

MAKING THE MOVE

THE ROBINS FORMULA: PROGRAMS THAT MAKE A 'SKILLS PROMISE' AND KEEP IT BOOST FACILITY PROFITS

by John Torsiello, Staff Writer

Just like any businessperson with bottom-line responsibility, a course owner or general manager will periodically ask their lead teacher or director of instruction, *What have you done for me lately?* Likewise, if an overture arrives from a teaching pro wanting to set up shop at a given facility, the owner or GM there would ask: *What can you do for this golf operation and its profitability?*

"It's the responsibility of the coach/instructor to focus on what the course is looking for and to lay out a solid plan for providing it," says Proponent member Will Robins, owner of Robins Golf Logistix (RGX). His company—headquartered at Empire Ranch Golf Club outside Sacramento, consults teaching professionals on how to grow their businesses by transitioning to the coaching model and creating programs that require lots of practice time and guarantee lower scores.

"Golf courses are in the business of selling green fees," says Robins. "It's great if they provide their golfers a menu of instruction programs, but that alone is not going to actually boost the bottom line—a percentage of normal lesson revenue won't add up to enough money," he contends. "To impact net profit calls for player-development programs that generate increased participation from current and new customers, in multiple streams such as green fees, food and beverage, range balls and merchandise."

Robins has more experience than most in



Will Robins

this form of partnering between coaches and course managers. In discussions with decision-makers at a facility you wish to move to, minimize the presentation of your impressive qualifications and how far you've advanced in your profession, he advises. Much better to focus on the measurable goals of the operation, whether it be an increase in memberships, walk-up play, spend-per-

visit or some other metric. You are there to gather that data and, in turn, explain how you can contribute to the achievement of those goals.

"During your conversation explain how your instructional programs will create avid golfers by getting them to shoot lower scores and become motivated to play more golf," says Robins. "Show them you understand the importance of reaching out to the local community to bring kids, families and businesses to the course to learn and improve at golf."

In the Robins approach, all first lessons are playing lessons, involving a "stroke harvest" analysis. The student is shown the shortest route from his score of, say, 96 down to 86. "You are teaching them how to be coached toward a result," he explains. "You are charging them for results, not for your time.

They will have lots of repeated contact with you and you'll find that they want to play well for their coach."

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His mechanics and the arithmetic go like this: Golfers form into “teams” of six (you’ll find they provide important support to each other) participating in 10 sessions over 12 weeks. Five of those sessions take place on-course, five happen on the short-game practice area or the driving range. The cost is \$695 per person, broken into \$470 for the “tuition” (at \$23.50 per hour) plus \$145 in green fees and \$80 in range ball value. The program guarantees 10 strokes of improvement over the player’s baseline average. “We guarantee we will get them to their goal or we will teach them for free,” says Robins. It’s a model proven to work, over many seasons.

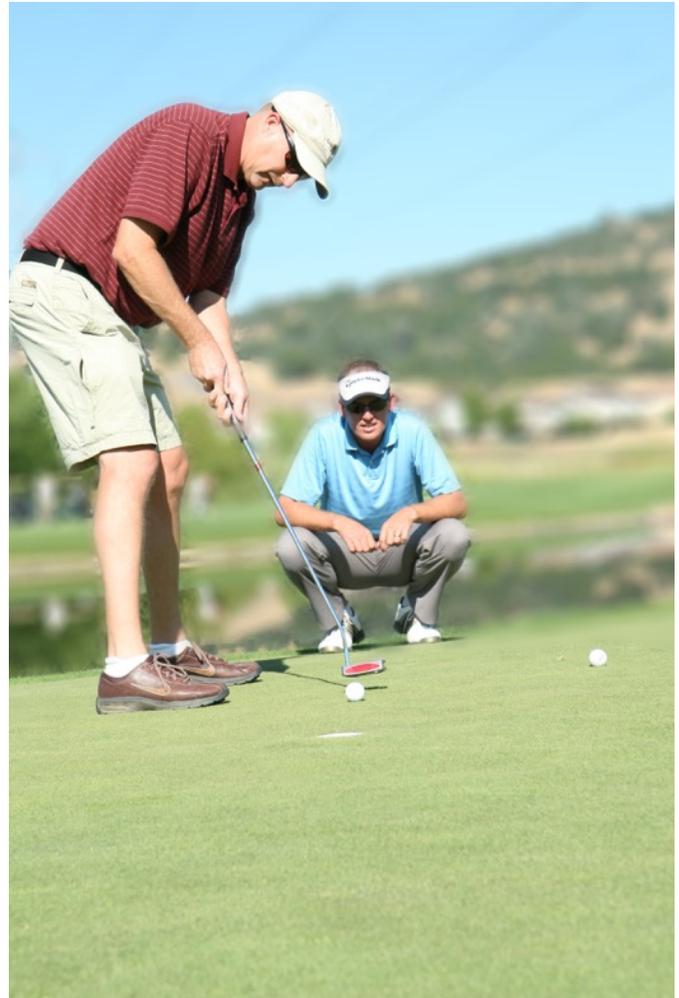
Part of the business strategy developed by Robins is the use of playing lessons as tee-sheet feeders. The on-course playing lesson is a standalone menu item that can be added on a unit basis into any student’s regimen at any time.

“It’s simple but often forgotten that our role as teaching professionals is to create avid golfers of all ages and then connect them to the club through various products, such as range memberships, discount range keys, off-peak green fee specials, summer camps, leagues and so forth,” Robins says. “Any instructor who does this will generate significant revenue for the course and bolster its bottom line.”

Robins suggests a target number of \$900 per year in additional revenue for each customer a teaching professional is working with on a regular basis. “If you can connect 25 new players a year to a club you’re bringing tens of thousands of new dollars in the door and that’s a huge difference-maker for their business,” he asserts. On that basis, when negotiating your revenue split with a course, think about the “additional spend” you can generate out of new, or newly engaged, customers. This is the true financial impact a teacher can bring to the facility—and it ends up being far more significant than 20 percent of your lesson revenue.

Robins provides this example of his approach: Commit to management that in your first year you’ll bring in \$25,000 in additional green fees and related revenue. This goal can be tracked through cross-tabulation functions in the POS system, flagging just your clients. If you reach this \$25,000 goal, the share of your own revenue payable to the club would automatically drop 20 percent down to 5 percent.

“Think about it from their point of view,” advises Robins. “Would management prefer 20 percent of your first-year teaching revenues—say those come to \$60,000 and they throw off \$12,000 to the club—or would they be happier about a bump of \$25,000 in green fees and range balls?” One other point, regarding that \$12,000 you now keep in your pocket: “Some of it will be invested in additional marketing and promotion



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of your services,” Robins points out. “That will be a contributor to further growth of the club’s business.”

Robins also suggests establishing a review with the course owner or GM six months into your agreement, in order to determine if you are delivering on what you committed to. “If the numbers aren’t coming in as promised, you can adjust the percentage dependent on the success you’re having, so there is no risk for the course.”

According to Robins, the theme of your interview should be reinforcing the fact that the instructor is the connection to the customer. “We are the only tool the owner has for creating new golfers and fixing broken ones. We take recreational golfers and make them avid golfers,” he says. “Even the best marketing campaign or special offer a course has can’t do that. That is why teaching professionals are so valuable to courses. We need to remember that when we go into our interviews.”

When Robins puts it that way, you almost want to go to a local stable the day before the interview and rent a white horse to ride in on. **PG**