



Just Say No

There we were, four women on tee at the 10th hole. After leaving the tee, we noticed the ranger slowly inching forward in his cart. He stayed in the background, watching as we hit our approach shots into the green.

The “eyes” were watching. How many times have you wondered, is the ranger going to move right along or is he going to come over and enlighten us on some aspect of golf course etiquette? It’s never an easy conversation. The golf course staff tries to keep things moving and keep us mindful of golf course maintenance. And we, the paying customer, walk through the discomfort of being told that we’re not perfect. In fact, it’s often more of a “confrontation” than a conversation, with defensive posturing and negative thoughts interfering with swing thoughts for at least three more holes.

In any event, the ranger passed by without saying a word. Just a wave. Yet, as we approached the green on 11, he was back. “I don’t want to be a thorn in anyone’s side, but there are a couple of open holes ahead of you. Could you please pick up the pace a bit?” Job well done. Great choice of words and delivered warmly. (Now before you jump on the bandwagon that women are slow on the golf course, allow me to do some “defensive posturing.”) We were playing a practice round for a sectional golf tournament (for the Executive Women’s Golf Association) scheduled to take place at that course the following weekend. We let him know that we were taking extra time to chart the course and that we’d be happy to pick up the pace. No harm, no foul, all egos intact. We didn’t see him again.

After the round, we stopped in the clubhouse (to shop and) to adjust our tee time for the next practice round. The gentleman behind the counter informed us that if we planned to play there again that we would need to play a lot faster. There were “way too many complaints” from the groups behind us. Now here was someone that seemed to take pleasure at being a thorn in our side. His tone did not convey, “women welcome here” nor “thank you for coming out to play today and spending money in our pro shop, too!” I exchanged glances with one of my teammates. I was shocked at the bedside manner. After our visit with the ranger on the course, we thought our pace of play had become a non-issue. Furthermore, our husbands were playing behind us. And, clearly they hadn’t complained. We were anxious to find out if the foursome behind them had been waiting

and, if so, how often. I'll give you one guess as to the major topic of conversation at our dinner that evening.

We returned to the course the following morning to play another practice round. Upon checking in, I recognized the gentleman behind the counter as the ranger from the previous day. I informed him that we were taken aback with our post-round experience in the clubhouse. It was a dichotomy from our conversation with the ranger while out on the course.

He expressed both disappointment and concern. From his perspective, he was appreciative that we quickened our pace of play, eliminating any issue of slow play. He was amazed that the attendant said something negative to us. If anything, he hoped the attendant would have thanked us for responding so effectively. We certainly didn't need a lecture.

Our discussion drifted to the efforts they have taken to be a woman-friendly facility and the need for on-going training. He apologized and was truly appreciative of the feedback, without which he wouldn't be able to prevent the situation from repeating.

Let's switch scenes from the golf course to the grocery store. Last week I had the pleasure of buying fresh strawberries that turned out to be not so fresh. The top layer of berries looked great. The treasures hidden below begged for a return trip to the market.

I approached the customer service desk with the strawberries and my receipt. I began to tell the woman that I was returning the berries, she asked me, "Are they moldy?" Without even taking them out of the bag and looking at them, she tossed them into a trash container. "You're not the first." Now that's reassuring. No apology. No invitation to exchange the berries or to have the produce manager come over to Customer Service to reassure me that this is an unusual occurrence at their store. She simply handed me a refund.

Now I'm wondering, if I'm "not the first" then why are they still selling bad strawberries? I told her that I didn't think it was right to continue selling the strawberries that were clearly bad. Another customer service representative chimed in, "Wasn't Cheryl picking through the berries this morning, weeding out the bad ones and repackaging them?" Now there's a vision! Was Cheryl wearing plastic gloves? Were the strawberries in my container, even if they were all good, previously shacking up with moldy berries? "I'm not sure that anyone has good strawberries this week." And this is customer service? Thank you. From now on, I'll buy my produce elsewhere.

As business people, we work very hard to get people in the door. We have a product or service ready for sale. We spend money and energy on marketing materials and advertising. Training personnel to provide a consistent level of customer service, especially those on the front line with direct contact with the customer (in person, on the phone, in writing) is crucial. These employees are in a position to keep customers or to

send them away. And remember, these customers have friends and family, each with two ears to listen to a positive experience or to a negative one.

Yes, there are golf courses that are welcoming to women golfers and other markets with fresh strawberries. The customer has choices. So pick up your driver. Tee up the ball and take a swing. After impact, look at your results. Learn anything? What feedback can you incorporate into the next swing to improve your results or to maintain consistency? Follow through. Drive your prospects and customers in the door; don't drive them away. *Turn Golf into Gold.*TM

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