

Taking it to the Greens

Just as women have moved into corner offices, they're now hitting the green. Knowing what the sport has to offer professionally, women are driving their way into this boy's club. Call it breaking the green ceiling. **By Rebecca Michuda**



HOLE 16 AT COG HILL. PHOTO BY JOANN DOST.

As a young associate at a large law firm, Jennifer Kenedy saw men at her firm frequently attending golf outings and events where they had access to potential clients. "That's what tipped it for me," says Jennifer, a partner at Locke Lord Bissel & Liddell LLP. "I knew marketing was a huge part of my job and that [golf] would be an advantage as a woman lawyer." Wanting to learn for both fun and business, Jennifer, 41, took up golf about 12 years ago. "When you're in a profession like mine, there's very limited free time. You have to use your free time in a way that you get a better return for your investment."

When business decisions are being made on the course – and women aren't there to participate – it can put them at a disadvantage. "There aren't a lot of men making legal assignments at 'spa days,'" Jennifer explains. "They're great if you're trying to attract business for women decision makers, but if the decision makers are men, you have to go where the men are. They're on golf course, not at the spa."

Getting Personal

Having grown up with golf, Katherine Jemsek, president of Cog Hill Golf and Country Club in Lemont, understands what the game can offer. Her grandfather, Joe Jemsek, bought the club from the Cog brothers in the 1950s. Katherine, 35, worked in the pro shop in college and has climbed the ladder to a top position. Although she played off and on as a teenager, it wasn't until about five years ago that she took up the sport again. "When you spend four hours with someone out on the golf course, you get to evaluate that person," Katherine says. "When you talk business, you get to explore their mind, but when you get them on a golf course, you get character."

Seeing the way people react in the game and how they handle stress can say a lot about them. Lynn Keel, CFO of The Marketing Store Worldwide, remembers she could only hit the ball two feet when she started seven years ago. Now enjoying it tremendously, Lynn has competed in ProAm championships with top

female LPGA golfers. "You're trying to get your colleagues and clients to get to know each other better," she says. "Overall, that enhances the relationship, which is critical in business. You're playing for about four and half hours, and essentially you're talking about anything that your client wants to talk about. It's a nice, relaxing atmosphere," Lynn explains. "At the end of the day you sit down for a drink, and you may mutually bring up business. Is the deal cut on the course? In a way it wasn't, but it a way it was. It's far more subtle than people think."

Maggie Lapcewich, 43, may not be willing to share her handicap, but the president of National Accounts for Diageo discovered she had more skill than she first realized when she started playing seriously about five years ago. "Golf benefits building relationships," Maggie says. "It's a good time to simply get to know people better, which helps you more off the course."



JENNIFER KENEDY



MAGGIE LAPCEWICH

Unequal Playing Fields

But it can be intimidating taking your first swing. Although more business-women are taking it up, the majority of golfers are men, which can make the game unequal on some levels.

Jennifer Kenedy, who plays about once a week during the season, has noticed some discrimination at the clubs. There are those that don't allow women golfers to tee off during prime tee times. Instead, women must wait until later in the afternoon to play, whether they're paying members or not. "They assume we're not very good and are going to hold everybody up," Jennifer says. "Maybe the economy will help that. Maybe country clubs will be so eager to attract new members that they'll lighten some of these rules, so women who can afford to be members will join."

It's also typical for the golf ranger at the club to blame women for back-ups on the course. Thinking women are slow players, rangers might assume the foursome of women at hole 12 is the delay, whether or not that's the case. "I'm paying the same rate, so I deserve the same service," Lynn Keel says. "That's where women need to speak up just like they would in any other situation."

Swing Intimidation Away

It takes time to feel comfortable playing with other people, having confidence or feeling like you belong on the course too. "Walking into a boardroom with only five or 10 percent being women can be just as intimidating as walking onto the golf course with the same odds," Katherine Jemsek says.

Both Maggie Lapcewich and Jennifer Kenedy suggest initially learning from someone you know. Jennifer's husband and father are avid golfers, so she'd tag along in the beginning to get a feel for the game. But taking lessons and joining groups is the best way to hone your skills and conquer the etiquette. Katherine recommends the No Embarrassment Golf School at Cog Hill, designed for adults who want to take up golf. Organizations such as The Fairway Network (TFN) are for professional women of all golf skill levels looking to build their golf game while creating business opportunities and friendships. With leagues, events and charity outings, participants can gain the experience they need to feel comfortable on the green with no judgments. Jennifer joined TFN seven years ago to learn how to be a good enough golfer to take out clients; today, she's chair of their Board of Directors. Lynn is a member of the Executive Women's Golf Association (EWGA), which she enjoys and recommends. Kohler Golf Academy in Wisconsin has a beautiful course, offers lessons to all skill levels and caters to women.

Maggie, who plays about 20 rounds a golf throughout the year, suggests that even if you're uninterested in the sport or uncomfortable with the idea of playing with other people, you can still be in on the business aspect with clients. "You can walk the course with them," Maggie says. "This fosters positive outcomes, which might inspire you to play the game."

"People can try to intimidate you in any situation, whether in golf or life," Lynn says. "Be strong, know what you want to accomplish and in the end you'll be fine. Not everyone can be a LPGA star, but being a solid recreational golfer is within the reach of any woman." ■



LYNN KEEL



WHISTLING STRAIGHTS HOLE 7 AT KOHLER GOLF ACADEMY