

## Tell Me Something I Don't Know

# JACKIE BECK HELPS TEACHERS READ THE MARKET

By **David Gould**, Staff Editor

A noted expert on golf marketing and media, Jackie Beck has successfully operated her own media-relations firm, Beck Communications, since 2002. She began her golf career as an assistant professional, serving four years on the staff at Florida's 54-hole Innisbrook Resort, then crossed over into marketing at Spalding, where she advanced through several positions before hanging out her own shingle.

Since 2015, Beck has also served as head women's golf coach at Central Connecticut University. She was a fine college player herself, competing all four years on the golf team at Illinois State and eventually earning induction into the school's Sports Hall of Fame.

At the 2015 Proponent Group Summit in Dallas, Jackie gave a well-received presentation titled "Secret Shopper: Customer-Service Mistakes Coaches Make, and How to Fix Them." Beck's summit presentation was based on her exclusive Secret Shopper study of customer-service issues at 50 Proponent members' teaching operations. Her report had summit attendees interactively involved in the content, even studying their own websites on smartphones, real-time, as she went through actual examples of what she saw working and not working.

In a recent interview that touched on the secret-shop question, Beck added additional nuances. One point she made involved sub-dividing your evaluation process into specific areas or particular questions. "Is the golf shop delivering messages to you, with accurate information about people who have called asking about instruction? If you suspect that's not happening, have a few people you know and trust call in, asking about golf lessons," says Beck. "Prioritize the things you want to check on, and take them one or two at a time."

Your success as a teacher is based, she believes, on the answer to one question: *Who are you?* "That answer is the basis for your personal brand and what in marketing is called your 'brand promise,'" Beck says. For example, Dave Pelz became known as a short-game expert, and has spent most of his career fulfilling the promise that entails. "It doesn't mean Pelz couldn't charge money to help a student improve their distance and accuracy with the driver," she says, "it just means that he wouldn't overtly market himself as someone who's equipped to do that. I don't know if Dave was ever offered a big paycheck to write a book about driving, but if he were my guess is he would turn it down, because of the



Jackie Beck speaking at Summit '15

problems it would create around who he is and what his brand promise is."

On that basis, a golf coach who is rising in their career and becomes highly skilled in the teaching of green-reading and putting could continue to teach other skills, but in their branding Beck would advise an increasing emphasis on putting instruction. "Take what you're passionate about and then build a brand strategy around that," she says. "People will get it that you're sincere about the talents and skills you've built your brand on."

Of all marketing tactics in use today, the loyalty program may be most emphasized. According to Beck, loyalty programs build off your brand promise—

they could never be a substitute for delivering on that promise. "Value, in the customer's eyes, equals price minus experience—that's your equation," she says. "So, if it's a \$100 lesson and the experience was worth \$150 they will almost automatically come back." You've more than delivered on your promise, in such cases. When student satisfaction is very high, she suggests, you may want to hand out your loyalty rewards more for referrals than for their direct patronage.

"Change or die" is a mantra Beck has been trying to live by, the longer she's been in the business. The greater your longevity, in her view, the bolder you ought to be with new initiatives and tools, as you deal with a changing audience.

"When my generation broke into this industry, golf was dictating to the customer—that's over," she believes. "If you're serious about serving Millennials, who are one-fourth of the total U.S. population, you have to go deep into their world of social media, and above all you need them to know you are asking what they want, not dictating." Lately Beck has been wondering about a "flashmob" approach to something like a golf clinic. "Who is going to be the first coach," she wonders, "to get 30 Millennials into an intro-to-golf clinic by posting a flashmob announcement and letting them all just show up spontaneously?"

On a similar note, it's often said that women highly value the socializing aspect of their involvement with golf. Beck heartily agrees, and she would urge greater emphasis on the social angle. "Some directors of instruction will schedule a Chips and Sips clinic and be overly concerned about whether whether chipping can be taught properly in this type of setting," she says. "I say, 'Who cares?' The women are happy. Some nights they'll be fine with skipping the golf part altogether—let them!"

If you have reservations, ask the participants. "Ask and listen," Beck repeats. "We have to get over the idea that we know better than the customer." **PG**