

## MEMBER BENEFITS

# Career Building: Best Foot Forward Will You Make Yourself Noticed in a Job Search?

By David Gould, Staff Editor

Career-minded Proponent Group members are known for investing in their future prospects. But how often will they spend \$30 for a box of watermarked, 100 percent cotton fiber writing paper—plus \$25 for matching envelopes? A generation ago, fancy stationery was a sign of serious ambitions. Your resume and cover letter would show up via U.S. mail and make a positive impression.

"I'm not sure I even get cover letters anymore." That was Rob Noel's response when asked about job candidates for his two learning centers, the Rob Noel Golf Academy north of New Orleans and Big Easy Golf Academy in the city. He corrected himself moments later, realizing that email messages with resumes attached do arrive at his in-box—it's simply that they fail to register in memory. The most recent example was an email from a young woman two years out of college who had modest credentials as a player and minimal teaching experience, all of it in First Tee events. Her letter was vague and she failed to attach a resume or even state that she had one available.

"What's weird is that I came very close to calling her," admits Noel. Despite the weak reach-out and skimpy qualifications, the fact that the applicant had done her First Tee work and had experience as a fitness instructor drew Noel's interest. Plus, her timing was good ("never under-estimate timing," he advises) given a busy upcoming schedule of junior clinics. "Also, she seemed like a sweet kid," he adds. If anything, having an attractive personality is more important than ever, according to the sources interviewed for this article.

Proponent member Rod Cook is a veteran teaching professional who just landed a new job. "I didn't have to write a cover letter, in this case," admits Cook, who was picked as an internal candidate for the director-of-instruction position at the new and lavish Four Seasons Resort and Golf Club, set to open later this year at Walt Disney World in Orlando. Still, Cook did warm to the topic of the well-written letter of introduction. "I've spent my share of time looking at resumes and cover letters," he says. "These days they almost always come electronically—but if some-

thing comes by U.S. mail on quality paper with a watermark, it will grab my attention. I may be old-school that way but if a young person goes to that effort it shows me something."

Plain-speaking Rick Martino, asked to reflect on this topic, began bluntly. "Golf is a terrible business for structured upward mobility," he asserts. "There is often no rhyme or reason as to why Candidate A or B or Z gets the job. How is someone making a hire going to sift through 500 resumes?" But he does see a positive side to the numbers problem. In his view, younger golf coaches who have the gift and have the dedication will look and act very differently from the legions of pros who gravitate toward instruction as a "whatever" option once their hopes for a head-pro career start to dim. "You need passion or you won't stay with it," says Martino. "If you are really right for this field you will be specializing, and that will be recog-



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nized, because that's the way everything is going."

Experts in career development will always say that a cover letter works because it explains in persuasive language what you are like as a person and as a worker and why you would fit well in the organization you're applying to. Martino, a Proponent member now based at Trump National Golf Club in Jupiter, Fla., translates that to golf instruction today.

"If you've built a good reputation and younger golf professionals know you, they will contact you with questions about technique and the craft of teaching," he says. "I was director of instruction for the PGA of America for a long time, so I get contacted quite a bit. People ask if they can watch me teach. There is an etiquette to that, and to how you behave once you are on-site with the teacher you're observing—that's often how the first impression is made."

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Career experts will also stress the great value of finding a mentor within your industry. In golf instruction, there's a strong tradition of mentoring and being mentored. Younger instructors who show that they understand this facet of the business will earn points with the established teachers. If you spend time at David La Pour's place of business, the Colleton River Golf Academy in Bluffton, S.C., you will notice that the outside-services staffers employed by this upscale, 36-hole golf community are over-educated for their

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— David LaPour



positions.

"We have a professional golfer training institute nearby and hire from there pretty regularly," explains La Pour, a Proponent Group member who learned his craft watching Bob Toski, Peter Kostis, Craig Shankland and other luminaries. "These are young guys who love golf and want to make it a career. Not long after they get here, most of them will approach me and ask if they can spend their off time watching what we do, observing lessons and clinics and so forth." In virtually every instance the answer is affirmative, opening a very important door. "Out of 50 young people who have asked for that privilege, and been told yes," La Pour reports, "I would say two of them ended up actually doing it."

The moral of that story is clear: Whether you express it in a cover letter or in some other form of communication, nice words about how dedicated you are need to be backed up by action.

Blandness, vagueness and worn-out buzzwords are not the way to put your best foot forward. Robin Rasch, head golf professional at Oak Pointe Country Club in suburban Detroit, advises a somewhat self-revealing approach, combined with solid research into what's needed at the facility you're applying to. "In our field," says Rasch, "there are many people with similar experience and credentials. What sets you apart is character and personality. Help me understand how you go about building relationships, and how you've succeeded in doing that."

In communicating with a teacher who wants to work at Oak Pointe, Proponent member Rasch hopes to hear that they've tried to learn about the club, what makes it tick, what path it sees itself on. Along with that, the candidate does well to share some facet of themselves that indicates humanity and depth of personal experience, even if it includes a setback or a slip-up along the way. "There is a risk on my part in taking you on," says Rasch, a Proponent member who works win-

ters in Florida at Hunter's Green C.C., "so it's reasonable that you, the candidate, might take a calculated risk in being candid about who you are and what your core beliefs are."

Many of the veteran professionals interviewed for this story say they have their eyes open for candidates who, despite being in an early phase of their career, take responsibility for the future of the game. So, along with researching the particular facility to learn what its needs are, job candidates should also demonstrate an understanding of the game and the industry, to grasp what its needs are. "I get resumes every other week," says David La Pour. "If I sense that the person is wanting to come into golf and enjoy the benefits of what is already there, that's not good enough. Growing the game is part of paying your dues. If you want to work in this great environment called golf, you have to help sustain it — you have to show me that you have started doing the outreach."

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