

Retention through Coaching

Are golfer improvement programs a key component of your club or facility's membership and golfer offering? If not, it is time to conduct a full review and redevelopment of the programs you offer and ensure they are fully integrated into your facility's activities.

Golf clubs and facilities have an obligation to provide services and programs to enhance a golfer's experience, and effective improvement programs are considered the foundation for enhancing golfer enjoyment.

The Role of Improvement Programs

The first step in the development of Golfer Improvement Programs is to fully understand the link between improvement and retention.

An improving golfer plays more often, engages with club events more often, spends more on equipment, spends more on food and beverage, recommends the club and the sport of golf to their friends and family, and most importantly is retained long-term by both the sport and your club.

At golf clubs all around the world, improvement programs have shown that they not only lead to increased golfer enjoyment, but are also an excellent engagement opportunity to enhance customer understanding; a key factor in golfer retention. Golf clubs and facilities that are dedicated to providing structured coaching and equipment evaluation programs through PGA Professionals or other accredited individuals are more likely to attract and retain golfers.

Aside from leading to increased long-term retention, survey information gathered by golfer retention specialists Retail Tribe found that golfers who regularly undertake coaching play 20% more rounds, spend 65% more on food and beverage and spend 79% more in the Pro-Shop, all metrics that lead to increased facility success. Ignoring the importance of golf coaching programs for the overall health of the golf club leads to increased attrition of golfers as members and green-fee players, lower spend per round and lower overall yield.

In addition to your own understanding in the management, administration and golf operations activities at the club or facility, it is also fundamental to the success of your improvement programs that your members and golfers are fully aware of the importance and role of these programs in relation to their golf. It is important that you communicate regularly to your members about the effectiveness of coaching for improving both their performance and enjoyment in the sport, and it is vital that you promote the skills, experience and expertise of your resident PGA Professionals as professional golf coaches. For the benefit of the long-term success of both the facility and your golfers, using club communication platforms to facilitate strong awareness of the club's golf improvement programs and services will benefit everyone.

Your Current Programs

After gaining an understanding of the importance of improvement programs in golfer retention, it is then paramount to conduct a review of your current program offerings in this vital area:

1. Do you have your resident PGA Professional/s in roles that allow them the time and incentives to provide a range of golfer improvement programs?
2. If you do not have a resident PGA Professional, have you set up systems to access a PGA Professional at another facility?
3. Do you offer new golfers/members access to introductory improvement programs as a component of club membership?
4. When promoting the facility, do you make the wider community aware that improvement and enjoyment are key golf club philosophies and the club will support new golfers and members on their golfing journey?
5. Do you ensure that at-risk golfers are directly connected with improvement programs to re-ignite their passion and enjoyment with the sport?
6. Do you have formal golfer care-groups in place to ensure at-risk golfers are attended to?
7. Do you ensure the club/facility offers a range of improvement programs, ensuring that golfers have choice in how they engage with the improvement process?
8. Are your current golfers/members fully aware of the range of improvement programs available to them?
9. Are your club-fitting and golf equipment retail services in the Pro-Shop linked to golfer improvement, ensuring an integrated approach is undertaken for golfer enjoyment?
10. Do you directly monitor the success of improvement programs in relation to golfer engagement and retention?

If your answer as a facility to any of the above questions is no, then it is appropriate to address the gap by implementing a new club program, system or procedure in the area of golfer improvement programs.

An alternative method of conducting the review of your improvement programs is to implement a SWOT analysis of your golfer development programs, with the following providing an example and a general guide:

Example SWOT Analysis:

Strengths	Weaknesses
<p>We have a strong understanding of the importance of golf coaching programs</p> <p>We have a great team of PGA Professionals</p> <p>We currently offer a member clinics</p> <p>We have quality coaching facilities</p>	<p>Management feels there is currently no link between coaching programs and golfer retention</p> <p>The operational and administrative duties undertaken by our PGA Professionals limits available coaching time</p> <p>There are no systems in place to track the links between coaching programs, golfer retention, engagement, satisfaction, spend per member, etc.</p> <p>There is limited messaging and marketing relating to our current programs and attracting new golfers</p>

Opportunities

Implement a structured and comprehensive golfer retention plan

Create a stronger strategic link between management and PGA Professionals in relating to golfer improvement programs

Redevelop PGA Professional roles to provide incentives for creating new golfers and retaining existing golfers through improvement programs

Learn more about our current golfers

Implement a system to track the results of improvement programs

Expand our efforts to attract new golfers

Implement national participation programs to expand our offerings

Threats

Inconsistent messaging from staff in relation to the role and importance of improvement programs

PGA Professionals not being invested in generating new golfers

Lack of effective communication with golfers undertaking improvement programs

Lack of planning in relation to official strategies to turn occasional golfers into avid golfers

Lack of overall strategic and operational synergies between Management, PGA Professionals and other staff in relation to golfer improvement programs

Improvement and Enjoyment

The most fundamental objective of golfer improvement programs is that they must focus on enhancing a golfer's enjoyment of the sport.

A golfer who is not enjoying the sport is an at-risk golfer – at-risk of playing less often and at-risk of giving up the sport altogether. While improvement is also obviously an objective of coaching programs, it is ultimately the process of improvement, or the learning or enhancement of a skill that promotes enjoyment of the sport and the value that golfers place in time and investment as a golfer.

Coaching programs that focus on the enhancement of enjoyment require an understanding of your golfers. You need to develop an understanding an individual's main motivation for playing the sport, therefore allowing you to tailor programs to meet the needs of individual golfers.

New Golfer Programs

To attract, engage and retain new golfers it is important to implement new golfer programs that develop the simple skills to commence their enjoyment of the sport. Focus on fun and informative programs that are customised to the needs of the individuals. Too many programs follow a general prescription and focus on factors such as etiquette, rules, dress code over the simple swing basics that get people going with enjoyment of the sport.

Too many programs also imply that golf is a difficult, technical sport that requires a specific skill level, handicap level or knowledge of rules before a person will become a "good golfer" and start enjoying the sport. Is this what people want, or is this what the club wants? Find out and then focus on what people want and you will discover that the vast majority want to get going with playing the sport for

enjoyment and the motivation for enjoyment varies from person to person. With regard new golfer programs, concentrate on “good golfers” being defined as those that are engaging and enjoying the sport.

Lapsed Golfers

Consider the implementation of a lapsed golfer program, using the positive strategies of coaching programs and accompanied play to learn more about those who have transitioned from avid golfers to occasional golfers and then become former golfers.

Make direct contact with lapsed golfers and invite them to engage with a customised improvement program, with the objective of enhancing their enjoyment of the sport. Alternatively (or in addition to), invite “former golfers” to nine holes of accompanied play with your resident PGA Professional, with the objective of finding learning more about them and the reasons they are no longer an avid golfer. This will provide your PGA Professional with the information that facilitates a customised program to return them to the sport, for the benefit of everyone.

Equipment Assistance

Equipment advice is a key component of coaching programs that focus on the enhancement of a golfer’s enjoyment of the sport.

Using the correct equipment is a key component in the enjoyment of golf. From correctly fitted clubs and balls through to the appropriate footwear, the right equipment improves performance and enjoyment. Best practice is for improvement programs and equipment assistance to be integrated into one offering, with the golfer’s enjoyment of the sport again being the primary priority.

The most effective coaching and programs will seamlessly make equipment advice part of the improvement and enjoyment process, with the best interests, and improvement and enjoyment at the centre of all equipment guidance.

Golfer Care Groups

While they have unofficially been in place for many years at golf clubs and facilities that provide best practice coaching and retention programs, official and structured Golfer Care Groups are a relatively new strategy implemented by golf clubs around the world to make a significant positive difference in the retention of golfers to the sport. It is now widely accepted within the golf industry that correctly implemented Golfer Care Groups are effective in moving at-risk golfers to the category of regular, avid golfers.

Care groups are a simple strategy, where the resident PGA Professionals are assigned a specific number of at-risk golfers, with the objective of managing these individuals back to being keen, regular and engaged golfers. It is also important to note that the strategy centres on the premise that it is simpler, more effective and more efficient to implement Golfer Care Groups with at-risk golfers than allow these people to become lapsed golfers, where the risk of never returning to the sport increases.

Golfer Care Groups require the following steps at your facility:

- Ensure your PGA Professional's role incorporates and incentivises them for managing at-risk golfers.
- Define the criteria of an at-risk golfer by measuring your golfers' engagement with the sport in areas relating to frequency of play, engagement with events, frequency of coaching and other.
- Measure the criterion that defines an "at-risk golfer" for all members/golfers at your facility.
- Determine the at-risk golfers at your club or facility.
- Provide your PGA Professional with the responsibility for following these steps with at-risk golfers:
 1. Make contact with at-risk and invite them to 9-holes of accompanied play or similar.
 2. Learn as much as possible about the at-risk golfer and their engagement, equipment, experience and enjoyment with golf.
 3. Develop an individualised plan to assist the at-risk golfer with improving their engagement and enjoyment of the sport relating to coaching programs, equipment guidance, event entries, introduction to other golfers or other factors that will assist.
 4. Monitor and regularly engage with at-risk golfers through the implementation of the individualised plan.
 5. Measure the golfer's engagement, equipment, experience and enjoyment with golf.

Summary

In summary, golf clubs and facilities have a responsibility to introduce people to the sport in a fun and engaging manner, while also promoting enjoyment of the sport amongst existing golfers. Golf coaching programs have a key role to play in both of these areas and it is important that the facility implements a comprehensive strategy relating to each of the following areas:

- Review your club's current coaching and improvement programs
- Ensure effective golf coaching programs are a key component of the club's strategic plan
- Ensure that all members and golfers are aware of the coaching programs and the expertise available through PGA Professionals
- Ensure that the wider community (non-golfers) are aware of your club's commitment to making improvement programs part of a new golfer's journey in the sport
- Ensure specific programs are in place for new golfers, lapsed golfers and at-risk golfers
- Ensure equipment guidance and advice is part of the coaching program strategy