

My Golf Grip Changed the Way I Lead- Really!

I've always loved golf, and to me, it's more than just a game. It's a way to gauge yourself, a way to learn; every round tells me something about who I am. But if you'd told me years ago that my grip on a golf club would completely reshape how I approach leadership, I might have rolled my eyes. Yet here I am, knowing it did exactly that. My grip transformed my game, and not just on the course. It taught me powerful lessons about building teams, trusting people, and finding that sweet spot between control and freedom; lessons that turned out to be fundamental to my career.

I remember the moment it hit me many years ago. I was out on the course, swinging hard, trying to send the ball as far as possible. I'd been struggling to keep my drives on target, trying to power through with all my might but ending up frustrated every time. I felt like I was muscling every swing, controlling every inch of it, and getting nowhere. That's when my swing coach took a good look at my grip and shook his head. "Tim," he said, "you're holding it way too tight. Relax your grip. You've got to let the club do the work." Well, friends and neighbors, relaxing and letting go ain't something I do easily. I want to control everything around me, and I want to hit the ball a mile.

But I thought about it and then it took a minute to sink in. I'd always thought a firm grip was essential; the firmer, the better. But he showed me how gripping too tightly actually ruined my swing. I was choking the flow out of it, fighting against the natural rhythm. And then it hit me like a ton of bricks: I was doing the same thing at work. Here I was, leading big teams, building organizations, and yet, I was holding on too tightly, controlling every detail. It wasn't helping anyone; not my teams, not the business, and not me.

So I started working on my grip, and, like anything else worth doing, it wasn't comfortable at first. Loosening my hold felt unnatural. I had to trust the club, trust my instincts, and just let the swing happen. But the more I practiced, the more I saw the results. The ball was finally landing where I wanted it to. And, as I loosened up my grip on the club, I did the same with my teams.

For years, I'd been that leader who thought he had to control every piece of the puzzle, tightly managing and checking every detail. Today however, I realized that if you're holding on too tightly, it creates tension. And tension gets in the way of people's natural flow. So I started giving my teams more space to work, to figure things out, and to do what they were there to do. I became less of a drill sergeant and more of a guide; still setting the direction, still offering support, but trusting them to do their part. It was like a breath of fresh air, for both me and them.

I can't tell you how quickly things changed. My teams started stepping up. They felt empowered, trusted. They had the space to try, to fail, to learn. And, just like in golf, when you have the right grip; that balance between control and flexibility; things start to flow naturally. The team found their rhythm, just like my swing did. And all I had to do was trust them and get out of their way.

Then came the part about handling unpredictable conditions. On the course, there's always a breeze you didn't expect, or maybe the green rolls a little differently. You can't control everything and forcing it doesn't work. The same thing happens in business. Markets shift, competitors pop up, and priorities change. Learning to stay steady with a balanced grip reminded me that while we can't

control the circumstances, we can control how we respond. In business, this translated into not overreacting to every shift. My grip on the organization needed to stay steady; not loose, not too tight; and adaptable.

I started to see a bigger picture. In golf, a great game isn't one amazing shot. It's consistency, about setting yourself up well for the next shot. My Dad frequently says, "Play smart." It's the same with leadership. Every decision builds on the last, every step in the strategy leads to the next. I began thinking of my role as less about one-time wins and more about building a foundation for sustainable success. I started to trust that when I held a steady course, the results would follow. And they did.

The other big change was trust. Loosening up my grip taught me to trust the club and the swing itself. In leadership, it became about trusting my team. Instead of trying to make every call, I focused on setting the vision and letting them find their own way of getting there. I stopped second-guessing and micromanaging, and I saw them grow. The whole culture shifted; people took more accountability, they grew more confident, and they stepped up in ways I hadn't seen before. When a leader's grip is balanced, the team feels it, and they start believing in themselves.

One of the biggest takeaways for me was how a good grip keeps everything in alignment. In golf, if your grip is off, even by a fraction, it can send the ball way off course. The same goes for an organization. Every team, every decision, needs to be in alignment with the bigger vision, the values, and the direction. With that steady, balanced grip, we could handle challenges, stay on course, and see the results we were after. It's about keeping the grip steady, not squeezing the life out of it.

So here I am all these years later, still refining my grip on and off the course, learning how a steady hand and a balanced approach can make all the difference. The grip isn't just a small detail in my golf game anymore; it's a philosophy that guides how I lead, how I build teams, and how I drive success. And in the end, all it took was learning how to hold on just right; not too tight, not too loose; and letting the results speak for themselves.

Tim Cutts sits on the Board of Directors of the Accessible Golf Community Foundation. He's an avid golfer and is passionate about fostering inclusivity and community through and within the context of golf. He lives in Frisco, Texas with his wife, Kristin, and his wirehaired pointing griffon, Hiccup (who loves riding in golf carts!)

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