



Connection Pros

In the Valley of the Sun, we have well over 250 golf courses. For a golf fanatic like me, this is a very good thing. It allows me the opportunity to play a different course each and every time I play. It also gives me over 250 places to network with others. I personally think golf is the greatest game ever created and I believe it's one of the best places to create deep, long lasting connections with others, too. Here's why:

- The pace and appeal of golf give it the upper hand over other sports. Even though football, tennis, and other sports are important entertainment venues for clients, you have limited time to socialize because of the ongoing nature of the games. With golf, you're talking and playing, not sitting in the stands watching.
- Golf levels the playing field for people in various positions at a company. While there are differences in status and power inside a company, those titles disappear on the golf course. You might be at the bottom of the company ladder, but presidents and CEOs will listen to every word that comes out of your mouth if you can help them putt better.

A good friend of mine is a 25-year-old financial planner. His challenge is that he looks much younger than 25. He was having trouble convincing high-worth individuals to take him seriously until he told them he was a two-handicap. For you non-golfers, that means he's really good! I recommended he talk about golf when meeting and networking with high-worth individuals, to be seen as more of an equal. Once he started using golf as a networking tool, his business took off and he's playing more golf than ever. What could be better than that?

- Golf removes the stuffy formalities present in a business environment. Dozens of books have been written about how to address someone above you on the corporate organization chart. On the golf course, those formalities go out the window. Instead of "Nice to see you again, Ms. Johnson," or "What can I do for you today, Mr. Williamson?," it becomes, "Great shot, Jill," or "Hey Bob, what did you score on that last hole?"

When you golf, you have the opportunity to spend four hours or more with potential customers and friends. You get to share great experiences and talk about them the next time you see them. If you accomplish anything really special while you're playing, your relationships will take a major step forward, because now your business associates and clients will talk about you and your amazing golf feat.

In December 2001, I had my first hole-in-one. It was one of the greatest experiences of my life. I can close my eyes and still see the ball drop in the hole. What's more, I now have really deep connections with the two people I was playing with because of my incredible shot. Every time I see them, it's like seeing old friends. One of the guys was a total stranger before we played.

Golf can also tell you so much about people. By the end of your round, you know more about these people than many of their friends do. You've had the chance to see their real personalities and their potential effects on your business relationships. If they cheat on their scorecards, there's a good chance they'll cheat or lie about their business. If they have an explosive temper on the course, you'll probably see some of that in the boardroom as well. If they continue to complain and whine three hours after a bad shot, I promise you they'll hold a grudge longer than most. Golf course networking can initiate a great relationship or steer you away from a bad connection.

Off the course, if others know you play golf, especially if you play well, you become a member of a powerful club. Golf is one of the most highly respected games and anyone who plays is automatically viewed in a more favorable light by other golfers. A kinship forms that doesn't exist with other kinds of activities. Some people consider those who golf to be more trustworthy and well-connected, giving people who golf a competitive advantage over those who don't. If you don't golf, this might seem a bit egotistical until you see the number of doors golf opens. Then you will begin to understand the power of this game. See you next month.