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by Ronel Nel



Hitting a Hole-in-One

through the Management Fairway

Close to 22% of employees surveyed in 24 countries worldwide indicate that they regard being able to play golf as a stepping stone to getting ahead in management and 15% use golf as a means to mingle with senior people to get ahead in their career.

A recent study by Reuters Ipsos Global @visory found that employees most likely to indicate that they regard golf as such stepping stone are from China (47%), India (46%) South Korea (37%), South Africa (35%), Saudi Arabia (30%), Hungary (29%) and Indonesia (28%), while Canada, Great Britain and the United States all scored 22%.

Employees least likely to believe that the ability to golf is a stepping stone to getting ahead in management are from France (9%), Russia (10%), Brazil (10%), Belgium (10%), Poland (11%) and Sweden (13%), followed by Spain, Mexico and Japan at 14%.

BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India and China) and Asia-Pacific countries (APAC) surveyed have the highest level of agreement that being able to golf is important to one's career in order to get ahead in management (both at 29%), while Latin American countries (13%) are at the bottom of the leader board.

According to the Ipsos study, different attitudes are evident among different types of workers: business owners (31%) and senior executives (29%) are most likely to agree that playing golf helps one to climb the corporate ladder. Those with a high household income (25%) and higher education (25%) are more likely to

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agree with them, compared to those with a lower household income (19%) and education level (18%).

The Ipsos study also indicates that one in seven workers say they use golf as a means to mingle with senior people and get ahead in their career. These employees are most likely to be found in India (37%) followed by China, Indonesia, and Saudi Arabia (each at 33%), followed by those in Turkey (25%), Argentina (23%), Poland (19%), Mexico (17%), South Korea (16%) and South Africa (15%). Workers from Sweden (3%), Japan, Great Britain, France and Belgium (each at 5%), as well as Hungary and Germany (at 6% each), are least likely to use golf as a way to mingle with senior people to advance their career.

Workers in the BRIC (23%) and Middle East/African (22%) countries have a greater incidence of using golf as a chance to mingle with senior executives for their advancement, while G8 countries and European countries are least likely – each at 8%.

Workers who regard golf as a chance to socialise with upper management are more likely to be male (18%), compared to female (13%), under the age of 35 (18%), have a higher level of education (18%), higher household income (17%), be a business owner (26%) and a senior leader (25%).

Drawing the conclusion that golf offers significant benefits to businesspeople – whether for career advancement or social networking – the subsequent benefits to businesses cannot be underestimated.

Turning birdies into eagles

Within a globally uncertain and instable environment, the need has arisen for companies and individuals to become more competitive and one way of achieving such levels is by generating capital.

According to Ronli Greyling's MBA dissertation, *The role of Social Networks formed on the Golf Course is creating Business Value*, social networks form the framework on which social capital can be created.

Golf networks are, in general, highly aspirational and mostly homogenous network types. Due to society placing high value on position in society and participation in elite activities, golf is widely considered to be a means to achieve ambitions, assess possible opportunities or form bonds or friendships that might not otherwise have been forged.

A study by the Hyatt Hotels Corporation found that 93% of executives surveyed believed that playing golf with a business associate was a good way to establish a closer relationship.

In his book *Deals on the Green: Lessons on Business and Golf from America's Top Executives*, journalist David Rynecki refers to golf as an 18-hole character test, adding that "no boardroom can provide the insight into a CEO's nature better than a round of golf can."

Do you think golf is a stepping stone to a management hole-in-one?

Happy Ntshingila, Executive Director: Marketing and Communications of Absa (HN): One should never ascribe the powers of business to golf. They are two different things: the one is for enjoyment (and torture for us amateurs) and the other is for enrichment. We learn in golf that course management and a simple thing like club selection can yield great results and can be principles you can apply in business.

Cecilia Mseteka, Owner, Uniglobe Ikhwezi Travel (CM): Golf is one game that removes all barriers. One gets to spend four-and-a-half or five hours, depending on speed of play, with three other people playing an 18-hole game. If you manage to secure a game of golf with your boss, you get to spend close to five hours on the golf course and maybe another hour on the '19th hole', compared to a quick five or 10 minutes under normal circumstances.

Having said this, one can take advantage of this time to warm up or sell oneself to management. Golf is also a good indicator of a person's character, as you can assess how they behave if things go, or do go, not according to plan. One can thus either make golf a stepping stone to a management hole-in-one or a stone which dents your business handicap into pieces.

Ingrid Diesel, Managing Partner, Ingrid Diesel Consulting & Events (ID): I certainly do believe that golf exposes one to the business world at all levels and could form an important part of the journey that one follows on one's way to a management position. The business/golf environment is just one valuable part of many aspects of a management hole-in-one.

Francois Theron, CEO, Dstv Mobile (FT): I do not believe that being a golfer in an organisation will be a catalyst or stepping stone for promotion. Achieving a management hole-in-one depends on your managerial skills and ability to add value to an organisation.

Gina Read, Owner, Cloud9Golf (GR): Golf is a stepping stone to a management hole-in-one. A round of golf and the discipline involved most certainly can be linked to life and business. Golf as a business tool is highly beneficial: walking five hours with a business associate or future partner allows you to see what kind of personality you are really dealing with. It is a misnomer that business is conducted on the golf course, as it's not. It is usually only conducted after getting to know someone while walking five hours with them, and probably more so at the 19th hole or a formal business meeting at another time.

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Greyling's dissertation lists the following as benefits of golf networking:

Personal benefits

- Improves relationships/friendships
- Creates new business contracts
- Builds personal leadership skills
- Builds personal entrepreneurial skills
- Builds personal management skills
- Influences business performance positively
- Helps with career advancement.

Organisational benefits

- New business deals/opportunities
- Forewarning of potential business opportunities
- Direct ties created with external organisations
- Improved access to key decision makers
- Creation of long-term/strategic business relationships
- Exchange of business critical information
- Positive influence on business performance
- Improved customer offerings through improved service (referrals)
- Increased control over business partnerships
- Direct ties created with governmental/regulatory organisations. □



Cecilia Mseteka, Owner,
Uniglobe Ikhwezi Travel



Happy Ntshingila, Executive
Director, Marketing and
Communications, Absa



Ingrid Diesel, Managing
Partner, Ingrid Diesel
Consulting & Events



Francois Theron, CEO,
Dstv Mobile



Gina Read, Owner,
Cloud9Golf



Patience Stevens, MD,
Tswelopele Productions

Do you think men and women view the relationship between golf and business differently?

Happy Ntshingila: It depends who the woman is. Most wives think golf takes too long and most men think golf days are just too few and too short!

Cecilia Mseteka: I do not think men and women view the relationship between golf and business differently because golf is a game that can be played by both sexes. Although women have different tees from the men, it does not deter them from playing together. In fact, this levels the playing field as men are stronger than women, hence the tees for the women that are moved forward from the men's tees. Golf is the only game that people of all ages and gender can play together, regardless of the levels of knowledge of the game.

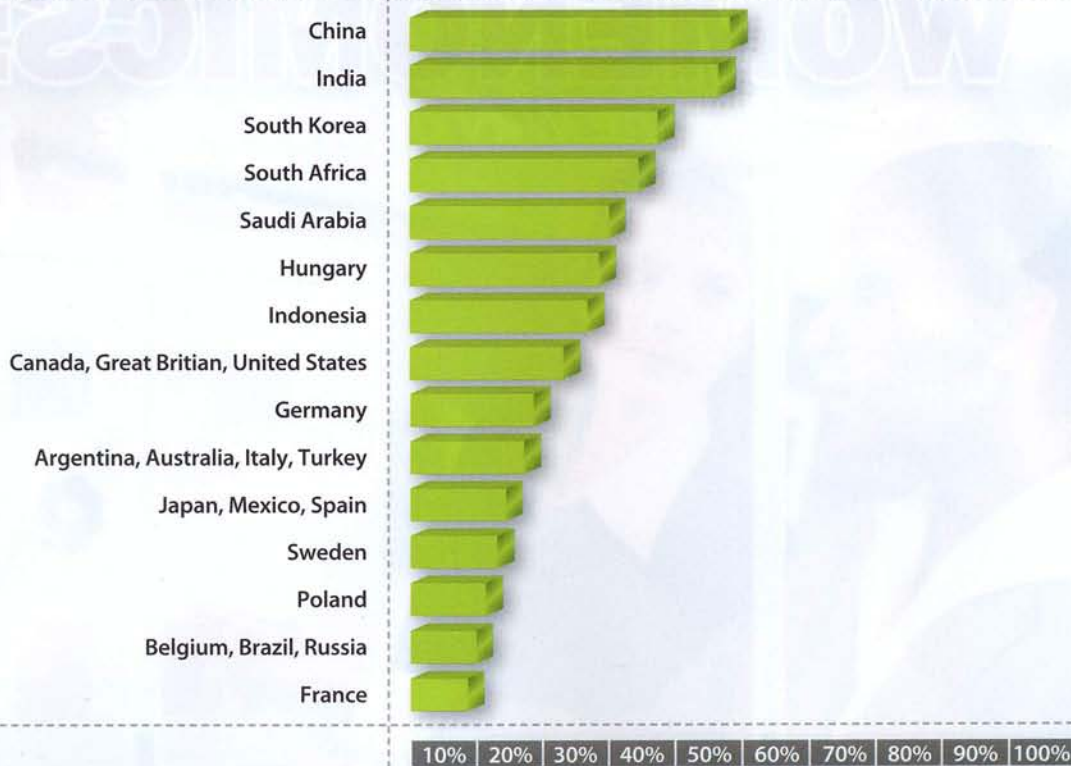
Ingrid Diesel: Businesswomen in golf is still a growing trend, whilst businessmen in golf has been around for many years. The 'old school' thought that men's golf is associated with business still exists, but this is fast becoming a game where businesswomen are as comfortable in this environment as their fellow

businessmen. Mixed golf in corporate golf days is very common today, and I have not experienced any difference in the networking and discussions that take place in this corporate/golf environment.

Francois Theron: Fewer businesswomen play golf and as such I believe they do view the relationship between golf and business differently. They may view golf more as a sport for men.

Gina Read: I do not believe women view the relationship between golf and business differently at management level. At a lower level, however, I don't believe women fully understand the true benefits of networking through golf. Men have successfully taken the 'guilt' out of playing golf and networking, whereas women still feel the need to justify it as a true networking tool and often put in leave, even when playing in a women's golf day to network. The intimidation factor for businesswomen at novice level is a real factor when wanting to use golf as networking tool as well.

Percentage of respondents in the Reuters Ipsos Survey who regard golf as a stepping stone to get ahead in management



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How has golf benefited you as business person?

Happy Ntshingila: I guess it's the contacts you make on the course that sometimes yield benefits and open some doors.

Cecilia Mseteka: Golf has been a great networking platform for me. I have been able to meet people, gain their trust and managed to gain accounts and referrals from there. I have also managed to grow my golfer database for all the golf packages my business offers. Business is about trust and golf is one area where this is realised: one is able to judge a character of a person and decide whether one wants to do business with you or not.

Ingrid Diesel: Firstly, in my business life – which is the golf business – I have been able to build an incredible network of business people from all spheres. As I have made an important career change during the past two years (after 18 years as the CEO of the Fancourt Resort), this network has been an enormous asset, with my new business taking off rather successfully in a short space of time.

Because golf is a social game, the sport enabled my business relationships to include a social aspect to them (besides building business contacts) and I have formed wonderful friendships over the years.

Francois Theron: Golf has benefited me tremendously as a business person over many years and in many countries. It creates an environment and opportunity to interact with a person or group of people (in the form of a four-ball), on a more personal basis and in a fun/relaxed environment. Golf helps to build good and lasting relationships – most of the people I have done business with and played golf with over the years have remained good friends to this day.

Gina Read: As a golf event management, marketing and golf travel company, playing golf and understanding a golfer and corporate company's needs and objectives, assists us in offering an event meeting our clients' objectives. We take the hassle away so our clients can focus on their clients and optimise networking through golf.