

## **Remove all swing thoughts with a “Clear Key”**

An obvious inspiration during my challenge was the work of Timothy Gallwey who wrote the seminal book “The Inner Game of Golf”. He had a variety of theories which resonated somewhat with me but ultimately didn’t fully “click” into something I could use. But his thoughts and concept of getting out of your own way while swinging and repeating a word seemed to make sense – at the very least to stop the constant swing thoughts or worries about hazards that so often pop into our minds in the middle of a swing.

But even though I was vaguely interested in his work I didn’t really apply it to my game. I was later introduced to a fascinating character called Dr Carey Mumford who had a variety of (to my simple little Irish mind) incredibly complex concepts about the swing, but at the heart of it lay a brilliant model called the “clear key”.

This was, in essence, very similar to a development of Timothy Gallwey’s ideas and involved repeating a phrase during your swing which helped to blot out all swing thoughts or other concerns.

Due to the complexity of the whole process I’m sure I’ve got it a little wrong but this is the version I used and it was incredibly helpful for quieting the mind during the swing which is a big issue for nearly all of us.

The theory is that you want to come up with a phrase that starts just before you take the club back (at forward-press time if you use one) and doesn’t finish until you stand there majestically like Tiger with your belt facing the target and watching your ball drawing beautifully towards the flag.

The phrase needs to be seamless and, according to Dr Mumford, should have nothing to do with golf since this can be a distraction. When I say “seamless I mean it shouldn’t have any logical pauses within it which may allow you to take a split second to think “Aghhhh, the water, I’m going to hit it in the water” or “I’m going to slice, I know I am

because I always do on this hole,” or any of the million other negative thoughts that can pop into our heads.

Initially I used:

“Ayrton Senna de Silva from Brazil”, which is the late Formula One driver’s full name (he also happens to be one of my greatest heroes). Except that there is a slight pause as you move from “Silva” to “from Brazil” and I used to feel swing thoughts creeping in.

Dr Mumford suggests something like “Mary had a little lamb” but that didn’t really resonate with me and since he suggests saying it out loud to begin with I felt I would look like a bit of an idiot at the range muttering children’s nursery rhymes under my breath.

For a while I used incantation style phrases such as “I’m a beautiful, effortless golfer” or “I swing the club beautifully,” but I would tend to agree with Dr Mumford that anything golf related isn’t entirely right for the process. I also tried to incorporate aspects of my “Incredible” anchor into the phrase, so that this feeling stayed, but again that wasn’t exactly ideal.

Eventually I settled on, and continue to use to this day “three hundred and fifty eight million”. The numbers mean nothing, they were simply a sequence of numbers that I felt flowed easily, without pauses and would easily quiet my mind.

The best solution is to come up with something that works for you but I would strongly recommend sticking to the basic rules as much as possible. Carey Mumford is a much brighter guy than I am and has done a lot of work on this. I tweaked and changed things as is my way, but very quickly came back to the essence of his concept.

**Clear Key Rules:**

1. Choose a phrase that flows effortlessly without pause.
2. Make sure the phrase means nothing to you and doesn't relate to golf.
3. Ensure the phrase is long enough to last from the start of the swing to the end of your follow through.