

STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

Fun and Games the Mantra for 2016 and Beyond



Do you think maybe we take goif and golf instruction too seriously? Just look at most instructor newsletters and marketing materials. It's usually about the new technology they just bought, or a new training program or awards won by their staff or themselves. This is all well and good, but if you've been watching the next generation as they examine whether or not golf is going to become one of their regular activities, we may want to think a bit

more about how to inject more fun and a more casual and social atmosphere into playing and learning the game.

I was pleased to hear the word "fun" mentioned more at this year's summit in Dallas than in the past seven summits combined. It seems that we too often become overly focused on the "how" of making golfers better and not enough on the emotional highs enjoyed from working on their games.

On the plane back from the Summit, I was reading an interview in Golfweek with Troon Golf's Dana Garmany. As the Chairman and CEO of the world's largest golf management company he is privvy to a worldwide view of what's happening in the industry. He makes a pretty good case that Millenials are already making decent money but are spending it on things like road bikes and family activities that only take an hour or two to complete. His point is that its not that the next generation can't afford the game, they're just choosing to spend their money elsewhere.

He also reinforces what David Ogrin made clear last week at the summit when discussing Topgolf's enormous success: Topgolf eliminates intimidation and embarrassment. Two very strong emotions that have always made golf a sport with significant emotional barriers to entry.

Another interesting point made by Garmany is that today's 35-year-old golfer talks more about who he played with than where he played. It's simply more of a social occasion for many younger golfers and we need to be aware of this as we design instruction programming.

Can we create more programs that allow people to share lessons with a buddy or family member?

Can we make the learning atmosphere less intimidating?

Can we do a better job of remembering that it's a game that doesn't have to be super competitive to be lots of fun?

Can we always remember that striking a few more solid shots each round is really what most golfers are looking for?

Most of the new tools we have at our disposal as instructors are generally designed to help the 5-10 percent of lesson takers who are competition focused. That is all wonderful, but let's not lose sight of the bigger picture.

Garmany doesn't see the situation as dire, but golf has to make generational adjustments like every business must. He believes that things like 9-hole rounds, jeans in the dining room and music piped onto the practice range will rule in the near future, but is there really anything wrong with these changes?

Some teachers get a little worked up about change "ruining" the game they grew up with. But, remember, the game we all grew up with was different than the game our parents learned. If golf was only about traditions, we'd still be playing hickory shafts while wearing a tweed coat or long dress. The game will continue to evolve and hopefully Proponent Group members will be part of energizing the next generation to appreciate and enjoy all the ups and downs of playing one of the greatest games ever created. Let's try to find more ways to make it fun and recognize that even though the facade may change, the essence remains the same.

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