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## Two-time Masters Champion Bubba Watson's 3-step Method for Facing His Problems

*A Guest Article from Don Yaeger*

Professional golfer Bubba Watson grew up in Pensacola, Florida, under the strong influence of his late father Gerry. A former Army Special Forces lieutenant in Vietnam, Gerry Watson was the kind of man who kept his emotions very much in check. As Bubba Watson said in a recent episode of the Corporate Competitor Podcast, he believes he inherited his father's confident, independent nature and his mother Molly's strong work ethic.

“My Dad once told me the only thing a poor man has in this world is his word. So never lie,” Bubba said. “I don’t care how bad the truth is. Never lie.” In a distinguished career that includes two green jackets as the Masters Champion and 12 PGA Tour wins, Watson says he strives to apply his father’s advice every day. This is not easy when you’re a professional athlete who works in the spotlight, suffers acute anxiety around crowds, and wears your emotions on your well-sponsored sleeve.

Watson’s heartfelt tears in the winner’s circle, joyously goofy hip hop performance in the boy band Golf Boys, and passionate advocacy for adoption (the Watsons adopted both of their children Caleb and Dakota) have endeared him to millions. Conversely, a past history that included snapping at his caddie when his stress levels got the better of him led to internet chatter that deeply hurt a man who admits he “wants to be liked by everyone.”

In near lock step with his considerable success on the golf course and growing portfolio of businesses—which includes ownership stakes in the Pensacola Blue Wahoos minor league baseball team, a car dealership and an ice cream shop—Watson has had to confront his mental health head on. Watson has done so, and quite publicly, by resisting the urge to bear his pain stoically (like his father), and to follow his dad’s advice and tell the truth.

Part of his wrestling match with anxiety has taken place in the public eye, especially in the media coverage that followed his antics, good and bad, on and off the golf course. He found inspiration from two fellow athletes in NBA star Kevin Love and Olympic swimming champion Michael Phelps who have come out and talked about mental health. “I look up to both of them and consider them friends, so I wanted to lend my experiences to the issue too,” said Watson.

But much of his struggle occurred in private as he learned an important lesson in life, golf and business. “Everybody has struggles in life. I’m going to struggle about three-putting a ball. You’re going to struggle with something else,” he said. “You lose focus on what matters. For a long time, I was all about winning and putting trophies on my mantle that said, ‘You’re a champion!’ But guess what? I have all the champions I need right here in my house with my wife and two kids. As long as I communicate with my wife and my team, I should be able to stay on the right path.”

Since most of this struggle was in private, few know of Watson's hard-won techniques for facing up to, and then facing down, his problems. Here they are:

**1. Empower your team to speak up:** Watson freely admits to being poor at handling the stress of professional golf. During one stretch of particularly bad behavior during which he publicly snapped at his caddie Ted Scott, Scott delivered some tough love to his boss. "Teddie told me he knew I could fire him for saying this, but if I didn't find a way to cope with demands of playing professional golf, he was going to quit," Watson said. When Watson sought corroboration from other members of his inner circle, they unanimously agreed with Scott.

**2. Ask for forgiveness:** Admitting when you've failed or behaved poorly and listening to feedback with an open mind are the first two steps in creating positive change. The next step is to respond to the feedback. You don't have to do it right away, but don't wait too long, either. Watson has delivered mass apologies several times to Scott, his manager, as well as close golfing colleagues such as Ben Crane and Ricky Fowler. "The first step in taking responsibility for my behavior was to ask for forgiveness from those I care about and who I know care about me," Watson noted.

**3. Effect change:** Owning your problem doesn't end at acknowledging it or even at apologizing for it. The last step has to involve an effort to surmount it. Watson has done this in several ways. He has worked with mental coaches, breathing coaches, and has doubled down in his spiritual faith. When he was left off the 2016 U.S. Ryder Cup Team, despite being ranked seventh in the world, he reacted to his pain not by venting on social media but by volunteering to serve as a vice captain of the team, a humble role he executed with deep commitment, while registering an assist in the U.S. win over Team Europe.

Owning his "weakness" has made Watson stronger and brought him closer to his team. It has also awakened him to the therapeutic power of sharing his journey with others. "It really opened my eyes to one of my callings, which I guess you could say is to inspire people, to help them."

Don Yaeger is a motivational speaker, New York Times best-selling author and host of Corporate Competitor Podcast. He often speaks on the subject of Greatness, taking lessons from the world of

sports and translating them to business and professional audiences. He can be reached through his Web site, [www.donyaeger.com](http://www.donyaeger.com). mhca members can login to view his recent presentation from the mhca Fall Conference in Memphis online at <https://mhca.com/conference-presentations/2021-memphis-tn/2844-what-makes-the-great-ones-great-yaeger-video>.

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