



## Messing A Round

Debbie Waitkus

Denis Waitley, author of *The Psychology of Winning* advises, “Expect the best, plan for the worst and prepare to be surprised.” Good advice, yes, but not likely to be your primary thought as you are driving to the golf course for the regular Saturday morning round you play with friends. And why would it be? You are playing golf. With friends. On a Saturday morning.



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Photo by Ron Trimarchi

At 7:30, which means you’ll be home for lunch and have the bulk of the day for other activities. Oh, and you’re playing on a very nice course with very reasonable green fees — one of the rewards of booking online.

When you arrive at the course you find the parking lot to be fairly full. You expect it at a venue such as this. No parking lot anxiety this day, though, because no matter how many people have come here to play golf this morning, you know the first tee is yours at 7:30. And, to top it off, you have arrived early enough to allow time for coffee and a pastry, loosening up with a little stretching, and hitting a dozen or more practice balls on the driving range. It just doesn’t get any better than this, does it?

This is how things began for my friend Joe on a recent Saturday. He had high expectations for a great day. If you knew Joe the way I know Joe, you’d know how virtually impossible it is to throw him off his game. Well...

Joe pulled up to the bag drop about 40 minutes early for his 7:30 tee time. He noticed that the outside

service staff was piling bags of clubs onto a shuttle cart. *Must be a tournament here*, Joe figured, an assumption confirmed when the attendant took Joe’s clubs and asked for his name. Joe said he wasn’t in the tournament and the attendant assured him that his clubs would be on a cart in the staging area within five minutes. Joe went and parked his car and returned to the pro shop, where he found...

A line. A *long* line of golfers waiting to check in and pay. Eavesdropping, Joe realized that *everyone* had a 7:30 tee time. Hmmm. A shotgun start? Had to be. Joe wished he had known this ahead of time, but, oh well. He paid and headed to the staging area to get his clubs, where he found...

Another line. This one a line of golfers waiting for their clubs to be moved from the shuttle to a cart. And, while Joe waited with this line of golfers, he noticed yet another line of golfers waiting for a turn on the driving range. Any thought of the usual 4-hour Saturday morning round vanished from his mind. Joe did manage to hit a few practice balls, while one of his playing partners opted to only roll a few practice putts. Walking from the driving range back to his cart, Joe struck up a conversation with one of the outside service attendants who mused...

Joe’s round would likely take 5 hours, perhaps even 5 ½, because 32 groups were playing. Joe voiced his displeasure. An hour, maybe two hours longer than usual was not part of Joe’s plan. “Take it up with the folks inside,” the attendant told him, rather dismissively, Joe thought. Joe decided he would do just that, after his round, which, even after all this, he was looking forward to, but...

As the noon hour approached and his stomach started complaining loudly that it was time to eat (and why wouldn’t it? — Joe and his stomach were usually home eating by now!), Joe asked the girl driving the beverage cart about sandwiches. Joe’s stomach was

not pleased to hear that sandwiches were not offered on the cart, that if something were to be eaten it would have to be chips or candy bars. Joe wondered aloud whether the cart girl might bring him a sandwich from the restaurant on her next trip around, which seemed like a reasonable request, but...

The cart girl said it would be at least 30 minutes before she got around again, *at least 30 minutes*. Joe calculated that this would only be 2 holes, yet he could tell she was not enthusiastic about the idea of having to go a few extra steps in order to haul a sandwich out to him on her next trip. Joe decided he would add this to the list of things he intended to bring up with “the folks inside,” which he did, immediately after his 5 ½ - hour round, but...

The inside folks were unresponsive. They told Joe the website had not been working properly and that it should have informed him of the shotgun start. There was no apology, just an acknowledgement that it was an unfortunate situation. Joe listened carefully for even the slightest hint of an apology, but none came. So...

Joe walked away, and he wasn't thinking about what a great day it had been, nor how anxious he was to come back. He was thinking about how he and his buddies had had to wait on every shot, how he couldn't find a rhythm for his game, how it had been a struggle all day to stay enthused, how impossible it was to get beyond the series of disappointments with the way they were being treated. Joe thought about what a frustrating experience it had been, and wondered whether “the folks inside” even cared about the legacy they were creating with such terrible customer service. As he was pushing the door open to

leave, Joe wondered whether the people behind the counter knew...

He was leaving for good and had no interest in ever returning. They could have changed the ending of Joe's day and the story he would share about it by simply saying they were sorry it had been a bad experience. They could have ensured his return by taking responsibility for the website's miscommunication. They could have had him back with the offer of a beer or a discounted round. But...

The golf course dropped the ball and lost Joe. And more. Joe's three playing partners don't plan to go back either. And, golfers being golfers, they will talk about the experience and likely cause a few other golfers to choose a different place to play.

If there is a moral to Joe's story it is this: Customers come to your business and “expect the best, plan for the worst and prepare to be surprised.” When the worst does happen – when everything that can go wrong does go wrong... You can control the surprise. Whether or not the fault is yours, a simple apology can make things right and keep the customer coming back. That's not just customer service, its customer care.

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