MAXIMIZE YOUR MEMBERSHIP

Keys for Making the "Top Teacher" Lists

By Lorin Anderson, Proponent Group President

Okay, okay, okay. You can hate me if you want. I understand. I really do. When I first came up with the idea for GOLF Magazine's Top 100 Teacher list back in 1994, I knew that a lot of teachers weren't going to be happy with the results. But I also knew that doing the list would be good for the industry by stressing to six million readers every month the value of good instruction.

I also felt it critical to make sure we included regional listings so that every reader could find high quality instruction near them no matter where they lived. I took the responsibility of creating the lists very seriously.

In a very fortuitous turn of events, Dr. Paul Schempp at the University of Georgia offered to help. Dr. Schempp runs the only lab in the nation that specializes in studying how sports are taught. His understanding of what teachers in other sports and other educational fields do to become experts helped us create a detailed questionnaire that the 500 or so nominated teachers completed and that was reviewed in detail by a number of teaching assistants at Dr. Schempp's lab. These TA's didn't know the teachers and made their recommendations solely on the responses to the questionnaires.

After reviewing more than 500 questionnaires each cycle of the list, the UGA staff would provide recommendations to the GOLF Magazine editors for a final review. The entire process took about six months to complete for each iteration of the list.

We always knew the list wasn't perfect, but we also knew we did our best to put the 100 best teachers we were aware of on the list. No politics. No special favors.

So how do they do it now and are there things you can do to enhance your chances of making it onto these lists which now include: Top 100, top 50, best in state, top junior instructors, top young teachers, top teachers at driving ranges, top women instructors and more?

Well, even though every publication operates differently and none do it using my old methods, there are some keys that will get you noticed assuming your experience level and general resume and accomplishments are near the level of others already on these lists.

1) Instruction editors feed the beast with lots of ideas so help them out. The Editors have the final say on most of these lists no matter who else is involved in the process. You can rise above the competition by showing the editors you have great article ideas. When the hair splitting begins when making the final choices, the editors always choose those finalists whom they know will be able to deliver articles. Send a handful of ideas to the instruction editor at each magazine once or twice a year to show them you want to contribute and that you have some creativity. Most teachers don't do this and those that do always have a big advantage in the list selection process. Remember – at the end of the process – the publication is going to rely on the teachers on its list for fresh, nourishing content for their readers. Show you will be a vital contributor and you're way ahead of the pack.

2) Don't be afraid to speak up. Many of the lists are now chosen – at least in part – by your peers. For example, Golf Digest has a national voting panel of about 500 teachers from across the country for its Top 50 list. This becomes a popularity contest. The more teachers who know your teaching methods and like you, the more votes you will get. Hone your presentation skills and offer to speak at your local section and then at other PGA and LPGA sections. Many current Top 50 Teachers spoke at a dozen or more sections before making the list.

3) Network, network and network some more. Network at the PGA Teaching Summit, the PGA Merchandise Show, the Proponent Group Summit, Section meetings and anywhere instructors are hanging out talking shop. A lot of talented instructors never get "discovered" because they rarely leave their teaching tee.

I used to get calls all the time after a new list would be published and the teacher on the other end would be saying to me, "How come you didn't send me an application?" Most of the time, the answer was "I've never heard of you." These were teachers who had never been published, never presented to their peers and basically never gotten involved in the conversation with their fellow pros because we were talking to people all over the industry and their name had never been mentioned.

Whether you like them or not, these lists have become very important for opening up career opportunities, adding credibility to your methods and driving new customers. My final advice: If you are eligible, go for it!