



Board Games – How Do I Win?



On a recent family trip, we encountered the ever-dreaded rainy day. So much for the planned outdoor activities! Not to be denied quality time together, we pulled out a variety of board games.

Some of the games were new to us. As we narrowed down the choices, I enjoyed the group's questions. My husband wanted to know, "How do you play?" I quickly noticed one of the kids ask, "How do you win?" And another, looking for insider information, whispered to an experienced player, "what's the best strategy?"

I chuckled. These are the same questions I hear from businesswomen who want to get involved with golf. They've heard too many times "are you missing a critical business skill?" That business skill, of course, is breaking through the glass ceiling and leveraging golf for business. The following statistics from an April 2002 attitudinal study by Starwood Hotels and Resorts Worldwide, Inc. entitled From the Boardroom To The Back Nine: The Importance of Golf In Business are powerful.

Besides acknowledging the social aspects of golf, executives in this survey also claim that golf is the best arena for the creation of business deals. Golfing with a business associate or client is a good way "to establish a closer relationship" (97%),

a sizeable percentage (43% overall and 63% of the women) agree that "some of my biggest business or sales deals were made on a golf course," and 52% say that "executives who don't play golf are at a disadvantage in business." In fact, 43% overall and 69% of the women believe if more women played golf, they would succeed more in business.

What I find very noteworthy is that the statistical responses from the female executive golfers are significantly higher than those of the male executive golfers. Executive women who play the game know the value of the doors that golf can open.

So, let's open the cabinet and pull out a new board game.... "Using Golf for Relationship Development."

Since we're new to the game, our first question: How do you play?

A quick glance at the rules book tells us that to a client who is interested in golf, his or her favorite salesperson shares that interest. We need a strategy to build our interest and develop some golf stories to share. Reading on, we find a few simple suggestions:

- Place some golf-related props in your office. A putter (you don't even need to use it!), a golf calendar, a picture of someone golfing (preferably you), or a golf magazine.
- Listen to or watch the Golf Channel.
- Read the golf section of the sports page in your local newspaper. In the Phoenix market, *The Arizona Republic* publishes a golf section

within the sports pages every Thursday.

- Take some lessons or go to the driving range to hit balls.
- Volunteer to help on a charity golf tournament committee.

Reading further in the rules book, we see "How do you win?"

At a recent presentation, one woman panicked when I suggested that she add a golf prop to her office. "What happens if someone asks me if I play? What can I say? I don't play yet."

You celebrate! You've opened the door to connect with someone in a whole new way. Engage him in a conversation about your new journey into the golf world. Does he have a favorite course? Can he recommend an instructor or a favorite golf shop? Does he have a favorite golf story? When your skill is up to par, you'll be able to invite him to play with you. Or, perhaps he'll invite you!

As you near the finish on our game of "Using Golf for Relationship Development," you can't complete the round without an objective. Consider, for instance, why that relationship is important to you. Are you looking for new business from that person, information, or referrals?

A few years ago, I was at an industry luncheon when the Phoenix Open was in town. An attorney asked me if I had seen any of the tournament. I was very new to the game. Yet, we had a wonderful conversation about golf, the Phoenix Open, how often we played and where. We eventually golfed together and shared some victories and, of course, some humility. After our first golf outing, my playing partner phoned a couple days later asking me to introduce him to the decision maker for matters that he could handle. On the heels of a tremendously fun business golf outing, you bet I made the introduction!

Without the protection of the business suit and the desk, we developed a terrific friendship, which led to our companies conducting a considerable amount of business together. Golf opened the door, but it was up to us to swing and to follow through.

Remember the rules: to the client who plays golf – his or her favorite salesperson is also a golfer. So take your game out of the box and get onto the golf course! "Turn golf into gold™!"

Debbie Waitkus a golf consultant, speaker and trainer, is the owner and founder of Golf for Cause, LLC. She speaks to corporate groups and stages creative golf programs, especially for women, to help them drive better business opportunities through the world's most popular game. "Turn golf into gold."™ Debbie can be reached at dwaitkus@golfforcause.com or 602/722-3605.