

Roberta Krause

Expert helps women executives interface with golf

Here at Chicagoland Golf, we're in the midst of a technological revolution. Forget the Y2K hoopla, we've left the Reagan era behind and are free-falling toward the '90s. WordPerfect

5.1? Arcane. We're throwing around kitsch phrases like e-mail, the internet and the phenomena of creating pages on our computer screens thanks to the newly installed Corel WordPerfect 8 - all part of our "advancement."

Advancement. As much as we need to be capable of embracing the notion - "to raise the rate of," "to go forward," and "to improve" - it can sometimes prove a daunting prospect. If it's not broke, why fix it? Can't we just hang out?

No, unfortunately, sometimes we can't. We have to dive headlong into the messy abyss called change. And that's across the board. It doesn't matter if it's learning to go click-click on a mouse or a round of golf.

Golf, you ask quizzically? Golf is not a daunting task. Hah! And that's from someone who likes the game. Can you imagine if you needed to learn it as an aside to your career? And don't think that's not happening. It's a trend that's on the upswing as we head to the millennium.

Company golf outings and playing 18 with potential customers have always been around, but nowadays, for-profit enterprises, recognizing what a business builder a day out on the links can be, are encouraging not only novices but employees who could sharpen their skills to enroll in group lessons and corporate golf programs.

People used to inquire about lessons because they wanted to improve their game, now it's because "my customers, my boss, the people at work play golf."

Anna Wildermuth, for instance, by trade what they call "a personal image consultant," is founder and president of Personal Images, Inc., She provides corporations with instruction on creating

or bettering its "image." Everything from the clothes the company's employees wear to the verbal and non-verbal cues they dish out are covered under Wildermuth's expert scrutiny.

As of late, the Elmhurst resident's eye has noticed that golf and the executive workplace go hand-in-hand more than ever these days, and employees, especially women, are taking up the game as a way not only to court clientele, but just to be social. Wildermuth incorporated a segment about golf into her workshops - she covers such topics as hosting an outing to what "titanium" means when referring to clubs. It's become so popular, it may become its own workshop.

"If you're not an avid golfer and you're invited to play in a business outing, what do you do? I present guidelines," Wildermuth said.

"Executives work. They can't spend all their time or money on golf. And it doesn't matter if they're men or women. Men may have access to the game and how it relates to business, but if they have to host women executives and want to make it an enjoyable experience for them, there are some factors to fine-tune.

"I try and show women who don't play golf all the time that they can successfully entertain or play with clients or their boss, and they don't need to be afraid to participate because they won't know what's right or worry about holding anyone back," she continued.

"Practicing, lessons, etiquette, equipment, even what kind of clothes to buy, are many and varied topics to have to pick up. But you can."

Sheila Hill, director of business development diversity at Schneider Electric Square D Company is one of Wildermuth's typical patrons.

"I've played golf on rare occasions, but I'm not a golfer," Hill admitted. "Anna actually encouraged me to play in a scramble event. She reassured me that, 'she would be there for support and together we could get through this, and since it was a

scramble event, I couldn't penalize anyone I was playing with.' I had a wonderful time."

Of course, Wildermuth can't go out and line up every client's putts, but according to Hill, her seminar helped quite a bit.

"I previously attended Anna's seminar on business casual dress. In addition to corporate dressing, the class covered how to prepare for a corporate golf outing. Although it was geared for executive women, it was informative for everyone.

"Playing golf is a good way to put your foot forward and blend in with your business peers, whether they're women or men. It was an in-depth workshop, covering everything from improving your game by working with a pro to proper club selection," she said.

"I think one of the things that really jumped out at me was how much you need a set of clubs that properly fits you. If your clubs fit you, you have a better chance at having them work for you. Clubs have to fit not only your physical characteristics, but your personal hitting style. How you swing, your grip, are as important as your height.

"The other surprising aspects were instruction and etiquette. Pretty much everyone can benefit from some instruction. You don't just pick up a club and become a golfer. Etiquette. I never realized there are things you do and don't do when playing."

"I come from a golfing family," Hill added, "even though my mother doesn't play golf, my father and brothers, even my sons, golf. But I never had that strong an interest. I should have but didn't. Now I can pursue it now that I know what to do.

"Golf is a great game from a business standpoint because you get to see people in a totally different setting than the usual workplace. You learn so much about a person. How they handle stress, how well they negotiate, or how meticulous they might be. Because you spend so much time with that person it's a key tool in building a relationship."