



## For a Good Time, Play the Back Nine

By Debbie Waitkus, Golf for Cause

“Checking in for the Waitkus group.”

“So, you’re just playing nine holes today? You’ll have to come back again so that you can play 18 - the back nine is really something.”  
“Do you suppose we could go off on ten and play the back nine today?”  
“Check with the starter. He controls all that.”



It was late afternoon. With the exception of a young couple on the driving range, the course was deserted. Our chances of playing the back nine looked great. With a bounce in his step, my husband approached the starter for his blessing. We were on vacation in Ontario, Canada visiting friends and family, clear skies, golfing everyday. Like the shirt says, *“Life is good!”*

After a brief discussion with the starter, an older gentleman with a lot invested in being the keeper of protocol (you know the type), he drove off to check the status on the 10<sup>th</sup> tee. He returned, directing us to hole number one. A single golfer was supposedly making the turn. We exchanged glances of disbelief and disappointment. “Are you sure?” What side of the bed did he get up on?? Being relegated to the lesser of the nine holes, we were officially off on the wrong foot. We were having an “interesting” golf day and we had yet to tee off. Our expectations for a great experience had been

dashed. We spent much of our round peering at the holes on the back nine, looking for signs of human life – golfers or maintenance crew. Just be amazed.

Even on vacation, we can’t get away from the importance of customer service and a good front line staff. First impressions are key to a company’s success. The upbeat person answering the phone, the attentive waiter, and the grumpy starter.

In this case, knowing that the back nine was better than the front, and believing that the starter could have accommodated us with ease, the golf course missed out on the additional revenue we would have spent at the 19<sup>th</sup> hole. In addition, the course enjoyed the brunt of a few jokes and stories as we continue to share our golf experience with others. With the multitude of golf course choices in the area, I doubt we’ll return – even for the supposedly amazing back nine.

Another lesson in customer service – Taboo. We played our next round at Taboo, Mike Weir’s home course in Gravenhurst, Ontario. Now this is an incredibly beautiful course! Dense woods, granite outcroppings, streams of water, wildlife. Don’t pull out your driver without checking the GPS first. Beauty, challenge and interest.

While standing over a putt on the 3<sup>rd</sup> green, the beverage cart rolled in. “Hi! Would you like anything?” “Would you please fill our cups with ice and wait until we’re done putting?” Unfortunately, my hint of protocol didn’t go anywhere. Her poor timing

continued throughout our round. “Hi! Would you like anything?” “I’d like you to get a clue,” I thought to myself. I wanted to putt without someone talking to me. I didn’t want to coach the cart girl how to be respectful and to refill the ice and be ready with our routine order. Certainly not twice. With a pricey green fee and a beautiful golf property, our on-course customer service expectations were higher. “Taboo” took on a whole new meaning. After the round I spoke with the golf staff in the clubhouse about their training opportunity. I’m sure she’d pull down more tips. And wouldn’t it be better for a guest to miss a putt and not use the cart girl as a scapegoat?

Not to be denied, we ventured to Bigwin Island, near Bracebridge, Ontario on the Lake of Bays. We boarded a ferry, golf clubs in toe, to get to the course. As the name suggests, it truly is on an island. As we approached the shore, I conjured up images of Fantasy Island. “Boss, da plane, da plane!” “Places everybody!” We were greeted by several staff members guiding us to the clubhouse, inquiring if we had visited previously. We felt like we were checking into a 5-star resort. The tone was set, the smiles back on our faces. Regardless of how we might strike the ball today, this was going to be a fun day of golf.

Managing the customer’s expectations is paramount for quality customer service. A problem can be resolved. Yet, the customer’s feelings about the situation often remain. In the first scenario above, we wanted to play nine holes of golf. And that’s exactly what we did. Nonetheless, we felt disappointed that we weren’t able to play the back nine and the disappointment lingered as a result of our interactions with the golf course personnel.

What impression does your front line set for your customers? Their first point of contact

is often with the lowest paid employee. Does he or she have the proper training and skills to be your ambassador? Put on your customer’s shoes and call your office, walk in the front door, make a purchase. What’s your first impression? How was your experience? Are you in the fairway - on the back nine perchance? Or are your chipping out of the rough?

*Turn Golf into Gold.™*

*Debbie Waitkus a golf consultant, speaker and trainer, is the owner and founder of Golf for Cause, LLC. She speaks to corporate groups and stages creative golf programs, especially for women, to help them leverage golf for business at any skill level. “Turn golf into gold.”™ Debbie can be reached at [dwaitkus@golfforcause.com](mailto:dwaitkus@golfforcause.com) or 602/840-0607.*