

CHAPTER 9

PLAY LIKE THE BOYS – LEARN TO GOLF

“To find a man’s true character, play golf with him.” ~ P.G. Wodehouse

Ladies, if you want to advance your professional career you need to seriously consider learning to play golf. I can hear you chuckling at this all the way from my office. Yes, I did say golf. Daddy was right. I am sorry to be the one to tell you that golf is still a powerful business tool and lesson in reality. If your goal is to smash the glass ceiling you better learn how to swing a golf club. This is a sport that is tightly associated with business. Many high-ranking executives use golf for networking and for making deals, or, at a minimum, discussing details of the deal. In spite of knowing this, many women still don’t consider golf crucial in business and this is a huge mistake.

So why aren’t women giving golf its due? It could be that women still believe that advancement up the corporate ladder depends solely on their skills and experiences. This just isn’t reality. Golf would be an excellent required course requirement for every MBA candidate. I don’t know why it isn’t. Many corporations actually suggest that their junior managers learn golf. Why wouldn’t they when we know what we know about golf and business by simple observation? What do all the US Presidents do on vacation? They play golf. Point taken. If it’s good enough for the Commander in Chief then it’s good enough for you as an aspiring CEO. Take the cue.

How to Get in the Game

So what exactly is it that golf can do for you? Playing golf gives you the opportunity to prove yourself to your male colleagues and in some industries it can also improve your standing among clients. Golf irrefutably offers a way that women can spend more time and gain more access with *key, male decision makers*. We’ve already established that men are still running the business world, haven’t we? We don’t need to beat them, we have to join them. Furthermore as golf provides a handicap based on ability, everyone plays from a leveled playing field, regardless of ability, at least in theory. In other words it isn’t a game where men are simply going to outmuscle you. Finesse stands a chance.

Golf offers women the chance to earn the respect of men in a friendly way, to develop your network and connect to others in a less-threatening, more personal manner. Less threatening by far than, say, going out to a night club together, which is still a safe networking option for men in business. Many executive and aspiring executive women are still convinced that you can get ahead by hard work alone, but hard work will only get you so far. Today you need to be aware that for business it is just as important to be with the right people at the right place and in the right time. Often that time happens on the greens.

Some of the most powerful women in the world play golf both recreationally and for business. Former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, retired Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O’Connor and Melinda Gates (of the Gates Foundation) all play golf. Patricia Woertz, Chairman and CEO of the Archer Daniels Midland Company and IBM CEO Virginia Rometty all play golf. Virginia Rometty was the third woman to join the Augusta National Golf Club, home to the Masters Golf Tournament.

The Augusta National Golf Club is one of the most famous golf clubs in the world. It was opened in January of 1933 with a strict no-women policy. This policy changed in August 2012 when the club admitted Condoleezza Rice and Darla Moore as its first two female members. This was a great day for women in sports but also for women in business. It makes you wonder if Conde Rice and George Bush sealed the deal for her appointment on a golf course somewhere. Doesn't it?

So how do you get started if you know nothing about golf? Here's how to start. If you already belong to a golf club, great! You've already got an in. Find the golf pro and take lessons and then invite your male colleagues and clients to your club.

If you don't belong to a club there are always public courses or you might look into joining a chapter of the Executive Women's Golf Association (EWGA) an association whose mission is to provide women with the opportunity to learn and play golf. The majority of EWGA's 20,000 members are between 36 and 55 years old, which makes them a prime target for networking. They'll help you find a golf instructor and people to play with. That's sure to give your career a boost even if you never develop a scratch game.

Field Notes

I'm not a great golfer, but I like to think I'm a fair golfer when I practice. To the detriment of my golfing time, lately I've been concentrating on tennis. To participate, I think women (or men for that matter) should just be at considered a fair player at their chosen sport. It is potentially important to their career, or to the business organization they are a part of. This might require taking some lessons.

Here's what being a "fair" player means to me:

- You are not a complete imbecile at the sport that causes embarrassment of your fellow team members;
- You don't delay the game with your lack of skill or knowledge;
- You can laugh at yourself and your short comings;
- You know and can appreciate the protocol or etiquette of the sport.

So I'll maintain I am a fair golfer. Anyone that plays golf with me will have a good time and enjoy the camaraderie, and in the end would likely welcome another golf date with me. That is enough to satisfy me.

On another note, in addition to golf, it's a good idea to learn about football. I love football. I know the game. I like watching it in the stadium or on TV and I love tail-gating. I can tell you the quarterbacks, running backs and coaches for the top teams and I genuinely enjoy discussing team stats with men in business or social settings. My father is a football fan so the game was on in our home quite often.

When conducting business it's important to find common ground. Whenever there is a lull in conversation, I can always talk about football. Although it's certainly not 100% of men in business who are NFL or AFL fans, I would estimate a good 80% of them are.

One thing I noticed early on in my career was that not many other businesswomen appreciated the NFL so this made me of a novelty in the mostly, male-dominated conversations. Today football is a pastime enjoyed more evenly by both sexes and in fact during football season, I

can count on most of my Monday conference calls leading in with talk about last night's game. Still, if you want a leg up-engaging with men, you might want to know a bit about the NFL.

The Takeaway

If you just cannot manage golf or talking about football, you can still look for other ways to participate in sports. There is no reason why you can't form similar connections with people at the baseball field, on the tennis court, or even out for a jog. US Masters Swimming has over 50,000 members who participate in swim practices weekly and by running meets and other competitive and social activities. Many people enjoy joining clubs to train for bike races and triathlons. These activities are tremendously popular among top-ranking business people who enjoy testing their mettle competitively outside the office. Find a sport that works for you because sport provides a terrific elixir for networking and talking business, particularly with men.

