



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

Article from:

The Stepping Stone

October 2007 – Issue No.28

Avoid Blowing Business on the Golf Course: A Quick Review of Golfing Etiquette

by Maureen Wild

For many years golf was perceived as the sport of aristocrats. Private membership in posh country clubs, the leisure time to play the game, and the expense of acquiring clubs, caddies and time on the green were out of the reach of most middle-class people. Ah, but all that has changed. Golf courses are the new executive meeting rooms, and business golf is booming.

What does this mean to you? If you are an experienced golfer, this trend is an answered prayer. But if you are not familiar with the sport, you might be tempted to reach for the Roloids when an invitation crosses your desk. It can be downright intimidating to arrive for a day of golf with very little comprehension of how the game is played. Even more nerve-wracking may be your ignorance of the etiquette of golf. Unlike other sports, there are some specific protocols that must be followed to enhance the game for your golfing companions and others on the course. And ignoring those can have lasting implications for your reputation, or even cost you business deals. Therefore, in the spirit of increasing your confidence and eliminating anxiety, let's review some basic golf etiquette.

Golf is one of the fastest growing sports in the world. The sport has a very colorful history. There is evidence that Roman shepherds played a crude version of the game as early as 1100 AD. Nevertheless, *The Original Rules of Golf* was published by The Honorable Company of Gentleman Golfers in Edinburgh, Scotland in 1744. St. Andrews golf course, overlooking the eastern shores of Scotland, was declared "the home of golf" in 1834 by King William IV. To this day, St. Andrews remains the premier golf course in the world.

Business golf is here to stay. More deals are clinched on the golf course than in any board

room or elegant restaurant. Tip number one: Invest some time and money in a few private golfing lessons with a professional. You will do much better to learn the basics with an instructor than to expect your business associates to teach you out on the course. You will also learn some interesting tidbits about the game that will facilitate conversation with others. Did you know that many of the golf courses in Scotland were laid out in a circle, with the starting and ending points near each other? Hence, when 18 holes are played today, it is called a "round" of golf.

Golf is a "gentleman's game." Therefore, if you are hosting colleagues for a golf outing, your first responsibility is to inform your guests of the dress codes, an arrival time that will permit a brief warm-up and how many holes of golf they can expect to play. Tip two: Pay attention to the dress code of your particular club—jeans, midriff tops and spandex exercise clothing are frowned upon unless you are playing mini-golf with the family. Remember that players are the "guests" of the golf course. As such, they are expected to take care of the grounds and to be attentive and courteous of other golfers. You must always call the golf course for a starting time or a "tee time." Check into the course a minimum of 10 minutes before your assigned tee time.

Always turn off your cell phones and beepers when you golf. The score should not matter all that much in a friendly round of business golf, but do play as well as you are able. Do not begin to discuss business immediately, enjoy the game and wait until your guest or client is comfortable before you launch into a discussion of business goals or objectives. It is recommended that you walk the course when conducting business because golf carts tend to separate a foursome into two groups.



Maureen Wild is a certified etiquette and ethics trainer with credentials from The Protocol School of Washington and The Josephson Institute of Ethics. You may reach her at: Maureen@highroadsolutions.com or 908-625-8563

When conducting business on a golf course, do your stretching, practicing and strength exercises before you meet up with your guests. Arrive a few minutes early. Shake hands and wish all players a good game. Be realistic about a course length. Most courses are marked with red, white and blue teeing markers. Red is short yardage, white is medium yardage and blue is long yardage. Be ready to hit the ball when it is your turn and try to take only one practice swing before you take your shot.

Another tip for the golf course—when another player is teeing off or hitting a fairway shot, stand to the side and behind the flight line of the ball. Do not move or speak when another player is swinging. Watch the flight of the other player's balls so that, if necessary, you can confirm their direction. Recognize a well played shot.

Business golf etiquette includes hitting first if your ball is farthest from the cup. Yell "fore" if you think your ball may hit someone. Make sure the player with the lowest score on the last hole is the first to tee off on the next hole. If you are playing off the green, your ball could hit the flagstick. If you are putting on the green, you must have the flagstick removed or attended to by an opponent. If an opponent asks you to tend the flag, hold the flag and remove it as the ball rolls toward the hole. If a putt is made on the green and the ball hits the flag, the player will incur a penalty. Place the flag carefully on the ground away from the line of play. On the green, do not walk between the cup and another player's ball. Replace the flag after all players have holed out.

It is the responsibility of all golfers to protect the grounds. Pull carts should not be taken onto tees and putting greens. Motorized golf carts should be left at the exit to the green. When you make a hole in the teeing ground, replace the divot immediately and press it down firmly

with your putter. When taking a practice swing at the ball, swing the club well clear of the ground. Pick up broken tees and put them in the trash bin. After hitting the ball out of a bunker (a sand-filled hazard on the fairway or around the green), rake over any footprints. If rakes are not available, use the back of a club. Recovery shots from a bunker are much easier when a ball lands on a smooth surface.

One final tip would be to encourage you to be conscious of saving time. As soon as the group in front of you is safely out of range, begin play. Move quickly to the next tee and record your scores from the previous hole there. Let players putt until they have holed out. Stop stroking after you have hit a "double par" (this would be twice the number of strokes recommended for getting the golf ball into the cup), and move to the next hole. In a gesture of civility, if the group behind you has fewer players than your group, consider letting them play through if there is space ahead of your group.

Golf is a great sport, and the more skilled you become, the greater your athletic, social and business triumphs will be. □

Maureen Wild has led seminars for many Fortune 500 companies and prominent colleges and universities. Wild has also been active in Meeting Professionals International and is an active member of the National Speakers Association. She has been quoted in The New York Times Sunday business section "O," the Oprah magazine, Self and American Baby. She is certified by the State of New Jersey to mentor small business owners. She has been interviewed on matters of ethics and etiquette for national television and radio programs.

