

# THE RECORDER

## Top 10 Golf Tips (That Can Also Help Lawyers Become Better Colleagues)

**B**efore the war in the late 1930s, my grandfather was an amateur-turned-professional golfer in San Francisco. It seemed only natural when my father started me swinging a golf club around the age of 10. At the time, golf was not the sport it is today, especially for the younger age group. That I was a girl playing a sport dominated by older men did not bother me at all.

I felt equally at ease when I chose a profession historically populated by men. I am happy to report many things have changed in both the golf and the legal world since then, and I have a place in both areas in the 21st century.

Joining a new law firm may be a daunting experience. Will you fit in? Will people like you? Will you like them? I recall distinctly every detail about my first day at McManis Faulkner 15 years ago, down to the shoes I wore. Some relationships formed easily, some took more time, but eventually I found my own path and place.

To succeed at anything, you need to put in time and practice. Golf and the practice of law are no exceptions. Ironically, when I started working as

a lawyer, I had little to no time for golf, and I took a 10-year leave of absence from the game. In 2012, I received a new set of clubs and re-connected with golf all over again. Spending time thinking on the golf course, it became clear to me there are several simple lessons new lawyers may learn from golf.

**1. Keep your head down.** When starting at a new firm or office, keep your head down and do not get mixed up with things that distract, such as office gossip or politics. Get in early, work hard, stay late and focus.

**2. Follow through and do not hesitate.** Whenever you are assigned a task, follow through with the assigned task. All too often it is easy to get distracted with other projects and feel consumed. Take one project at a time and always follow through with the task you are given, no matter the size.

**3. Appearance matters.** One of the things I enjoy about golf is the fashion. Unlike other sports, golfers always seem like they care how



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they look. I believe firmly that when you dress well, you feel more confident and bring your best game. In the office, pay attention to your attire. A well-dressed lawyer is a confident lawyer.

**4. Practice, practice, practice.** You cannot be a scratch golfer without practice. For litigators, practice on the course equates to time in court. Always volunteer to get as much courtroom experience as possible. The more time you spend making arguments, the more confidence you will gain, and you will be a stronger lawyer because of it. Consistency is what will ultimately improve your score in golf. Consistency will also help you succeed in your law firm. The more consistent your work product, the more your colleagues will depend on you and grow to respect you.

**5. Be a good sport.** Golf is a frustrating game, just like the practice of law. You are destined to have bad days—days when nothing seems to go right. Days when you want to throw down your clubs and jump up and down. Learn from those days. Explore what you could have done better. Then, focus on those things moving forward. Always retain your composure. Come to work with a good attitude. There will be times when you get frustrated with policy or administration or colleagues. That is natural. Just take a deep breath, and treat everybody you encounter with respect, as if they were part of your foursome on the course. Your colleagues will be more likely to want to work with you if you are kind and collegial. Do not go behind another's back or try to leverage for advantage at the expense of your colleagues. It is unbecoming and unnecessary to play dirty to get ahead.

**6. Set yourself up to succeed.** When I got back on the golf course, I thought success was defined by index or handicap. While this may be true for professional golfers, beginners should not judge themselves by professional standards. Set realistic expectations. For instance, on a par 27, nine-hole beginner course, set your goal to finish at 36. Then work toward that 27 scratch score. At your law firm, do not judge your success by the same standard that you would apply to the founding partner. Instead, set up bi-yearly concrete goals that highlight your strengths. Once you attain those goals, modify the list to push yourself to new goals that will increase your value at the firm. For example, if your goal is to bring in new cases, start with a realistic number such as two cases a year. Then, once you hit that goal,

double it for the next year, and so on and so forth.

**7. Play with people who are better than you.** I always play better golf when I play with golfers who are better than I am. At work, surround yourself with associates with more experience or build a relationship with a partner who can mentor you. You may identify with the things that make them successful and then formulate your own style. When you make a connection with somebody in the office, invest in it. That person may also be able to give insight about unwritten office subtleties or expectations.

**8. Do not talk when somebody else is swinging.** This may be the oldest rule in the book. Whenever anybody is about to swing during the game, be silent. Do not speak, move or stand in the golfer's space. This is a golden rule of golf etiquette. It is a simple rule that all true golfers respect and follow. The same philosophy applies to the respect you should show your colleagues in the office. Try not to interrupt other associates during a meeting. It is okay to disagree with others in the office, but simply give them the courtesy of listening to what they have to say and then offer your point of view. Give others the chance to formulate their thoughts and ideas and do not be quick to dismiss. Odds are your colleagues will pay the same respect to you.

**9. Do not walk across anyone's line on the green.** In golf, the goal is to shoot below par. Par is the number of strokes it should take to get the ball in the hole. Your score really comes down to your short game. Once you get on the green, you need to sink your putt in as few strokes as possible. The ball furthest from the hole goes first and if your ball is in the way, you move it and mark your spot. In doing so, you never, ever walk across

your fellow golfer's path. Doing so would disrupt the shot he or she has to the hole. Most of the lawyers I know are Type-A individuals who are goal-oriented, focused and driven. By nature, they want to succeed. You have to understand there are many other associates who share your same goals to succeed. Just like golf, no two shots are the same. In other words, try not to step in the path of colleagues who are also looking to succeed. Respect your coworkers' lines, because ultimately both of you may still achieve the same goal. Your success is defined by your shots, not by the shots of your colleagues.

**10. Keep your eye on the ball.** Always, always keep your eye on the ball. Focus on your plan, whether it is to make partner in six years, become a judge or run for political office. Always know the work you do today will prepare you for the future. If you take your eye off the ball, you will never hit it straight.

There is no special handshake or formula to fit into a new law firm or assimilate firm culture. The best advice is to be yourself, be courteous and be kind. Golf is unique because there is no official monitoring each play, unlike other sports such as baseball or football. Golfers are judged by their respect for the rules and for each other.

Joining a new law firm may be intimidating, just like getting back on the golf course. If you use these tips as guidelines, there is no doubt you will ever have to call "fore," because your course will be clear! Good luck.