

RENAISSANCE Man

A time of revival and rebirth...

'Tis how the Renaissance Era is described and it befits the current state of the golf industry in Canada as it emerges from its own middle ages and prepares to become enlightened - exploring modern methods of understanding current and potential golfing consumers and discovering new ways of marketing in the next era of golf - the modern age of Canadian golf.

But who to lead the charge? What man would be the studied personality "well-versed in the humanities with extensive knowledge in many fields to go beyond the boundaries in learning...without skepticism and encouraging of free thought"?

Enter James Cronk; golf course operator, stage actor, athlete, entertainer.

TAKING ON A TOUGH ROLE

The golf business is filled with interesting and talented people, but nowhere is this more evident than the individual recently hired to assume the lead role in a new initiative called *Play Golf*, with the simple but daunting mandate to grow the game of golf in Canada.

To some, James Cronk is the general manager of Westwood Plateau Golf Club, a facility in Coquitlam, BC that has earned recognitions as '5th Best Customer Service in North America' (Golf Digest 2002) and '8th Best Company to Work For in BC' (BC Business Magazine/Watson Wyatt 2002).

To others, he is a sought-after speaker who motivates audiences to deliver blockbuster customer service by implementing his 'Lights! Camera!...Customer Service!' training program.

But if you dig a bit deeper, you'll find that this passionate 'golf guy' has filled up his 42 years with various interests and accomplishments, certainly qualifying him as one of our industry's 'renaissance' men.

DRESS REHEARSAL

Cronk's first exposure to working in the golf business was in his early 20's when he worked a few shifts a week in a golf shop while attending the University of British Columbia.

At school, Cronk explored various topics of interest, from political science to commerce to the dramatic arts, but after four years, restlessness led him to take a job as restaurant manager with a successful west coast chain called Earl's.

Over the course of a few years Cronk reached a senior management position at one of their busiest stores, but the 80 hour workweeks and 3 a.m. bedtimes made him question the job's long term potential.

"I learned so much working for Earl's about customer service, managing people and product quality, but I just literally burned out and recognized that as I got

older, I probably wouldn't be able to lead a balanced life at that pace."

ACT ONE

After leaving Earl's, Cronk decided to focus his energies full time on one of his true passions...acting.

His first paid acting gig was in his late teens and throughout his twenties and early thirties he continued to perform at professional theatres throughout Vancouver and British Columbia.

And while he hesitates to admit it, he also once sang back-up for Paul Anka in one of many singing roles throughout the years. But time has not quelled this instinct, as anyone who calls up Westwood Plateau and is put on hold (all too briefly) will tell you - you will indubitably hear his dulcet tones serenading you while you wait...

"Obviously I like to be on stage, invited or not, and I believe that the customer service business, which golf is, requires all of us each day to put on our costume and perform a show," explains Cronk. "That doesn't mean being phony, it means that we all have the choice to entertain our guests and the better we do that the more likely they will spend time (and money) with us."

Cronk transferred his acting experience into his 'Lights! Camera! Customer Service!' program, which includes segments such as 'Hiring the Right Actors' and 'Designing a Customer Service Script'.

IMPROVISATION

But when asked about the highlights of his acting career, Cronk quickly reminds us that there is a reason why they call them 'struggling actors'.

To pay the bills and make ends meet, he took on various jobs, and at one time owned an import/export company that had the rights to glow in the dark golf balls and coffee mugs that changed design when you added coffee. Most of the jobs, however, were not so glamorous...

Play Golf – 3 Keys to Success

1 Provide a Benefit - Play Golf needs to provide a direct benefit to each and every stakeholder in the industry; by educating everyone in best practices, by creating new golfers, by motivating current golfers to play more, by promoting the intrinsic values of the game and by providing valuable data and consumer research.

2 Stakeholder Participation - Every person in the golf industry needs to be aware of the Play Golf initiative and how each of us can participate in growing the game!

3 The Grow the Game Fund - The ability to raise funds, through sponsorships, fundraisers and other means, is critical to the success of Play Golf. The Grow the Game Fund is like the industry's own charity, where contributions will go directly back into supporting the industry to create more golfers, more rounds and more awareness.



Brett Hull

James Cronk

His 'regular paying' jobs included being a school janitor working the graveyard shift and a Hudson's Bay Charity Bear Mascot.

"I will guarantee you that it is a very humbling and motivating experience to clean out school washrooms or be pummeled by 10 year olds while in a bear suit. You quickly learn to appreciate hard work and having options."

Cronk says that at the age of 27 he realized he needed to establish a skill or trade and so that winter, after talking with peers and faithfully completing the job seekers' manual 'What Color is your Parachute', he realized that he had truly enjoyed working in a golf shop and that his interests suited the golf business.

"At that time I felt that the golf industry would provide me with a great environment and allow me to achieve many of the goals I had set for myself. I knew that I needed a job that was constantly challenging and changing, and I also wanted a career where you could rise quickly through the ranks if you performed well. I wanted to work with people and I also love the game and all that the game stands for.

"Most important for me was that I felt it was an industry that I would be proud to be part of. In my opinion, the golf business is first a 'people business', but if you can also add hard work, creativity and a bit of a performer's personality, you can increase your chances of being successful."

THE UNDERSTUDY

One of the problems Cronk faced when he contemplated becoming a CPGA Professional was that at the time, he wasn't a great golfer. Although he learned the game when eight years old at Sunningdale Golf Club in London Ontario, he didn't play again until his twenties.

Always a talented athlete, Cronk spent these 'off' years playing the staples such as hockey and tennis; and in typical Cronk fashion, his exploits led to encounters with eventual greats along the way, as he won a national juvenile hockey championship and played on a midget team with future NHL player and then teammate Brett Hull. Cronk even scored a stint early on as the doubles tennis partner of Grant Connell, who would eventually become, in 1995, the world's number one tennis doubles player –sans Cronk, of course.

So it should come as no surprise, then, that Cronk's golf skills improved with practice and determination and four years after earning his CPGA designation, he placed 6th at the CPGA Assistants Championships.

James also knew, early on, the value of working for successful people, and he wanted to enter the golf business under the tutelage of either Tim Tait or Jim McLaughlin, two individuals for whom he had much respect.

He would end up working for both.

Cronk credits much of his success to the fact that he worked not only for, but with highly motivated people.

"I have been very lucky to have worked for or with some very bright and hardworking individuals," recalls Cronk. "One thing that has always been obvious to me is that when you surround yourself with creative and motivating people, they will bring you along for the ride. I am always learning from my peers, and whenever possible I try to share this with others just as others have shared their tips with me."

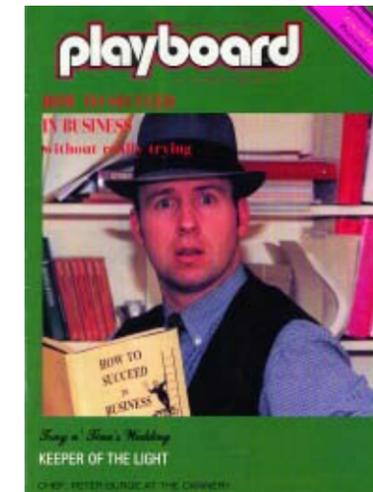
If you get the chance to sit in on one of James' seminars, you'll notice that his love for the game and the business is contagious. He wears his passion for the golf industry on his sleeve, and in the past this desire to see a healthy and vibrant industry has led him to donate his time and effort to many industry causes.

ANTAGONIST AND PROTAGONIST

As past board member of the Canadian PGA (and BC PGA), past-education chair of his local Club Managers Chapter and a speaker at all five previous NGCOA Canada national conferences – with another appearance scheduled this November in Calgary - James has become quite exposed to the various stakeholders in our industry (and also their agendas).

Cronk may have first gained national notoriety in the industry in 2002, when he traveled coast to coast on his own ticket, meeting with golf professionals to discuss his, and others', concerns with the current state and future outlook of the CPGA.

While a few CPGA loyalists may have initially labeled James a troublemaker, it's the opinion of many that James was simply expressing his opinions and concerns for the well-being of an association he cares deeply about.



"I am aware that some in the industry may have felt that I was just causing trouble. But in my opinion, what happened was necessary and I think our efforts were instrumental in creating the CPGA association review process, which led to the hiring of Steve Carroll, and which further led to many recent positive changes within the CPGA.

"There's a big difference between being a troublemaker and being passionate," believes Cronk. "As long as you listen to others you respect, and you continue to have their support, then good things will result from your passion and your willingness to step up to the plate."

Every successful enterprise needs someone who challenges the status quo, doesn't accept complacency and asks the hard questions. In the case of the CPGA, Cronk didn't just simply criticize from the sidelines, he got involved; organizing forums for golf professionals to provide input on their association, and came up with progressive recommendations.

He held the association's feet to the fire and got results.

THE PLAY GOLF SCRIPT

Whether you agreed with James' methods or not, you can't argue that James gets results...and results are exactly what the Play Golf initiative needs.

"For me it's about being proactive, versus letting things happen and accepting the status quo," adds James as our conversation shifts to Play Golf's mandate. "Any successful business, organization, or relationship needs to evolve, to evaluate where you are today and where you want to go, and then determine what the best ways are to get there.

"When it comes to growing the game in Canada, we can't accept complacency and just hope things turn out the way we desire them to be. The time is right for a proactive solution; an umbrella strategy to grow the game in this country. We can't keep doing things the same way unless we want the same results. The industry, and in my opinion the consumer, are demanding that we consider different strategies with the intent on achieving different results."

Lessons I've Learned

by James Cronk

At a recent education conference in Prince Edward Island, James presented his seminar 'The Golf Business - One Guy's Opinion' to golf professionals, industry executives and golf management students. The highlight of the session was the 'Steps to Success' learned from industry peers over the years. Here are few examples:

Design your brand / Create experiences!

Ask yourself - what makes you unique? What separates you from your competition? When your name or club is mentioned, what do people think? Look at other industries to see what they are doing. How does your experience meet the expectations of your golfers? (PS It's not about spending more money!)

Everyday when you wake up you get a new opportunity to create an experience for those with whom you come into contact

Commit to lifelong learning

Attend seminars and conferences and read books (biographies and self-help books that will teach you something or help you achieve your goals). Work for the best people you can find and if possible, develop a student/mentor relationship with someone you admire.

Insanity is doing the same thing over again and expecting different results

Hire right and deliver exceptional customer service!

Hire for attitude and then train the skills and make sure your staff fit your brand. Continually reevaluate yourself and staff and your facility. Think about what golfers (and non-golfers) experience when they walk into your facility and design an experience that matches the expectations of your guests.

The people you hire, and your ability to lead them, will make or break your career

Understand that this is a 'business'!

Those who have achieved success have learned to deliver great golfing experiences while achieving fiscal and business results. Increased competition, changing consumer demands, rising costs and greater liability concerns mean that golf course managers must understand ALL facets of the business.

Owners and boards care about results, not how well you can hit your tee shots

Be passionate

If you don't love what you do - do something else!

14 40 Under 40

Business in Vancouver December 24-30, 2002

Running a high-end golf operation leaves Westwood Plateau Golf general manager James Cronk little time to knock dirtball around his carefully measured greens and fairways. But that's not surprising.

Cronk's Capilano golfing operation includes a championship golf course, a teaching academy, a nine-hole course, and restaurant and lounge facilities. In total, he's responsible for 400 staff in the high season and 120 in the winter. "If there's any skill I have, it's hiring good people," he said.

But more impressive than the size of the operation that Cronk runs is the way it's run. Cronk, his executive staff and the golf course facilities have won numerous awards, including best new course

in Canada, best food, best clubhouse, and best driving range. Cronk, who has been Westwood Plateau general manager for three years, is the man behind many of the region's distinctions, including recent recognition from a leading U.S. golf publication, *Golf Digest*. The magazine's readers voted Westwood No. 5 in customer service of the 1,500 courses ranked in North America. Still, he puts a needless spin on his achievements, saying golfers love the game and are already happy when they come through the Westwood Plateau door.

"You have to be pretty laid to know that," he said. Cronk, who used to import glow-in-the-dark golf balls, arrived late to the golf course business, pursuing a career change at 28

JAMES CRONK
General manager
Westwood Plateau Golf



We are in the entertainment business



When asked what he hopes the industry will think of his assignment as *Play Golf's* Director, Cronk pauses.

"I hope people in the industry understand that *Play Golf* is ultimately driven by them, owned by them and accountable to them. It is a collective effort that requires every person in the industry to participate in the process.

"I hope people are excited about how 'growing the game' will impact them personally - either by more opportunities or more money or bigger budgets or a better workplace."

Adds Cronk; "*Play Golf* will be successful if it provides an opportunity for each and every person in the industry, from teaching professionals to manufacturers to owners to the media and everyone in between, to contribute in some way, big or small, to the growth of the game."

PLAYING TO A FULL HOUSE

I recently conducted an informal survey of industry peers, asking what they thought of James' appointment to *Play Golf*.

Remarkably, the first four persons I asked echoed identical sentiments, stating they believe "He will put his heart and soul into it."

"Personally," states James, "I seek a challenge and purpose for what I do - and it's important to me that I love my job and that I am always learning. I like to be around positive people that I admire and this business is filled with leaders and icons that the rest of us strive to live up to.

"And finally, I like to be creative and I like having the responsibility of getting a job done. My new job will be very rewarding and I am truly fortunate to have this opportunity to contribute in any way possible to the game of golf in Canada."

In the late 14th century, at the start of the Renaissance Period, the first golfer ever documented paid 14 shillings to a bow maker for clubs and balls. That golfer's name happened to be James...

James Cronk, the new Managing Director of Play Golf, can be reached at jcronk@playgolf.org or at his Vancouver office at 604.986.1824.



JEFF NEILSON

Jeff Neilson has held various golf industry positions during the past 15 years, most notably with the BC PGA, Pacific Golf and as a writer. He can be reached by email at jneilson23@yahoo.ca.

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