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## **Getting to the green** **Golf can play into women's success in business, author says**

- [Dave Murphy, Chronicle At Work Editor](#)  
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In some jobs, if you don't know the difference between a birdie and a bogey or a hook and a slice, you just might have a huge handicap.

Investment counselors, top executives and people in sales and marketing often use golf as a way of connecting with clients or helping charities, says Suzanne Woo, founder of BizGolf Dynamics in Berkeley and author of "On Course for Business." Woo aims her book at women, saying they sometimes harm their careers because they're not interested in golf or are too intimidated to learn how to play.

More men have grown up learning how to play sports, so they might not be bothered as much as women are if their golf skills take awhile to develop, she said. That can put the women at a disadvantage, Woo explained, because playing a round of golf is a great way to spend several hours of uninterrupted time getting to know a client or boss.

Woo suggests that aspiring golfers of either sex take a handful of group lessons so they understand the basics of the game and have practice hitting a variety of shots.

"It's not as much how they play the game, but that they know the etiquette and the rules," she said. "The bare minimum is that they make consistent contact with the ball. I don't care if it goes 100 yards down the middle."

Once they're ready to play, Woo urges novices to start with other new players, or with a colleague or mentor who has been encouraging them to take up golf. If they are playing with a client or are invited to play, they should describe their skill level in advance to make sure an avid golfer won't be frustrated with them.

For those who have little time to learn the sport, Woo suggests practicing putts and other short shots, which can keep scores from getting ridiculously high. That can help in charity tournaments as well, she said, because those are often played with teammates in a scramble format, where the team's best shot is all that matters. Novices can count on their partners for the long shots, but still make a few putts to contribute to the team.

"The best thing is, no one asks, 'What was your score?'" Woo said. In a scramble, individual scores don't matter because the team score is all that counts.

Those who are ready to play with a client or associate need to approach the situation differently than they would a weekend outing with friends, Woo said. "Remember: Business golf is still business."



If you're the host, however, that doesn't mean you should start talking about business once the two of you are playing. Woo advises letting your guests bring it up if they choose, or talking about business casually at the 19th hole, where golfers have a drink or meal after a round. People can also use the 19th hole time to set up a phone call for the next day.

Avoid making bets because even a small one adds an element of competition that shouldn't be there, she said. Go out to have fun, but don't bend the rules by nudging your ball into a better lie or conveniently ignoring a stroke or two.

And never get lost in the moment. Just because it's a friendly outing doesn't mean you should swear or gossip or drink heavily, especially with your boss, Woo said. But casual conversation certainly can help. "People share things they ordinarily wouldn't in a conference room."

Playing with the boss is even more delicate. Woo certainly wouldn't suggest cheating or making fun of any boss' swing, but she doesn't believe in intentionally hitting a bad shot to let the boss win. If you are having a good round and the boss seems frustrated, she urges that you downplay the success and keep the situation as light as possible.

She would say something like, "I want to thank you for making this such an enjoyable round. I can't believe I'm playing this well."

If you're playing with an inferior golfer, sometimes your actions can show people your skills in customer service. If the player is obviously bored or tired during the round, you might suggest quitting early so you can relax together at the 19th hole.

Being sensitive to the other person's needs might include suggesting that you pause for a couple of minutes after the ninth or 18th hole to check voice mail messages. It also means making sure that your cell phone is off unless there are extraordinary circumstances.

Woo says the most important factor to keep in mind is that you're trying to build a relationship, not get a low score. "A lot of people say that if they can't have fun playing with someone, they can't imagine doing business with them."

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