

Train driver was Dirk Rothuizen. A beautiful profession and if it had been up to him he would have continued with it until he was 65. Fate decided otherwise. A junkie threatened his life, a burn-out followed, Rothuizen was declared unfit for work. 'What can you do?' they asked at the reintegration office. 'Drive trains.' 'What do you want?' 'Become a golf teacher.' And so it happened.

DOOR ANGELA HOUDIJK

# TRAIN DRIVER BECOMES GOLF PRO: 'THIS IS THE GOOD LIFE'



I have never felt as happy as I do right now!' Dirk Rothuizen, 44, leans back in the deep armchair in the clubhouse of BurgGolf Purmerend and looks at me radiantly.

The recently graduated B-professional does not have to search for long for words to express what he felt when he was presented with the coveted certificate from the Van Swinderen College a week earlier at the Efteling golf club.

The sentences tumble over each other in bliss: 'I walked on a pillow for a week... I couldn't sleep at night. Yes, really, for a week. I've got it! I've got it!'

Dirk Rothuizen. Occupation: golf instructor.

He still can hardly believe it.

'Every now and then I have to pinch myself. Ouch! It's true.

Yes, if I have to describe "being happy", it is now. I get up laughing and I go to work laughing.'

Dirk rubs his hands with satisfaction: 'Come on. Let's get started. Fantastic!'

He is now a teaching pro, three days a week. After obtaining his diploma, he and his fellow student Ed Vander were able to start working immediately at BurgGolf Purmerend, the golf course where he also did his internship.

Undoubtedly, every professional who graduates from the training is happy with his diploma, but with Dirk you get the feeling that he has landed in seventh heaven. When you listen to his story about what preceded obtaining that piece of paper, it is no longer difficult to empathize with the man's feeling of happiness. The Purmer as heaven on earth. OK then.

## JUNK

Dirk Rothuizen was a train driver. For seventeen years he worked on every express train and freight train that ran around the Netherlands. 'Every day a little bit somewhere else, today to Maasricht, tomorrow to Rotterdam.'

He was his own boss, because as long as nothing happened, if you were on time and the train ran on time, you didn't see anyone. If it had been up to him, Dirk would have continued working for the railway until he was 65. It was a nice job, so why not? Dirk says quietly: 'But it was taken away from me. I wasn't allowed to do it anymore.'

Everything stopped on that fateful morning. The train stood still for a few minutes at an intermediate station. All passengers had boarded, the driver waited in the cabin for the green signal to depart. Suddenly he found himself staring straight into the barrel of a gun. Dirk thought it was over for him: 'You look into a barrel and you think it's over.'

The man who threatened his life was a crazy junkie. Why the man, just as quickly as he was inside, also ran away like a shot, Dirk does not know. The only thing he knows is what it did to himself.

In his seventeen-year career as a train driver, he had experienced quite a few cases of suicide. 'Jumpers, yes. I can talk about it now, but the bad thing is that you keep seeing it again and again. No, that will never go away, it's on your hard drive. I've processed it, I don't have sleepless nights anymore, but then, then I couldn't talk about it. That was the problem. I collapsed. That junkie was the last straw.'

For a year, Dirk sat at home on the couch, staring into space, 'not knowing how the day would pass'. He received help from a traumatologist, learned to process what he had experienced, but he was no longer allowed to drive. 'They said: "If it happens to you again, we don't know how you get out of it. You have to look for

something else"'. Dirk went looking. First jobs at the railways themselves, in the mail room, the warehouse, on the train as a conductor... 'To see if I liked it. They did a good job, you know, from the railways, they didn't push me.'

But he didn't find his way either. After two years he was declared unfit for work and could go to the GAK.

And the reintegration agency.

They said: "What can you actually do?"

'I said, "Running trains."'

'They said, "Go apply, go find work." But for a forty-year-old train driver, work is not easy to come by.'

Dirk had to make a choice.

'You've had a reality check because of an event like that. You think: we're only on this planet for such a short time. You get that sense of mortality. You look at your life and you think, I've worked my whole life for the money, I want to do something again, but only something I really enjoy. Something I can put my heart and soul into.'

Tests showed that Dirk was good at dealing with people, that he wanted to teach people something. Training machinists, that wasn't something, suggested the supervisor of the reintegration agency.

'I said, Yeah, that's cool, but I want to do something really cool. I want to be a golf teacher.'

## BASEBALL

At the age of thirty, Dirk was introduced to golf. Fellow machinist Johan de Jäger dragged him to the Spaarnwoude driving range for the first time and gave him an iron-7.

Dirk: 'I had never held such a thing in my hands before. Johan said: "This is how you hold it, hit that ball." So I gave him a row and hit that ball a hundred and fifty meters. Johan: "Not bad for a first time."'

Dirk went to play. 'Johan showed me the way to golf.'

Last year he became club champion of Spaarnwoude.'

Dirk got his feel for the ball from baseball, which he had played at a high level for 27 years. From the age of sixteen he coached the youth, later the first team. But when he really got hooked on golf, he stopped playing baseball.

The irregular shifts of being a machinist suited him. Dirk: "Starting at five in the morning, finishing at eleven, and Dirk was on the golf course at twelve. I played so much that my hands were blistered."

All those years Dirk took lessons from Ivar van der Molen. 'The work my golf teacher did seemed fantastic to me. Always fun, lots of enthusiasm, people who come for fun, what more could you want? It seemed like an ideal profession to me.'

So when Dirk was finally faced with a career choice at the reintegration agency, he knew for sure: he wanted to be a golf teacher. Could they do something with that?

'Luckily they were behind me. It also helped that I had worked my whole life, from the age of sixteen.'

Dirk had read about the training to become a professional golfer in GOLFjournaal and from that moment on he started training. Training. And more training. He trained like a monkey for two years to reach the admission level. Golf teacher Ivar van der Molen was his support and confidant. 'He said: "You have it in you."'

When the big day of the exam arrived, Dirk had a handicap of 7.

## EXAMEN

The training exam.

The moment supreme that he had worked towards.

Dirk played...And sank. Exam anxiety?

'I have spent my whole live never had exam anxiety before, this was the first time that I really stood to shake. It is long was too big. I wanted it too much.

You have to get it, because it has to become your bread, right? I wanted it so badly that the tension was too much for me.

I had a lot of match experience, also in the competition, even at my age I still managed to play in the first team, so I can really play golf... but at the crucial moment things didn't go well.'

The reintegration agency was lenient. It didn't happen every day that they guided someone from machinist to golf teacher. 'You have to look for other work, they said, but if you don't find anything in the meantime you can just try again next year.'

'So train really hard again and also look for work, which wasn't easy to find. And then I was allowed to try again.'

Dirk snorts: 'And then we were fortunately accepted.' When the ex-train driver was admitted to the training (now with hcp 5) he had played 365 times 9 holes that year according to the administration of Spaarnwoude. And he was the record holder.

'It felt like work to me. I went to the golf course at nine in the morning, trained, played and trained again. At least six hours a day. For two years.'

'But we did it, and now we're here. That's fantastic. Actually, I'm grateful to that man (the junkie, ed.) now, otherwise I would never have been here.'

LATIN

But first there was the two-year training, and that didn't go smoothly.

'The learning was very hard for me. And without the home front, a girlfriend who supports me a hundred percent, I wouldn't have made it either. Those young boys do it all with ease, it takes me three times as much effort to get something in.'

Age, Dirk was now forty-two - the oldest in the class - started to count.

'The medical part of the training, the human body, all the bones and muscles, that's not in Dutch, that's all in Latin. Spina dorsalis...That was really adacadabra for me.' Thanks to physiotherapist Erik Niesert, who him in the evening-hours helped to find my way around the



'FAILURE IS NOT IN MY VOCABULARY.

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dark forest of medical terms, he mastered the subject.

Dirk didn't go on holiday for two years. 'When those other boys went away for a week, I was studying.' Together with study buddy Ed Vander. 'We have each other through the exams dragged away, I helped him play, he helped me learn. It was a struggle, yes. But that's the way I am. When I do something, I don't give up.'

## PRO-AM WINNS

Six years have passed, from the day the junkie pointed his gun at Dirk's head to today. Six years

of burnout, sitting on the bench, traumatologists, jobs at the railway, being declared unfit for work, going to the GAK, to the reintegration agency, rejections in job applications, not earning any money, setting new goals, training, failing your entrance exam, training again, applying for jobs again, high training costs, struggling, struggling and struggling again.

But now that he has his diploma, his worries are over and life is smiling on Dirk again. The question remains how he sees the future. A man who can fight like that can do anything, we think. Does he perhaps secretly still have ambitions to go on a Tour?

'I'm participating in the Monday Tour and I participated in the qualification for the Dutch Tour. I was fourth reserve, so I could have played all the matches, but that would take up so much time.

I'm going to teach first, build up a client base, and then maybe I can play next year. No, I don't have any further aspirations. Becoming an A-pro? Maybe in two years.

First I'm going to gain teaching experience. I'm realistic, I held a club in my hand for the first time when I was thirty. I'm already very happy that I'm playing at this level, that I was able to complete the training.'

Well, Dirk still has a modest dream: to win the Pro-Am of Spaarnwoude as a pro.

'I won it as an amateur, together with a team of course. Last year I participated for the first time as a young pro. I missed out by two strokes as the best player of the young pros. It would be nice if I could win it this year. Then the circle would be complete.'