

STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

Certification Programs: Are They Worth it?



By Lorin Anderson, President

Cooler weather has arrived and “certification season” is upon us. You spent the summer filling your book with student appointments. Now you’re filling it with dates and times for golf-instructor training. It’s the time of year to get those name-brand certifications or else renew them and attain higher levels.

I sometimes hear instructors saying, “Do we really need all these certification programs?” and “Jeez, these certification programs are getting pricey.” Let’s look at that in two ways: ROI and your competitive advantage. I hark back to my long experience with the companies that published the world’s two largest golf magazines. They spent significant sums of money to make sure managers and sales teams received world-class training. They were locked in a fiery competition for advertising dollars and a blown sale could easily cost one of those magazines \$1 million or more in revenues. So, their annual training budgets ran well into six figures, and generally the return on investment was huge.

Instructors tend to over-focus on the sticker price of the training and not recognize the payback it provides. If a certification costs you \$2,000 but it provides the tools for new or enhanced programs that earn you an additional \$5,000 to \$10,000 annually, that’s a great ROI. It makes the price of certification a steal!

Don’t ever forget that you work in an intellectual property business. Enrolling in certification programs lets you quickly obtain significant intellectual property. You can then turn around and sell this knowledge to stu-

dents. The Internet is making it incredibly easy for your students to tap into teaching from thousands of instructors. At this level, golf instruction becomes a commodity. At your level, with help from certification programs, it remains a high-value service that’s scarce in the marketplace.

The best teachers are always learning. It’s what sets them apart. But your certification decisions require strategy. There are two basic routes you could take: Shallow and Wide or Deep and Narrow. Shallow and Wide is the Godiva sampler pack. You attend a variety of certification programs and develop a solid understanding of a variety of swing methods and training ideas. The tradeoff is that you aren’t necessarily an expert in any specialty. Deep and Narrow is when you work to become world-class in a specific area, such as putting. You would then likely go through certification with Aim-Point, SAM Putt Lab, Frank Thomas and others to try and dominate that niche. As a marketer, I like Deep and Narrow because it lifts you above the competition in a recognizable way. That’s a powerful selling advantage.

Having said that, I do notice that some of you combine the two strategies. That may be the best decision, if it’s practical for you to do it. One Proponent member specializes in long-term player development coaching but keeps herself well-versed in the most respected swing methodologies. She plans her annual education budget to include one swing-related certification such as The Golfing Machine or Stack and Tilt and one coaching-related program such as Coach54 or TPI Coaching Track. Her goal is to be able to competently explain any method her students may have seen elsewhere while creating credibility to be known as a cutting-edge coach.

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