



The Parking Lot Blues



They were yelling at the top of their voices out in the parking lot. “They’re at it again,” one of my co-workers reported. New to the company, this was my first glimpse at passionate disagreement between the owner and the number one salesperson. What kind of environment had I gotten myself into?!

Tom, the top sales guy, had been with the company for more than ten years. His numbers were tremendous. When evaluating a deal, he and the owner would typically arrive at the same answer. Yet Tom’s approach and consideration factors were completely different from the owner’s. With a handful of new sales people, myself included, the owner, Gary, had been meticulously outlining protocol. Tom had become the thorn in Gary’s side because he consistently bucked the system. Gary constantly made an example of out Tom, in a negative light. This is how we shouldn’t do it and why. Yet, Tom managed to successfully close deals, generating significant revenue to the bottom line. No surprise that Gary eventually left the company and went out on his own.

Last summer I traveled to the New York City area to participate in an executive golf school. During the program, we looked at our behavioral strengths and tendencies and learned how they are revealed in our professional lives as well as our golf games. In our group, we had five decision makers, four process people, and one salesperson, me. We projected that if we were a group working together on a project, that my ideas would most likely be dismissed. They’d be dismissed not because my ideas were wrong, but rather because I would be out-voted. The others, with different behavioral styles, would have a hard time seeing my perspective. After being shut down a number of times, it would only stand to reason that I might stop coming to the project meetings. What a shame, we’re all on the same team, trying to accomplish the same objective.

Using golf as a metaphor, I quickly remembered Gary and Tom. The process/analytical person and the presenter/sales person – two styles, diametrically opposed. I imagine that while playing a round of golf, Gary hits his ball to the right of the green, under a tree with a low canopy. To make matters worse, there’s a sand trap between the tree and the green. The low tree branches will definitely limit Gary’s chances to pitch the ball near the flagstick, let alone onto the green. While Gary is making his club selection at the cart, Tom walks up to Gary’s ball, bends down and moves Gary’s ball so that he has an easier shot. “We’re not at the Masters, give yourself a good shot.” Not wanting to lose his outward composure in front of the twosome playing with he and Tom, Gary is fuming inside. That’s cheating – it’s against the rules! How dare he! Stewing over Tom’s actions, Gary tightens his grip and proceeds to hit the ball right into the sand trap.

Has this happened to you? During a round of golf, you move your ball out of a divot, as you always do, and proceed to hit your next shot from there. No harm, no foul. Your playing partner, however, knows that taking the ball out of the divot is against the rules. She spends the rest of the hole and the next several holes debating whether or not to say anything. Realizing that she seems distracted about something, you ask her if she's ok. She proceeds to confront you about taking your ball out of the divot. Feeling a bit ignorant, you admit that you had no idea that you weren't allowed to move your ball. She was upset about a rules violation while you were going along your merry way not even noticing that she was upset. You were both playing the same game together with very different perspectives. Can you imagine if she was a potential client and you'd never discovered that she was harboring annoyance about the way you play golf? What are the odds that you'd win her business?

As for Gary and Tom, here were two guys, both doing the same thing, but performing the evaluation process in totally different ways. Each was so intent that his way was the right way that they had to part ways, after a few choice words in the parking lot, of course. How often do we dismiss someone else's abilities, thoughts, or achievements because they set about things differently than we do? The lesson of course, is to realize that we all come from different angles with something of value to contribute. Take a look beyond our own perceptions of right and wrong.

According to Mark McCormick, author of *"What They Don't Teach You at Harvard Business School"* and Chairman of IMG, "you can tell more about how a person will react in a business situation from one round of golf than in a hundred hours of meetings." Just don't forget that while you're evaluating your playing partners, they, in turn, are evaluating you!

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