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We're in the people business

It's a quote from James Cronk within our feature story, and coincidentally, it's also a line I have used numerous times in staff meetings.

I'm sure it resonates with most golf course operators as well...

Although many industries are in the people business to some degree, the hospitality industry, and golf in particular, are more tightly connected to the dynamics of people and behaviour than most.

The challenge of growing the game, for example, is all about understanding people's desires within the recreation, leisure, sport, social and lifestyle arenas, then marketing effectively to them to create more rounds played and new golfers.

Some of this is a macro-marketing strategy, including Play Golf. James' leadership to execute the NAGA vision on behalf of the entire golf industry is the most relevant example.

It starts with relevant research to understand the customer properly, followed by the implementation of marketing strategies that target the most likely segments. You'll notice reference to market research within this magazine issue and other recent announcements intended to not only serve individual golf course operators, but also to create aggregate benchmarks on everything from customer satisfaction surveys to rounds played trends.

Home is at the heart of it

But within that macro picture, a tremendous reliance on effective local marketing is required, and not just for the purpose of growing the game, but for the fundamental need for golf courses to more effectively meet their golfers' needs.

Without unnecessarily compromising the traditions of the game, there seems to be considerable room for more responsive people interaction between staff and

customers at many golf courses. New customers are particularly sensitive to any shortcomings in this regard.

Of course the "people" factor goes well beyond customers. Our management, staff, suppliers and even government representatives present continuous interactive relationships that require effective people skills. As my first year economics professor said on day one, the theories are all about the flow of dollars but every one of them is based upon human behaviour tendencies.

A good illustration is the employee theft article in this issue. A certain proportion of people will cheat you for personal gain if the opportunity exists. Hiring right, and implementing proper control systems will minimize the problem, but the reality is that we are a labour intensive industry, and with that comes inevitable behaviour of the people hired - especially if they are unhappy.

Supplier support, as noted in the pro shop article, can offer tremendous opportunity to enhance marketing strategies. Building strong relationships with key supplier reps in order to gain advantages on price, rebates, co-op advertising support, inventory management, or other angles not offered to every client is another example of effectively working the people business that we are in.

And this industry is increasingly calling upon individual operators to develop relationships with their local government officials as they discuss and negotiate for legislation affecting their businesses. This issue's overview of course valuation targets one of these hot button issues and underlines the pervasiveness of this theme.

Respecting senior management positions, Jimmy Pattison, self-made Canadian billionaire, probably said it best when he explained his success: "I let managers manage". Of course this assumes proper hiring and the art of delegating, which are two other critical component of the people business we are in.

As segue would have it, the contracting of James Cronk to lead Play Golf is a very important step towards growing the game in Canada (no pressure James). Our feature story on this industry leading man is an insightful look at one of the true innovators in this people business, the golf industry.

Enjoy this issue of Golf Business Canada, and all the best throughout the '06 golf season.

Executive Director, NGA Canada.