

Meet me on the green

Why a round of golf beats meeting in the boardroom

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M. Grace Cantwell well remembers business "pre-golf."

It was about 10 to 15 years ago and the now community relations manager for Barnes & Noble Booksellers in White Plains was then global marketing manager for Forbes magazine.

"I'd attend conferences and conventions and I'd be seated at a table of 10 people and they'd turn to me and ask, 'Do you golf?'" she said at a recent "Golf for Business" seminar presented by the Executive Women's Golf Association Westchester chapter at MasterCard Worldwide in Purchase. "And I'd say, 'No,' and it was like I didn't exist anymore. I felt like I was invisible and I was being left out of the one thing I was there to do – network."

Contrary to popular belief, deals don't get signed out on the green.

"What happens is, you've built the relationship with the client that you're out with and it's much easier to negotiate once you're back in an office setting," said Hilary Tuohy, vice president of the EWGA, Westchester chapter. "And now, you're more likely to get invited out for a morning or afternoon on the links than you are to get invited to a lunch."

The average full-round, 18-hole game could take four to six hours to complete, which Cantwell said is the equivalent of landing "an adjacent seat on a cross-continental flight" next to your biggest business prospect.

A few years ago, Cantwell recalled reaching the 13th hole with a potential client who

ran a large accounting firm in Westchester.

A storm was approaching and Cantwell and could-be client sped up their game.

"My ball was a little bit off the fairway in the fringe, so I bent down and looked for it and I got hit right in the derriere with his ball and it was hard and it hurt," she said. "I



Hilary Tuohy, left, and Sherry Bruck at Doral Arrowwood in Rye Brook.

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turned around and said, 'I know I'm a pain in the butt, but is that your way of telling me?'"

Her business prospect promptly laughed and they finished their game, took it to the clubhouse and had lunch.

By the end of lunch, could-be client signed on the dotted line.

"I wondered if I had handled the situation differently, would I have gotten the account?"

A game of golf let Cantwell's client peer into her personality – and what she may be like to work with.

"It also gives you the opportunity to be able to make decisions and assess your risk," said Sherry Bruck, president of the EWGA, Westchester chapter. "You have to prepare and develop confidence because there's no room for doubt."

Your guide to networking on-and-off the course

- A cheater in golf = a cheater in business? Cantwell: "It's the one sport where there are no referees and no umpires, so it is up to your own honesty and integrity as to how you score yourself."

- Use golf to break the ice. Tuohy: "You're not playing against your partner. You're playing against each individual golf course. Everybody is trying their best. You get to commiserate with the people you're playing with. You can congratulate them."

- Learn who you are in golf to learn who you are in business. Bruck: "I use golf to analyze myself and my business personality...one of my weaknesses has been course management. As much as I like to win, I'm never really willing to sacrifice the fun of letting it rip, even if it means sacrificing a strategic location on the golf course for my next shot. I need to step back and say, 'Do I really need to just go for it or do I need to analyze the situation and do the smart thing as opposed to just going for it?'"