

To serve or not to serve...

It's a service industry — golf. The faster everyone learns that, the faster everyone will get healthy. Sobering statistics from the National Golf Foundation (NGF) followed quick on the heels of announcement that the United States opened more than 500 new courses or expansions in 1999. The number of players and how often they play remains flat-lined, the NGF revealed. Time to apply the defibrillator.

America has turned from a manufacturing country into a service country. Instead of steel mills we have Kinko copiers. Instead of shoes we have Burger Kings. Maybe golf can learn from these other service industries, which appear to be doing very well, thank you.

First, we need to realize golf is in a battle for the disposable income of America — fighting to get people to the first hole instead of the cinema; to the clubhouse restaurant instead of the Wendy's; to the pro shop instead of the local K-Mart. Where's the beef? There had better be some, because Americans are willing, and able, to go elsewhere with their money.

I get around the country, see a variety of golf facilities and notice some big differences in how the golfers (shoppers/clients) are treated. Money Hill outside New Orleans? They were there to help with the clubs, friendly at the pro shop, quick at the restaurant. Kemper Lakes in Chicago? The same: courteous, helpful. Pinehurst? Wow!

Yes, upper-class clubs, and what we are calling "high-end daily fee" are, for the most part, doing it right. Treat your customers well. Greet them with a smile; even Wal-Mart does that.

But, in my experience, it seems that the lower-end and middle-of-the-road daily-fee clubs — those where beginners decide to stick to the game and where most of America can afford to play — should learn a thing or two from the high-enders. Heck, I know two nine-hole courses where the owner/operators appear nonchallant, or even disgruntled, by new arrivals. What would a smile and a "good-day" cost?

One figure from the NGF is particularly disturbing. That is, although about 3 million people take up golf each year, the same number drop out. Retention, where art thou?

Golf course managers must find ways to attract golfers back for a second or third round, for annual membership, for a lifetime.

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We need your help

It's that time of year again. We are compiling our annual list of golf course management companies and the courses they operate. We plan to publish the list with our June issue.

We started doing this several years ago, calling the management firms we knew about and asking them to provide us a listing of their owned, leased and managed facilities.

We were amazed at the response. The people who received that particular issue called to thank us and ask where they might get further information. Many others who hadn't received the issue apparently heard through the grapevine that we had published it and called to get copies, which we were glad to provide.

Inevitably we'd hear from a couple management firms that felt slighted their courses weren't listed. Those omissions were never a conscious effort on our part. Rather we usually just didn't know the company existed.

So, we're asking for your help.

If you operate a golf course management company, and your firm's holdings have not been included in our past management company lists, please contact us.

You can forward the information via e-mail to pblais@golfcoursenews.com; or fax to Peter Blais at 207-846-0657; or by mail to Peter Blais, Golf Course News, 106 Lafayette St., Yarmouth, ME 04096.

Thanks for your assistance.

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Good to see that the Japanese economy is turning around. Troon Golf's entry into the Japanese market (see story page 35) is a strong indication that Asia's sleeping giant is about to reawaken from its too-long slumber.

Japan spearheaded Asia's golf boom during the late 1980s and early 1990s. New courses were built for tens of millions of dollars. Course memberships — sold like stocks and bonds are in the United States — traded for hundreds of thousands of dollars. Builders and architects flocked to the region to ply their trades.

When the economy slowed, golf development came to a virtual halt and memberships plummeted in value. The Japanese banks that financed golf course projects and membership investments alike suddenly found themselves with mountains of bad loans.

Now that the Japanese economy is regaining its health, the banks can better handle the financial hit of selling off these under-performing assets.

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GOLFER'S CREED CREATED

To the editor:

The need for a Golfer's Creed was generated from discussions held at last October's Colorado Public Golf Operators' meeting. This group meets annually to discuss issues pertinent to public golf. At this meeting the issue of golfer etiquette was discussed. The opinion of those in attendance was that etiquette and conduct on golf courses has been declining the past several years. To help address this situation, it was suggested a Golfer's Creed be created and circulated throughout golf.

A task force of public golf operators went to work on developing this creed. As with most creeds, they tend to evolve over time, based on input from many sources. This creed is no exception. Valuable suggestions were received from the Colorado Golf Association (CGA) Public Golf Committee, the CGA staff, members and staff from the Colorado Section of the PGA, members of the Rocky Mountain Golf Course Superintendents Association and golfers. The result is a compilation of ideas, molded into a seven-part creed.

The first letter of each segment spells the word "respect." The hope is, if we RESPECT each other, and the game, we will all enjoy golf more.

The goals for this creed are to educate golfers on proper course conduct and to encourage everyone in golf to embrace its concepts and philosophy. The intent is that golfers, golf course operators, golf professionals, golf course superintendents, club managers and golf associations will assume ownership of this creed, and use it to improve the game. Please help spread the Golfer's Creed and the elements contained within.

Respectfully submitted,
Dennis Lyon, (keeper of the creed)

Editor's note: Consider it done, Dennis.

Golfer's Creed

Golf has been good to me.

As a golfer, I will RESPECT and be good to the game of golf:

RESPONSIBILITY — I will follow the rules of the golf course and take responsibility for all of my actions on the course, including the safe operation of a golf cart and the responsible consumption of alcoholic beverages.

ETIQUETTE — I will abide by the rules of etiquette, awaiting the proper time to hit, refraining from foul language and boisterous behavior and generally conducting myself as a lady or gentleman on the course.

SENSITIVITY — I will be sensitive to the environment and the course where I play and to those who maintain and manage it.

PACE — I will keep up with the group ahead and maintain an appropriate pace of play.

EDUCATE — I will do my best to educate other golfers on the principles of this creed, by sharing it and living up to it at every opportunity.

CONDITIONS — I will strive to leave the course in better condition than I find it, by fixing my ball marks (and those of others), replacing my divots, raking bunkers, and properly disposing of trash.

TRADITIONS — I will embrace the rules and traditions of this ancient and honorable game and respect my fellow golfers and the courses we are privileged to play.

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Let us serve you

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What does one golfer's round today amount to? The \$20 or \$50 or whatever they pay for a greens fee today? Not by a long shot. Multiply that round by 20 a year for 30 years; add three golf balls per round, a golf shirt a year, a pair of shoes every five years, a set of clubs every 10 years...

Keep on adding. Or subtract. For many managers, this is their choice to make.

Here's another idea, thanks to Marty Kavanaugh, now a Veep with the PGA of America in Palm Beach Gardens, Fla. When he was in charge of a half-dozen courses in Cincinnati, Marty instituted a special program for his teaching pros. New golfers, Marty said, feel the same walking out on a golf course as he felt when he began dancing lessons with his wife: self-conscious and embarrassed. The dancing instructor worked with beginners personally in a private room until they felt comfortable enough to dance in the ballroom.

Marty sent all his teaching pros for dancing lessons so they could feel the way new golfers feel, and thus empathize with them. The beginners would not venture out to play the course until they felt comfortable about it. Marty found a great success with this.

Women and youths are huge, largely untapped groups for the game of golf. How often do women walk into the game and do an abrupt turnaround because they were not met with a welcome mat and an understanding assortment of pros and fellow golfers? Too often.

Ditto for kids. Hats off to the World Golf Village, the PGA of America and others supporting First Tee programs around the country. If only there were more.

A friend of mine who owns and operates an 18-hole daily-fee course near my home offers free golf lessons for youths every week. That's a smart move that many courses could make.

Who is the future, after all, for the golf industry? Could have been those teenagers that your ranger just soured to the game by his sour attitude. Could have been those inner-city kids who will not get a chance at a First Tee facility because of a dumbfounding city council; after all, look at the hoops through which the Richmond, Va., city leaders made their

First Tee founders jump.

There are a lot of great marketing ideas in the world of golf, but not enough courses are using them. Golf Course News offered a monthly series of ideas for years. I hope many people instituted them, but, hey, the golf participation numbers are flat-lined, are they not?

The NGF says 41 million Americans said in a recent survey that they want to play golf or to play it more often.

Those new golfers everyone needs are out there... waiting to be lured... waiting for a reason not to dump their extra cash into a night out at another bad movie... waiting for your golf course

to serve them.

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As part of *Golf Course News'* effort to encourage and improve education in the golf course industry worldwide, our international edition will serve as the official publication for the Golf Course International 2000 Show in Frankfurt, Germany, in December.

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Jim Engh, joking about playing his new creation, Hawktree Golf Club, with a group of his old school pals:

"You know intimate things about the course, so you can really mess with them. You can point them in the wrong direc-

tion, start reading the putts for them. Then they don't know whether they should believe you or not believe you. At that point they're yours."

Seriously, he added: "Playing with them gave me a great deal of satisfaction. They were all giving me a hard time about my job. Those are your true friends who make you feel your worst, but at the end of the day they're happy for you."

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"I believe we are on an irreversible trend toward more freedom and democracy — but that could change." — Vice President Al Gore on May 22, 1998.



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We need your help

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Many of the 600 to 900 Japanese courses expected to come on the market in the next few years will likely sell at a fraction of their development costs. With more realistic debt loads, the new course operators should be able to run these facilities on a profitable basis.

Troon Golf has taken the financial gamble of bankrolling a 12-person office in the expensive Tokyo real-estate market and hopes to become a major player in the reviving Japanese golf market. Other American management firms are likely to follow.

It will be interesting to see what develops.