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My wife, the marketing executive, was recently responsible for an event at the Pebble Beach properties. What better place, she reasoned, to explore the game of golf and discover what all the excitement is about. While she spent a full a day at the Pebble Beach Golf Academy, I made do with a few hours of one-on-one instruction from the golf pro at the same facility. It was an illuminating education, full of parables and lessons that are as applicable to our lives in data warehousing as to the game of golf.

My instructor's main lesson was, "*Feel Aint Real.*" Golf, he explained, is a paradox. For instance, you grasp the club in an entirely unnatural way, holding it in your fingers, not your palm. You swing with your left arm, doing everything possible to minimize the involvement of your right arm. If you try to swing straight, the ball will go crooked. The harder you swing and the tighter you grip, the worse it is. In short, nothing you do *feels* right, or normal.

Instead of playing by *feel*, he instructed, you must understand the few, fundamental mechanics of the game. Only by knowing what caused a hook, a slice, a chop, etc., could you learn a good swing, and maintain it over time. Otherwise, you would be sentenced to a life of endless frustration, never understanding how a swing that *felt* so good, could produce such a terrible shot. *Feel Aint Real*, he taught.

The same mantra can be applied to our data warehousing projects. So many projects fail so miserably because it just *feels* right to do it. It just *feels* right to solve all the problems of the enterprise and do a big bang, even though it requires infinite time and resources; it just *feels* right to get all the data, even if there is no demonstrated business need; it just *feels* right to build it, after all someone will surely come and use it; it just *feels* right to start big, even though you and your team have no experience; it just *feels* right to focus solely on the technology, even though the technology does not drive success. Just as in golf, after you take your swing (and it *feels* oh so good), the project ends up lying in the rough, and you have no idea why because you didn't take the time to learn the fundamental mechanics that allow you to understand cause and effect, and maintain and sustain your game.

Here are some tips from the world of golf to help you sharpen your data warehouse game:

- **Keep it Simple**

Strangely enough, there is one basic swing in golf. The more you keep it simple and repeatable, the better off you are. The trick they use in golf is starting with the short clubs, like a seven iron. They are easier to control for the novice, allow you to build confidence and a solid swing before moving on to the monster drivers. The same is true in data warehousing. While all the glory centers around multi-terabyte "Big Bertha" projects, you'll build success by starting small with a few incremental architected data marts while you and your team polish the mechanics of your swing.

- **Prepare for Sacrifice**

When we played our first round, I took along 36 balls, a budget of one lost ball per hole for each of us. When you are building your first few projects, you must be prepared for some lost balls as well. You and your team will make mistakes, but you won't have the time to search through the bushes to find and fix every one of them. The pressures of the course marshals will force you to take a penalty stroke in the form of sunk costs, drop a new ball in the form of a different tool or consultant, and move on.

- Invest Time and Resources

You can't be a success on the links without committing time and resources to the game, and the same is true of your project. While on the course, you must have a clear mind, and be focused on your game, not another project or priority. In data warehousing, you must have dedicated business and technical resources, with 100% commitment of their time. You cannot work with part time people who drift into and out of a project. They will be as ineffective as a partner who plays two or three times a year.

- Play the Entire Game

A special tragedy is the person with \$3,500 clubs, bag and accessories who never improves their game, never understands why their shots are inaccurate, and is trapped in endless frustration and failure. It takes more than costly technology to be successful in golf and in data warehousing. Just as golf requires mental and physical preparation, knowing the rules, managing the course, etc., data warehousing requires execution on many more fronts other than technology.

Our first round of golf was very similar to a first data warehousing project. We were unknowingly playing one of the most challenging courses in the world, there were infinite unexpected and unknown challenges, we were simultaneously trying to learn and play the game, we had countless course marshals monitoring our progress, and we were being pushed all the way by the resident heavyweights, who in our case were the hovering hulks of the NFL Alumni Association annual golf tournament.

Despite the pressures, we greatly enjoyed ourselves by sticking to the fundamental mechanics of the game, and remembering all the while, "*Feel Aint Real.*"

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