

### Golf: A Sales Tool



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Golf is not just fun and games on the greens, it is business.

Early in my career I realized the value of golf as a vital sales tool and networking opportunity. My foray into the game began more than 30 years ago in Vermont. I was amazed to see with every stroke I knocked off my game, I seemingly added another contact to my rolodex. The connections I made on the course translated into off-the-course deals and opened many doors for me. The greens might as well have been my closing room as golf became one of my most important selling tools then, and golf still holds that rank in my sales arsenal today.

#### **Leveling the Playing Field**

One of the greatest aspects about golf is that there are no titles on the course, which affords the opportunity to break barriers that are much harder to overcome in the office. Out on the course, we're all the same: all pretenses are gone (including stuffy suits) and camaraderie emerges. The bond formed during a four- to five-hour round typically results in a friendship by the time you're having cocktails at the club house, and, if you're lucky, the start of a valued business relationship.

I am fortunate to have had numerous tee times turn into new business for my resort, and in many cases these opportunities resulted in annual events.

### **Adjusting Your Sales Tactics**

The most important thing to remember when networking on the greens is that you can't use a hard sell or standard business pitch.

Like the game itself, conducting business while on the links requires finesse and judgment on when to talk business and when to keep it social. I suggest starting by asking non-assuming questions and encouraging small talk. After a few holes, you'll get a feel for each golfer's personality and how to proceed.

### **Everyone Can Join In**

Golf can be intimidating to break into, but the great thing about it is that it's never too late to start; it doesn't require athletic ability, can be played at nearly any age, and players of different abilities can play together. For example, at Horseshoe Bay Resort, in addition to our three championship Robert Trent Jones, Sr. courses (where I've closed a few deals myself) there is also a made-to-scale putting course, Whitewater, that is perfect for beginners and ideal for group teambuilding.

If you're new to the game, I suggest reading *Golf My Way* by Jack Nicklaus, one of the first golf books I ever read. Also, Texan Harvey Penick's *Little Red Book* is a simple, quick read and gives excellent instruction!

Plus, invest in a few lessons with a local PGA professional; the sessions will get you off to the right start and certainly boost confidence. If your company includes golf at a meeting or offers a company golf outing, take part! Most of these events are planned to accommodate golfers of varying levels so everyone feels comfortable.

Last but not least, have fun and remember: golf is a game that means business.

Jack Bickart is the chief sales officer at Horseshoe Bay Resort in the Texas Hill Country. For more information, please visit [www.hsbresort.com](http://www.hsbresort.com).

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