

## Course behavior

*A round of golf can serve up surprising insights about you... and your fellow players.*

### **Words by Todd Pitock**

A few years ago at a company retreat on a golf resort, an executive came back to his hotel and announced that he'd made a bet with three other teams. "We have fifty bucks a person on the line," he said. "Everybody has to play well tomorrow."

Another executive took exception. "Do you realize that if we lose every bet we'd lose, like, \$6,000?" he asked.

"Yeah, that's why I said we have to play well tomorrow." "Every time we go on an event, you make all these bets. Why can't you just play the game for the game's sake? Enjoy the game, the weather, the mountains, the course, the companionship. You don't need all the other stuff, because it's such a great game."

"I have news for you, buddy," the bettor said, "without the bet, it's not that great a game!"

Of course, golfers have long focused on what golf can reveal about character issues, such as how a player performs under pressure, how he manages frustration and if his scorecard is honest. Beyond those judgments, though, are more tangible insights, such as how on-the-course behavior may yield information about how a person negotiates and whether he or she is suited to lead, communicate, trade or sell. Joking, betting, speed of play and even driving the cart are all reliable clues about people. The key to using golf as a business tool is understanding how to read your fellow players—and making sure you're read the way you want to be.

Jennifer Munro, a management consultant with a background in philosophy, developed psychographic profiles using a survey that breaks the populace into four categories: challengers, socials, technicals and traditionalists.

The 10% of golfers who are challengers strive to control. They are assertive, decisive and competitive, and are prone to bet on the links and lead in the boardroom. A player who examines scorecards, proposes bets and seats himself on the driver's side of the cart is likely a competitive challenger—whose traits you want in, say, a salesperson, where all negotiations are win or lose. They usually thrive in creative, authoritarian positions, as do "socials," the 20% of people who tend to be extroverts, focusing mainly on relationships. A guy who tells jokes, helps with introductions and admires the environment is a social.

Twenty percent are "technicals," or conformists, who focus on rules and systems, while about half are "traditionalists," patient, cooperative types who strive for consensus. Technicals and traditionalists are not big-picture people, but they're detail-oriented and ensure that things get done.

Pace of play is a leading indicator and often a sore point between contrasting types. Challengers want to keep the game moving and experience anxiety when they feel they're getting held up. Technicals, on the other hand, typically analyze the greens from multiple angles before attempting the putt—and begin to chafe challengers because of what challengers perceive as plodding and indecisiveness.

“You see it play out at the office too,” observes Shelby Futch, a longtime golf entrepreneur who worked with Munro at the Golf Digest Schools, a Palm Beach Gardens, Fla.-based national chain. “The corporate counsel is patient and conforming—making sure every ‘i’ is dotted and every ‘t’ crossed—while the sales guys can’t understand why it takes so long to get a contract through. The counselor is thinking, ‘Here he goes again. He never pays attention to details.’”

The other big indicator of potential conflict, Munro says, is the amount of socializing players are comfortable with. Are they chatty or quiet on the course? Introverts and extroverts are usually a bad match.

“Right away there is an element of distrust,” Munro says. “The introvert is likely to start imagining things about the extrovert that may or may not be true—that they’re superficial or insincere, or not focused on their game. If you’re trying to build a relationship, one of the first things to ask yourself is whether someone is outgoing or private. Then be mindful of how you’re coming across.”

But while you’re shooting sidelong glances at your playing partners, just remember: the experts also warn against knee-jerk judgments.

Munro agrees that analytic types think about what they’re going to do and tend to spend a lot of time planning, while creative types are more “grip-and-rip-it.” However, Alan Fine, a sports psychologist and president of InsideOut Development, a Salt Lake City-based consulting firm that focuses on performance issues, says he’s wary about extrapolating too much. “I’ve taken executives out on a golf course and noticed them become nervous and embarrassed about what people thought, whereas in a different situation they’re just fine,” says Fine, who has worked with professional athletes including Colin Montgomery and Phillip Price. “They believe in their abilities in one arena, but not in the other. It just depends.”

And everyone agrees that it’s important to consider the motivation behind any behavior. Mismatched personalities start out with different basic assumptions. Entrepreneurs and venture capitalists, for example, are codependent and operate in the same spaces. Yet they are prone to misunderstandings because they operate from different psychological premises.

“Venture capitalists play by the rules,” Futch says. “They often don’t know much, if anything, about the industry they’re investing in, so they emphasize trust. ‘Is this guy honest? Is he 100% accountable?’ They tend to make judgments on the integrity of the people they’re dealing with. They’re traditionalists.”

By contrast, entrepreneurs are challengers. They're results-oriented. So if there is no bet, they consider the round just a social occasion and may not see the need to observe the rules as strictly—taking mulligans, rolling over a bad lie in the rough. They want to get through the round and not sweat the small stuff.

”Without the bet, an entrepreneur might even kick a ball back into the fairway and figure it's meaningless, and it really may not say a thing about his character,” Futch says. “If a game is on, the same guy may play 100% by the rules.”

Of course, as with anything, one key to avoiding misperceptions is to establish the ground rules clearly up front, because in the end, all that matters is how people construe signals and “read” each other. To make the most of it, though, you need to pay attention to how you behave and read the signals the other guys are sending.

And anyone can feel comfortable betting on that.

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