

Washington SmartCEO

Required Reading for Growing Companies

>>POWER STROKES

rules are rules

BUT IN BUSINESS GOLF, HONESTY IS WHAT BUILDS TRUST

The weather might have just turned mighty nippy, but I managed to squeeze in a round of golf at the Microsoft Tournament with Mike Ryan, executive vice president, Government Business for North America at Rolls Royce.

Mike, how old were you when you started to golf and why?

I started at 38 when my three children were all in their teenage years; by then I was looking for something my wife and I could do together. Business-wise and for my game, I just wish I had started earlier.

We all do! Then when did you first see the benefits of business golf?

As a lieutenant colonel in the Marine Corps I found that there's something special about the kinds of conversations you can have on the golf course. Even in the military, people say things that they would not normally

say. There's something unique about the comfort level that grows out of spending that time with them, you learn so much about others.

What are some of the things you have learned and could you give our readers some tips on how to read other players?

You find out if people cheat by the way they follow or don't follow the "rules." There are such nuances here; if a rule is silly you can also tell how cool and sensible a guy is in a tournament, we don't all follow certain ones.

Such as?

Well, the issue becomes have you

"declared" you are modifying a rule, like say, moving a ball five inches away from a tree root to make sure you don't break a wrist, letting the other guys know especially if it's just a fun round. It's a question of knowing up front, it's a great way to know if a guy is on the up and up.

So you mean since we as business golfers aren't playing The Masters, we relax the USGA rules a bit?

Exactly! We're not golf pros, we all know it. But still being an honest guy is part of the honor code we follow, just that it's the "business man's golf honor code."

Describe the business golfer's honor code?

We're out to have fun, we're not golfing for competitive reasons but rather for personal relationships, some of the rules are silly, we all know it.

Since golf can be seen as a metaphor for life and has so many parallels with issues in business, have you experienced something like this in your military background or business experiences?

Oh yes, when I was a younger offi-

cer working for a commandant in the Marine Corps, he noted, "When you get to be a General Officer you get to question orders; not just follow them, otherwise the rules will not get any better. Your role is to improve them."



Hilary Bruggen Fordwich

Speaking of improving things, how have you used golf as a business tool to build relationships?

When I think about golf as a tool, to build and maintain relationships it's mostly about being trustworthy, or the 'declare' issue I mentioned. Also, knowing how people think and how they act, and what is important to them. Years



Mike Ryan

later I can pick up the phone and can call upon them as after golf I can instinctively know there is a trust between us.

What about very specific and tangible examples of how golf has helped you in your national role at Rolls-Royce?

Rolls-Royce was responsible for developing a sophisticated lift fan engine for the joint strike fighter that allows the airplane to do a short take off and vertical land. It is important to the Marine Corps. The Air Force, under General John Jumper, announced a plan to buy some of this variant as well as hundreds of the conventional variant. As it so happened General Jumper and I were paired in a golf tournament the day after the announcement. As a former Harrier pilot well versed in short takeoff and vertical landing fighter aviation, and as someone who knew John Jumper, we spent two hours on the golf course discussing the merits of the STOVL variant of JSF for the Air Force. In my view, good for Rolls-Royce; but more importantly, good for the Air Force.

During golf I was able to provide more information, first hand information in a casual setting, and because of the relationship I was able to further establish we had, as a firm, that information communicated effectively via

golf to the general.

With government oversight so stringent these days, this was still allowed?

Yes, because the tournament was for a charitable cause, and had been approved as such by the legal department of the Department of the Air Force beforehand. In my experience, it is rare when someone violates such a rule. And most of those rare events are because someone just didn't understand the rule in a certain context. Government servants are, in my experience, incredibly honest.

This situation ended well with the Air Force General, but what about business golf blunders, where things have been done or said that are actually detrimental to business?

My boss, Jim Guyette, President and CEO, is not such an avid golfer. He basically just gets out a couple of times a year, mainly when it's necessary for him to play business golf. He really likes to go out with me beforehand, to play a few holes one night, not that I teach him any technique but it's all about avoiding making those blunders. He wants to know all about the business side of golf, what to do and not do to, all the right things that make his time out there with the customer enjoyable and beneficial for Rolls-Royce.

PARTING WORDS

Although sadly we're somewhat at the end of this year's season, we'll still have some lovely mild days; heading south means a surer chance of warmer weather. Just about an hour away on what was once a Civil War battle site, play a world-class great old style course. Cannon Ridge Golf Club, www.golfcannonridge.com, has simply breath taking views, where the architects even left the historic cannon emplacements so the course is natural and certainly worth the drive. Golf Digest ranked it in the Top 10 Courses in Virginia and in the Top 3 Best New Public Course in America (2004).

Is there anything you don't like about business golf?

Yes, scrambles. They drive me nuts, they take too long, clubs think it will go faster, whereas best ball format actually speeds up play. The other thing that does annoy me is when male golfers talk about women golfers being slow. I know many slow male golfers, I know no female golfers that are slow, and they know their etiquette!

Mike you're just trying to butter me up!

No, I mean it!

Where do you golf and is it with the guys?

Ah, yes, you got me...International Country Club in Fairfax. Every Saturday and Sunday I do indeed golf with the guys. Some attorneys, government workers and the like, one of the guys rotates the guys around.

What's your handicap?

I was a 6 now I'm a 9.8

Rather good for a business golfer!

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