

Network *To A Tee*

TALKING SHOP ON THE GREENS

by DEBBIE WAITKUS

Mark Twain is remembered for many things, but good business sense isn't one of them. The fact that he was a failure in business would not surprise any of the Phoenix women who use golf as a networking tool. After all, Twain is the man who said, "Golf is a good walk spoiled."

Perhaps he should have found new people for his foursome—they can make all the difference in the world. Meeting and mingling with the right people can lead to an ever-expanding network of

professional and social contacts, new business, personal growth and unexpected opportunities.

Networking through golf has steadily gained in popularity for several years, but now is exploding as more and more women discover the value of a great day on the greens. In the corporate world, women who can properly hold a putter and have basic golf etiquette possess an easy-to-use tool that can open many doors.

GETTING INTO THE SWING OF THINGS

Like many women who use golf to network, Maurine Karabatsos, director of strategic alliance for Empire West Title Agency, learned to play out of necessity. "Back in the '80s, I was working in a mostly male environment. The guys would come back to the office after a round of golf and tell me things I had not been privy to," says Karabatsos. "I needed to get in the game."

Today she does as much business on the golf course as off, and she is in her sixth year of sponsoring a 9-hole golf league for women and men. "We started the league because it sounded like a fun way to put professional women and men together on common ground," she says. "We play nine, have a beverage and network." It's a concept that works.

Deborah Lavinsky, financial advisor with Eide Bailly Financial Services Company, plays in the league. "Golf is such a good vehicle to build business and relationships," she says. Lavinsky has gone from being a non-player who handed out goody bags at charity golf tournaments to an organizer of "Golf and Learn" clinics.

"Four times per year, I invite clients, prospects and people who could be strategic partners to join me for an hour golf lesson, followed by wine and cheese, networking and a short discussion on a financial topic." She says, "It's a matter of putting together people who have something in common—golf—who might



not otherwise get together at all. And it's always fun."

JUST DO IT!

Building and expanding your network using golf is not difficult, nor must it be expensive. The key is the promise of a fun time, especially when you want to bring into your network people who have never played. It helps to create "buddies" out of two or more non-golfers. Many veteran networkers say an outing with newbies is the most fun of all.

Jyllene Miller, vice president of new business development at Direct Alliance Company, has been playing golf less than a year and had to be talked into it. "I was too embarrassed to try it, because I didn't know how," Miller admits. "My husband is a very good golfer, so ... you know, I stuck to climbing the corporate ladder."

No matter what business you're in, you can use golf to network. Debbie Hill is a partner and criminal defense lawyer with Osborn Maledon.

"Getting new work is all about new relationships. By the end of a four-hour round of golf, my playing partners have a very good idea about the type of legal work I do," says Hill. "They are unlikely to need a criminal lawyer the next day, but they pass my name along. I've found that people translate golf course qualities into 'good lawyer' qualities. When you need a criminal defense lawyer, you want someone you're comfortable with and can trust."

GOLF FOR A CAUSE

The game of golf is an ideal networking tool because it reaches into so many areas of interest and offers something for everyone. It can even become a cause, and if you are the

driving force behind, say, a charity fundraising tournament, your network can significantly expand.

Sherry Sentgeorge, business development officer with Arizona Bank & Trust, discovered nearly 20 years ago the parallel of fundraising and golf when she was on the board of Chicano Museo, and the task at hand was to raise money and awareness. "When you have a good cause, golf will always attract people," says Sentgeorge.

The tournament she started has evolved into an annual fundraiser for Chicanos Por La Causa. It is so popular golfers often get turned away. "You need to be creative with networking. Golf makes it easy, because there are so many ways to use it," she says. "I was on the planning committee for an all-woman fundraising tournament for Phoenix Children's Hospital. Men wanted to play, of

TEE IT UP

- **NINE & WINE:** Golf up to nine holes with a mentor and enjoy a hosted happy hour afterward. The program runs twice a month at Continental Golf Club in Scottsdale and Shalimar Country Club in Tempe. Transportation is provided by Ollie the Trolley.
- **EVENING ON THE RANGE:** Hit balls under the stars, receive light instruction, network, enjoy some refreshments and win prizes. All skill levels are welcome. Held on the third Tuesday of each month at Coronado Golf Course.
- **2-DAY BUSINESS GOLF SCHOOL:** Geared toward those who want to learn how to blend business and golf, regardless of skill level. Offered at the Shalimar Country Club in Tempe.
- **THURSDAYS TIME FOR NINE (TTFN):** A weekly business golf league for men and women featuring nine holes of golf, networking happy hour and prizes. Held on Thursdays at Scottsdale's Silverado Golf Club.

course, but it was for women only." Sentgeorge saw an opportunity to involve the men: "I held a caddy auction. I didn't ask for permission; I asked for forgiveness." It was wildly successful.

Sentgeorge and many other networkers say golf gives them a huge advantage in establishing new relationships and maintaining existing ones. Unlike basketball or baseball games, which some networkers use, golf provides a noise-free, interruption-free, one-on-one environment. Whether it's an 18-hole round or a shorter nine-hole outing or just hitting balls on the driving range, it's quality bonding and business-building time.

If you love the outdoors, a good walk, fresh air and having fun, turn golf into gold. Use golf to network and you'll build a network that will work—to a tee. **pw**

Debbie Waitkus, President and Founder of Golf for Cause, helps organizations and individuals—especially women and beginners—understand and leverage the business potential of golf. Her creative approach delivers a positive message that is both inspirational and educational.

INFO LINK: GolfForCause.com