we went outside. There was a green about 75 yards away. I asked Ben to tee up a ball and hit it onto the green. He did. Then, I said, 'Now, let's go to the green and putt the ball into the hole.' 'If you wanted it in the hole, why didn't you tell me the first time?' Little Ben asked." Clearly, here was a true talent!

They remained lifetime friends, and there is the most poignant story of the 1995 Masters Tournament when Ben Crenshaw left during the practice rounds to be a pallbearer at Harvey's funeral, only to return and face a tricky putt on the 72nd green. He made the putt, won the tournament, and credited his win to Harvey Penick's ethereal presence.

You'll learn what Harvey thought were the 3 most important clubs and in what order and why. You'll learn (for right-handed golfers) why he likes to see your hands toward the inside of your left thigh on every shot except for the driver. You'll learn why 'looking up' is the "biggest alibi ever invented to explain a terrible shot. And you'll learn when and why he knew he was not cut out for the world of playing on the golf tour.

In a chapter called *Learning*, he gives us a peek into his psyche in his story about taking over the coaching role at The University of Texas. His own cousin, Dr. D.A. Penick, was the head tennis coach and advised his successor, Wilmer Allison, who went on to a most successful tennis coaching career at the university. He recalls the advice: "Wilmer, I know you'll make better players of your students in four years. But will they be better people? That's the important thing."

As Ben Crenshaw writes in the book, he certainly succeeded.

Here is what Ben had to say in his introduction to the book: "What a joy it will be for people who are serious about their game to read about Harvey Penick's life of helping others. The golf parts are easily understandable as they contain a simple, common-sense style. But those of us who are lucky enough to have been around him for a while have truly been touched by a man with unfailing courtesy and generosity, a special kindness the likes of which I have never before witnessed in any man. I have never, ever heard of him remotely raising his voice to another; he is truly a man filled with compassion for others.

For all of his admirable traits, let us simply say that Harvey Penick represents the very best that life and golf can offer."

This book is worthy of his legacy--for golfers and non-golfers alike. I highly recommend it.