

# SALES LESSONS FROM GOLF

18 Insights for Sales Professionals from  
the Great Game of Golf



GAURAV KUMAR

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Sales Lessons from Golf  
by Gaurav Kumar

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To

*Rahul Gupta, my guide and mentor,  
who also introduced me to the world of golf.*

*Bani, my dear daughter, the joy of my life.  
She inspires me to be a better man everyday.*

*My Parents, my first teachers, in sales and in life,  
who believed in me before anybody else did.*

*Deepika, my sister, my first partner in crime,  
and her beautiful family.*



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To my inner circle- my mentor, Rahul, my parents, my sister and her family and my daughter, Bani. This book is dedicated to them. Last but not the least, our dog, Kajju, who teaches me everyday what it is to love unconditionally.

Grateful always,

**Gaurav Kumar**

September 20, 2022

Los Angeles, California

# Foreword

When you meet Gaurav Kumar, there are a few things you realize right away—that he’s insightful, smart and super-passionate. He has a big vision and that he LOVES golf and sales.

What you get in *Sales Lessons from Golf* is a combination of those characteristics—a book that is driven with smart insights that connect to a big vision.

What’s powerful about the combination of sales and golf is that oftentimes we need a simple analogy to remember key concepts. Simple things like “approach shots are the key” help you remember that if you only focus on the beginning and the end of a sale, you will miss the most important parts. Analogies like this, that stick, are key to us being able to access them in the right moment. Sales people who golf are going to turn the corner after the first meeting and realize, “ok, it’s my approach shot now, this is what counts the most”. The book is filled with powerful and useful analogies like this and more.

I have known Gaurav Kumar for over a decade. As I've gotten to know him through the years, I've found him to be a great source of fresh ideas. You will see this talent in the book.

Over the years, I've found myself having great respect for real world practitioners who take the time to write a practical book. The art of getting your thoughts about a subject down on paper, articulated in a way that anyone reading it can understand and then change their behavior as a result, is incredibly hard to master.

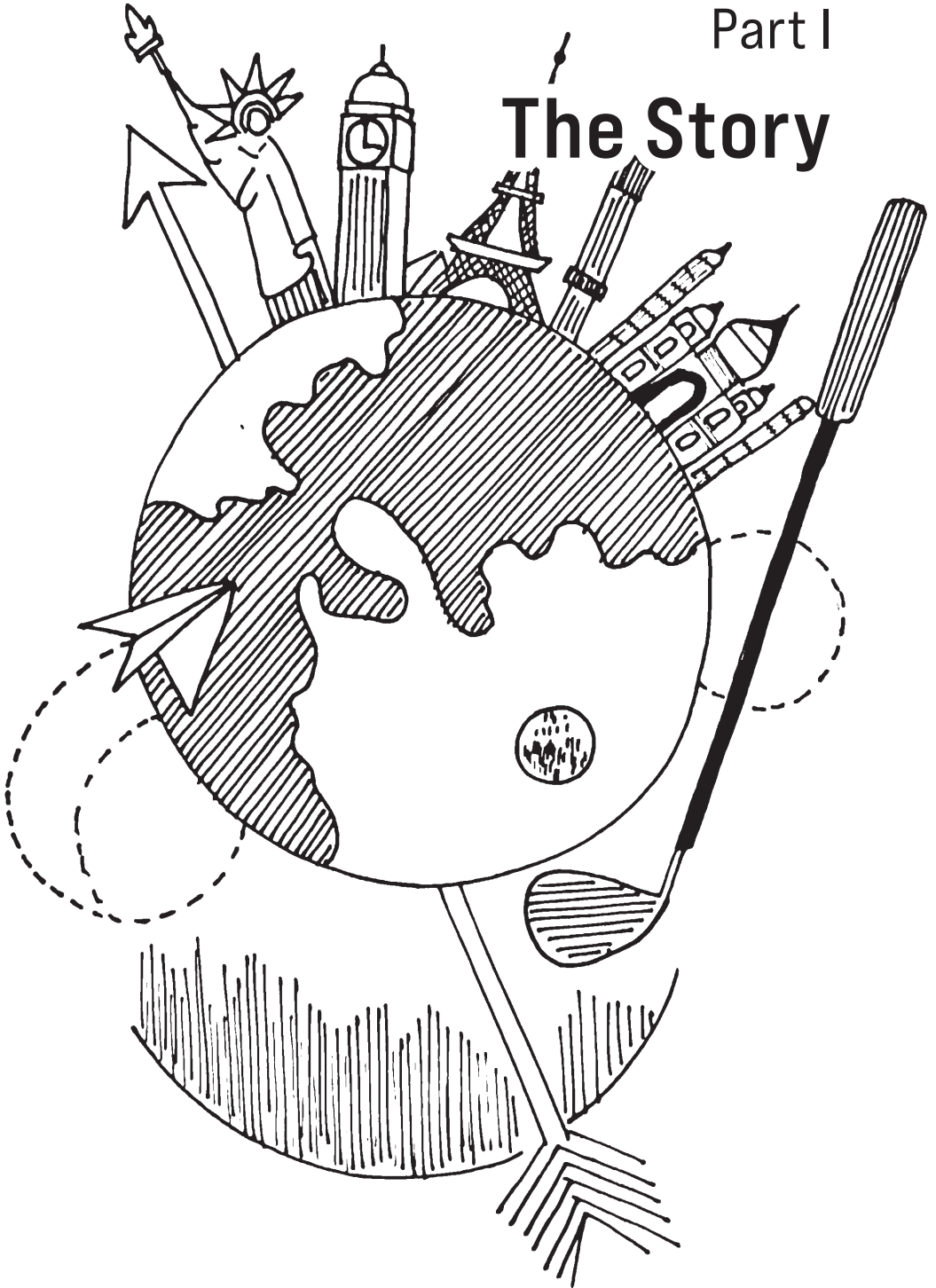
Gaurav has taken the time to think through, articulate and iterate his insights on sales and golf across the following pages. His passion, his insight, his smarts, jump off the page.

Enjoy!

**Henry Schuck**  
CEO, *ZoomInfo*

Part I

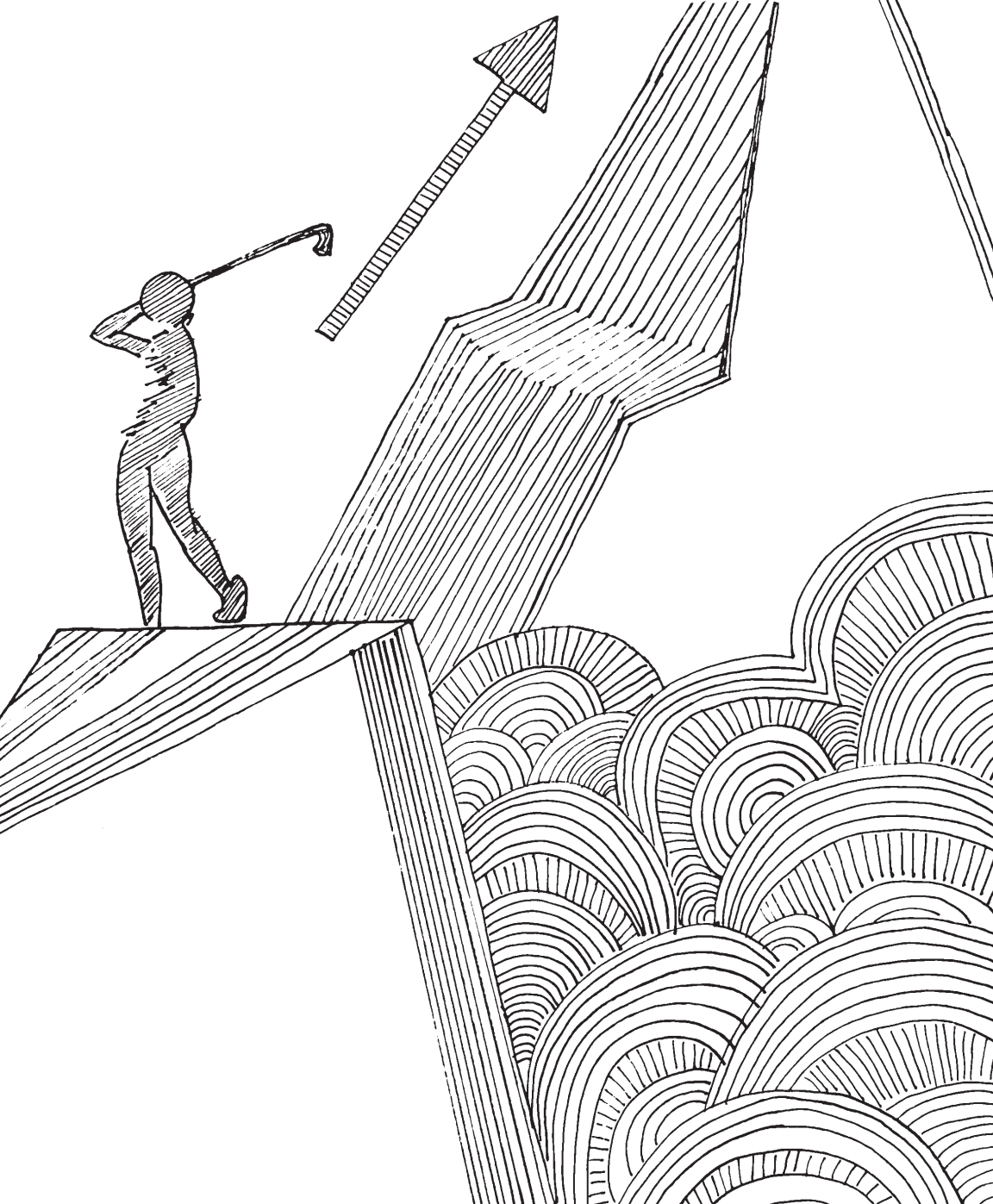
# The Story





Chapter 1

# When Sales Met Golf





*“Golf is like a love affair. If you don’t take it seriously, it’s no fun; if you do take it seriously, it breaks your heart.”*

Louise Suggs

**T**hey say that every gripping book has some version of romance woven into it. This book is about my two great loves—sales and golf. They may appear like strange bedfellows at the outset, but look closer and you will find, they are the perfect couple.

I grew up in a world very far from the greens of golf courses, in a dusty industrial township called Faridabad, outside Delhi. Today I live in sunny California, where I raise my daughter with the values instilled in me by my parents and my sister. My journey from there, to here, was paved by priceless lessons learnt from some great teachers.

Growing up, my father had a small manufacturing business. My mother, a homemaker, helped him in her spare time. She was the untitled COO to his CEO, in their firm of two. Their shop was open 24x7, 365 days a year. Despite the achievements of my companies today, I remain 1/100th the salesman that my father was. While I approach sales academically, with stats, processes and dashboards, my father did sales the old school way,

where it is survival of the fittest. He did not let a single customer go, even those who needed products outside his expertise or means. I watched my father go to great lengths to service them all. For my parents, sales was not a competitive game, but a means of their family's survival. They did it with utmost integrity. The customer *always* had to benefit from working with them. Their decency, was my first lesson in sales.

My mother was academically inclined and a gold medalist with a Masters in Education. She gave up a career path to raise her young family. The lion's share of my parents' earnings for nearly two decades, went towards the education of my sister and myself. They sent us to schools where the fee must have been a burden, but they never voiced a complaint. This helped instill in my sister and me an attitude of academic rigor. I came to respect learning greatly. I did well in exams, won admission to decent institutions and finally an MBA, specializing in Marketing, with sales—a natural choice for me. At the same time, I took evenings classes in Kaizen, the Japanese Art of Management.

After graduation I got a job at an IT sales firm where I met Rahul Gupta, who was the company's CFO. Rahul went on to become a friend and my mentor. He showed me a way forward that eventually brought me to America.

When I first moved to the U.S. in 2003, I did not have a Green Card. For 6 years I worked for a firm that sponsored my work visa while receiving pittance as a salary. Making ends meet was an issue, month on month. One time when my parents came to visit, seeing the way I lived in America, my Mother said, “*Wapas aa ja, umar hai chhoti, apne ghar main, bhi hai roti.*” (Come back, life is short, there’s a living to be made back home too.) I was so tempted to pack up and go home with them. But my father stood firm. If I return home, he said, I had to come back a winner. So I stayed.

After 6 tough years, I got my green card, quit my job and started my company, Beyond Codes. I made some mistakes in the initial years of Beyond Codes, less at work, more at home. I was so driven to succeed, I got lost in trying to expand my company. As a result, while the company did well, my marriage failed. Finding myself as a single dad was the wake up call I needed. Something had to change. I was lost.

Rahul suggested that I try golf. It was something to distract my mind, occupy a few hours in the evenings, serve as a new challenge and perhaps help me build a new community? So off I went to play a few games of golf. It looked easy, but when I got down to it, the game whooped my behind like nothing had before. I had never

seen so much failure. I felt like I had stepped into an alien territory, Golf was too difficult, too damning and too humbling. So I gave up. Eventually, Rahul threw me a challenge. He dared me to play golf for 40 days straight. If I still hated the game after that time, I could give it up, no questions asked.

Looking back, he must have known on some level that challenges were my Achilles' heel, throw a challenge at me and I would fall for it every time. I bought new clubs, new sets of golf clothes, signed up a coach for 30 sessions, bought membership to a beautiful golf club, I went all in, to win the challenge. For the next 40 days, come rain or shine, I showed up on the golf course everyday. Around day 20, I fell in love.

The game of golf, you see, is not a game at all. It is something like life. You can play it mindfully or lazily. You can play it strategically or carelessly. You can cheat through it or you can be noble. Whatever you bring to the game, the game gives back to you. Eventually, you play the game with yourself and there is no place to hide. Playing golf, you reveal to yourself what kind of person you are and what kind of a person you want to be.

As my love for golf grew, whatever black clouds were raiding my psyche lifted. I began to make connections between strategies that worked in golf with strategies

that worked in sales. Anytime I thought of taking a short cut at work, something from golf would pop in my head and I would change the decision and play the next sales move differently. Lo and behold, I started seeing real results at work!

Golf became a true north, a short hand, guiding some of my key sales decisions. At a decisive moment at work, while choosing between two good options, I often relied on wisdom from golf. “What would I do on the golf course with an opportunity like this?”, I would ask myself and the decision would become clear.

The most surprising thing of all was that my experience at sales helped my golf game as well. The way I mine data from my sales dashboard, I started mining my performance scorecard at golf. I loved gaining insight into the game, into the course, and into my strengths and weaknesses. Such data gathering had helped me excel as a sales professional. Now it helped me improve my game of golf.

Over time I started jotting down the connections between golf and sales as voice notes in my phone. Golf is all about reducing the number of strokes it takes for a golfer to sink the ball in the hole. Likewise, there are 7 steps in a sales process and we are always trying to reduce these to 5 or 6. To play the 18 holes of golf, the

ideal number of strokes should be 72 or less. Beginners start with 90, 100 or more. Golf teaches you patience and strategy, to get your number of strokes down. It is also a game of relationship building, just like sales. Your relationship with your caddie and fellow golfers is so important. In sales, your relationship with your customer is everything. In golf you have to play differently at every hole, on every course. In sales, you have to do things differently, with every customer, on every deal. Your game of golf is greatly affected by the weather, by your mood, by the time of day that you are playing. Likewise, the game of sales is greatly affected by unseen market forces, by your mental acuity and stamina and your ability to communicate in a given climate.

By 2015, my company was one of the top 5 global companies in lead generation and by 2018, it was the second largest in the world. It was not until 2020 when the pandemic broke and the resultant lockdown started that along with the rest of the world, my travels ground to a halt. During this period, I learnt that my company was growing without me. For the first time in my adult life, I could finally take a break.

I decided to go back to my first love—learning. I enrolled in the Stanford Graduate School of Business where I met the most extraordinary teachers and

inspiring entrepreneurs and business leaders from the world over. The days were long, the sessions were thought-provoking and the learning curve was steep. My time to decompress was on Sunday mornings, on the Stanford golf course. My colleagues at work and my golf buddies had long suffered my comparisons between golf and sales. When my friends at Stanford heard my theories, they immediately thought it was a winning idea that needed to get out.

Today, golf is such a big part of my life that it has seeped into my professional life as well. These days, I am more likely to fix a meeting on the golf course than at the office. I find that fellow golfers are happier to do the same. And you know what? Even professionally, those relationships are more stable.

I have found that golf and business go hand-in-hand but in a different way. When two people who could work together play golf, they don't talk about work. For certain, it will not be mentioned in the first 6-7 holes. As you play golf together, the real character of a person gets revealed. It is impossible for a cheater to not cheat, just as its impossible for a sore loser to lose graciously. Golf gives it all away.

Today, I am a different man to the one who started Beyond Codes. I am no longer interested in making more



millions. I'm interested in making more millionaires. I'm interested in the employees of my company prospering. I'm interested in empowering differently abled. I am interested in changing the way that the world looks at sales and influencing the next generation of sales professionals. I believe that bringing the lessons learnt on the golf course, to sales, will not only make the sales professionals richer, but it would make businesses sustainable, compassionate and aligned with the larger good of all.

## Chapter 2

# The Golf-Sales Connection



*“Golf is a compromise between what your ego wants you to do, what experience tells you to do, and what your nerves let you do.”*

Bruce Crampton

Unlike other sports, Golf is not simply a game of shoot-score-and-repeat. It is a complex and nuanced journey played in various stages, following a path laid with pitfalls and possibilities. It requires mental fitness, stamina and creativity. Golf constantly pushes the player to their limits, to bring out their best or worst.

It is all the same with sales.

If you are a sales professional who plays golf, then this book is for you. If you are a sales professional who does not play golf, then prepare to be amazed by the 18 principles laid within these pages. But beware, chances are, you will start playing golf too.

This book can take your sales game and your golf game, to the next level. I know this, because following these principles at work has done that for me.

Once you connect golf and sales in your mind, a switch is flipped and something powerful happens! You will open the floodgates between your golf skills and your sales skills. Your brain will begin firing in new patterns, as you draw parallels between the two. Things

that you may have struggled with before would now appear clearer because you are tapping into your talents and skills from another area.

No matter how long you have been in sales, there will be new learning here. You will feel that while others are searching for their next big “sales secret,” you already have the answers you are seeking. The answers are locked in a different part of your mind, waiting to be unleashed. And the benefits flow both ways! Do not be surprised if your game of golf improves too.

For ease of communication, this book is broken into 18 easy-to-digest chapters, one for each hole on the course. At the end of each chapter is an exercise. I urge you to put pen to paper when you get to these. Every time you do so, you will get new insights.

There is nothing more exciting or more dangerous than a sales professional who can attack the game of selling with the strategic mind of a golfer. I am so excited for you, because you are about to see tremendous improvements in your sales results AND in your golf game very quickly. Plus, you will have a lot more fun doing both.

So without further ado, let's head to the fairway. As golfers say to fellow players, while wishing them luck before the start of the game, “May the fores be with you!”

**There is nothing more exciting, or more dangerous, than a sales professional who can attack the game of selling with the strategic mind of a golfer. Gaurav Kumar lays down 18 powerful connections that can enhance your sales game, as well as your golf game.**

“Gaurav Kumar’s singular focus and determination in successfully building Beyond Codes should be a case study in Harvard Business School on how to build a technology business that is deeply dependent on human interactions. Only a genius like him could visualize such a hybrid model and make it happen. In this book he shares his insights, using the game of golf as a metaphor.”

**Ranjan Guha, President, *Interra Information Technologies Inc.***

“This easy-to-read book is a must-have for anyone in sales who plays golf. Now I’m seeing both golf and sales in a whole new way!”

**Brenda A. McCabe, Advisor, *Chief, Next Act Advisors***

“A great book for rookies, as well as for professionals. Easy to digest and keeps you interested in both golf and sales.”

**Abdu Mudesir**

“As soon as I began reading this book, I realized that reading this I would improve both my selling skills and my golf game immensely. The insights are well structured and to the point. It simplifies the concepts and gives advice you can put into practice right away. Highly recommended!”

**Rathapol Bhakdibhumi, CEO, *General Electronic Commerce Services***

“The workbook section of this book blew me away. When a sales professional asks the prescribed questions of themselves and their teams, there is no way that their sales game will not end up amplified. Kudos!”

**Nitesh Banga, CEO, *GlobalLogic***



***Gaurav Kumar is the Founder and CEO of Beyond Codes, Inc., a global leader in Sales and Lead Generation.***

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