



The Numbers Are In

Do you remember the last time you were on an airplane waiting for it to board, coveting that vacant seat beside you? As the passengers walked down the aisle toward you, did you secretly hope one would sit next to you rather than another? Did you make eye contact? Did you place reading material or something else on the seat to dissuade others from sitting next to you?

Uncomfortable, isn't it? I walked through this scenario during the Sunriver Women's Golf Forum, a biennial think tank of women leaders from all segments of the golf industry who meet to discuss issues of current relevance facing the game of golf. Our topic for discussion this past September was Diversity. We were shown pictures of people and asked to rate them according to how we felt about sitting next to them for the flight. I found myself staring at a picture of an ethnic-looking woman with a scowl on her face. She appeared to be young and I thought she might even be a college student. I decided that she simply didn't photograph well and that I would be happy to sit with her. Others in my group nixed her from the flight. Turns out that she's a physician with a very impressive history. Eye opening. All this was to hit home the fact that we make decisions everyday, both personally and professionally, in which issues of diversity enter the picture.

Now unless you've been walking around with your head in the sand, then you know it's pretty clear that the demographics in the United States are changing. According to the 2000 US Census, of the 275 million Americans, 71 percent are White with the balance being Latino, African American, Asian American, and others. Let's fast forward to the year 2040. The US Census predicts that of the 390 million Americans only 56 percent will be White. The ramifications on purchasing power, workforce, voting trends, and other areas are quite significant.

Yesterday I read two articles in the *Arizona Republic* with great interest. One article appeared on the first page of the Sports section, "America's pastime now experiencing changes *grandes*." The second was on the front page, "Minority numbers on rise at colleges." And there's an article in today's paper, "Latino population growth show no signs of slowing." (The Sunriver Diversity program clearly piqued my interest and attention.)

So what does this mean when we look at the golf industry? Recent history includes such things as 9/11, a tough economy, an increase in the number of new golf courses, and, not surprisingly, a reduction in average rounds of golf per course. Taking into consideration

the above demographic information, we have to ask: who are the customers and who will be our customers next year, or 5, 10, 20 years from now?

Tapping insight from the Women's Golf Forum, as we look at the various "customers" (and potential customers) in the world of golf, we have more than just men and women, old and young, rich and poor, rural and urban, and a variety of ethnicities. We have a spectrum of player ability levels from new players to skilled players. We have athletic players and players who are all thumbs. We also have a variety of behavior styles and learning styles. Effectively serving all these unique faces can be quite the challenge.

It's a given that those of us in the golf industry want to grow the game. And the face of the golfing customer is changing and will continue to change. The numbers paint the picture. Yet "change" can be a tough word in the context of golf. Golf, after all, is a game rich in tradition. We have a dress code, etiquette, "Rules," and segregated golf clubs. And when was the last time that you changed putters or your pre-shot routine? Change doesn't come easily. We're still working hard on "forward tees."

Hold that thought and let's jump to the above-mentioned article about the increase in minority students at college campuses. The student body at Arizona's two largest universities has minority populations that have grown in recent years. Arizona State University (ASU in Tempe) is at 22% and the University of Arizona (Tucson) is at 25.9 percent. Both schools lag the state's minority population, which according to the Census Bureau, was approximately 38 percent in 2002.

Interestingly, according to columnist William Hermann, ASU's minority student population increased by 10.4 percent this fall as a result of an increased recruitment effort. ASU actually went out and recruited minority students. They made a commitment and focused on a segment of the market. With meaningful programs in place to serve this targeted population, they sought out these students and showed them the benefit to enrolling at ASU. The result... 1,200 new minority students. The school is to be commended for recognizing the changing marketplace and positioning itself accordingly.

There's a lesson here for all of us. In our businesses, what are we doing to ride or get ahead of the wave of our changing demographics? Who are we hiring? Who are we servicing? What programs are we designing, implementing, and promoting? At a personal level, let's go back out to the golf course for a round of golf. Next time you're matched up with a single, think about the airplane exercise. Are you accepting, tolerant, or dismissive of your new playing partner? What if her skill is different from your own - better, worse? What if he's older, younger, a newer golfer? Together we can make a difference one golfer at a time to share this game we love and to help each other "turn golf into gold."TM

Debbie Waitkus is a business golf consultant and speaker. She works with organizations and individuals, especially women, to demystify the game and "turn golf into gold."TM Debbie can be reached at 602/840-0607 or dwaitkus@golfforcause.com.

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