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Legacy Planning, Once Removed

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Once Removed: Productive Life, Productive Day: Lessons from the Golf Course, Part 1

Episode 40 Summary

One common feature of daily life in every generation is that everyone is busy and struggles with being productive. This episode explores lessons from sports — in particular, golf — as a metaphor for helping us start our day in a way that makes it productive and meaningful.

Transcript:

(0:00):

Hello and welcome back. I'm Steve Murphy, a trust and estates attorney with McGuireWoods, LLP. And this is Legacy Planning, Once Removed – my podcast on legacy, trusts, family, and everything else on my mind.

For those of you who are returning, again, welcome back. And for those of you who are new to the podcast, welcome.

This podcast is about more than just legacy planning. This is about the mindset of your legacy, how you affect others and how they affect you.

And we have a tagline here. We say: Walk like you leave footprints.

This is an episode on productivity. I'm talking about this because a lot of clients and colleagues and students are talking about it.

I give presentations on productivity, and after that, people often ask me if I have some more materials. So...here's one.

But in this episode on productivity, I'm going try to keep it relatively short.

Forgive me if I'm moving quickly through these concepts. I'm happy to discuss more if you want to send me a note.

So, I understand why people think about productivity so much. We are all so busy.

Ask someone about their day and you get the same kinds of responses.

"My to-do list seemed longer at the end of the day than the beginning."

"I'm constantly interrupted."

"I can't get anything done."

I think we can all relate to those. So, what do we do?

Well, there are tons of books out there with new habits and approaches, but I'd say this, I think you already know what to do because you already have been practicing it for almost your entire life.

And the answer, yes, is sports: the ultimate training ground.

And more specifically in this episode, we're going to talk about a few lessons from the sport of golf.

The idea is that if you play golf or if you do a golf-like activity, then you are going to understand some of these concepts we're talking about.

So, this doesn't just apply in the case of sports, in another episode on golf and teaching life lessons, I talked about golf or golf-like activities like gardening or knitting and cooking and how they have lessons for us.

So, in this episode, even if you don't play golf, I think that these tips on productivity will resonate with you, and you'll get a lot out of this episode.

So, in this episode, we'll go through the metaphor of golf.

(02:39):

Then we'll come back to lessons for your day to make your day productive in your job, your work, and in your life.

So, step one. Step one is not about swinging a golf club, because in golf, it never actually starts with swinging the club.

Where do you start in golf?

Well, you start by warming up and planning for the round.

And when you warm up, you ask yourself this question: "What am I working with today?"

And there are lots of components to that.

Think about the weather. Is it windy, rainy, sunny, hot?

How about your playing partners? Are they chatty, competitive, annoying, enjoyable?

And what's the game you're playing?

There are lots of little games you play in golf.

Are you keeping track through stroke play or match play or some specific game with your partners?

And if you talk to the best golfers out there, they tend to comment on this.

They say that the golf swing is so specific that they have to review what they're working with physically before the round.

They might say that on the warmup range, they realize that they're hitting a bit of a fade. That is the ball goes a little bit to the right.

There might not be an explanation. Maybe they're just a little tight from the way they slept or the prior day's work out or picking up a toddler.

And they might try to fix it with a few swings on the warmup range.

But if they can't, then they just go with it.

There's no use fighting against it. Just like there's no use fighting about the weather – and the mental game of golf is the same.

(04:16):

That day, the player might be distracted or stressed.

So, golfers do this all the time before they start their round.

So how does this affect our work?

Well, as we plan our day, let's ask the same questions.

Pay attention. What am I working with today? How about my coworkers, my clients? Am I tired? Am I agitated? And what's the scoring here? How is this being measured? Is today about productivity or efficiency?

That distinctions another talk I give.

So, some things you could work out or fix before you start your day, or some things you just have to go with.

But importantly, this step one is about knowing yourself.

It's about acceptance and acknowledgement before you move ahead with your day.

Okay, let's move on to step two.

Wait, don't swing that club. Not yet.

Because in golf before swinging, you have to decide what club to hit and where to aim, or rather, what's your target.

And golfers do this all the time.

They might do it the night before looking at a map of the course on their phone, or they might do it the day of or right there on the tee box.

So, step two is asking another question.

"What does a good shot look like here for me?"

Seriously?

Great players ask themselves this question before hitting a shot.

Let's break that down.

Why is it such a great question?

(05:42):

First, they ask, what's a good shot? Not a perfect shot. Not a shot that will solve all of your problems, not a shot that will win the entire match with one swing because think about it, in golf, that kind of perfect shot doesn't exist.

The perfect shot in golf is actually the hole in one. And the odds of that are very slim. For the average golfer, the odds of getting a hole in one are apparently about one in 12,500.

But even if you hit that elusive hole in one, that's just helpful on that hole. It doesn't win the whole match.

So secondly, the question asks about what does a good shot look like here?

So, it's about visualization. Really take a step back, really picture that result.

And lastly for me, again, recall that by this time you know what you're working with.

You might not have your best stuff today.

So, this question is what does a good shot look like here for me in my situation?

So now let's apply this golf lesson to life.

Let's look at that to-do list and ask, what does a good day look like here for me?

Not what kind of day would solve all of my problems, not what project would erase my to-do list with one stroke of a pen.

Really, what would a good day look like for me here?

What projects, what conversations?

And in later steps, we'll talk about how to identify those.

And now step three, wait, sorry, we're not swinging a club.

Sorry, not yet.

But the good news is in this step we are ready to be productive.

Golf is a game of distance. Or put another way, it's a game of proximity to the hole.

So, to be really productive in golf, you have to advance the ball towards the hole.

But here, don't swing a club yet.

There are several tees on a golf course.

There are the back tees where the pros would play from and then it moves forward from there.

(07:52):

All of those tees are designed by the architect to be challenging and to approach the course.

How the architect envisioned the course – all of those tees are actually a way to play and enjoy the golf course.

And there's a USGA initiative started way back around 2010 and it's called Tee It Forward.

And it says that most people play golf from too far back.

They're making golf harder than it needs to be. And that gets in the way of their enjoyment of the game.

And it turns out golf is hard enough to begin with. You don't have to make it harder.

So, what is a way to make the game more enjoyable while still playing golf and still having a challenge?

Walk to the forward tees. I mean it.

Move up, walk to a forward tee in golf.

So, what does that difference look like?

Statistically, based on some research of average distance of golf courses, each tee is about 15% closer.

But moving to the forward tee is still about being productive.

You're advancing the ball.

Sorry, writing out your to-do list is not being productive.

Just like mapping out the golf course doesn't actually move the ball forward.

But walking to the forward tee does advance the ball.

And even better, it advances the ball without a swing, with no risk of hitting out of bounds, you just walk with the ball in your pocket.

So how about that? Let's translate that to the working world.

Start the day with walking to the forward tees.

What does that look like?

It's finding a project or conversation or task on your to-do list that is productive, low risk, easy, and gets you about 15% of the way towards your day.

(09:42):

So, it might be something like a task or a series of tasks of one hour and 15 minutes.

Now I want to clarify what I mean by easy.

I don't presume to know how you do your job.

So, your job would not be easy to me or to a lay person, but it is easy to you relatively speaking.

Maybe there are tasks that you've done a thousand times.

Maybe there are tasks that you find interesting and maybe there are tasks that have low barriers or obstacles to getting it done.

Just like walking to those forward tees, whatever those tasks are on your to-do list, do those first for a period of time.

Okay, so in this episode, we've covered the problem of being busy and being productive and how golf might provide some answers or metaphors.

And we've talked about step one, asking ourselves, "What am I working with today?"

And then step two, asking, "What does a good shot (or day) look like here for me?"

And then step three: Walk to the forward tees.

We like to close these episodes with a thought exercise.

Take a moment, take a breath.

Breathing is really important in sports and in golf, by the way.

And look at that to-do list and that schedule in front of you and ask those questions.

Well, you're probably saying this episode is about golf, but we're not even swinging a golf club yet.

Well, that's for part two.

For that you'll have to wait for the next episode.

I'm Steve Murphy and this has been Legacy Planning, Once Removed my podcast on, well, life.

I'll see you next time. And in the meantime: Walk like you leave footprints.