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Who Me? Play Golf?

by Caroline Vincent

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I admit that four decades ago (Yikes, Am I that old?) I was a pretty good golfer, for a woman. Every weekend I played with my husband. That lasted two years, the length of my marriage. I had originally learned to play in college, a women's college in fact. After those 2 years of regular play, I played a few times, but golf just seemed to drift away as career took hold. Replaced by hiking, bicycling, tennis, movies, lattes, spa trips and any number of what seemed to be easier activities to engage in with my increasingly growing number of women friends and women lawyer friends, I became rusty, sold my clubs and became a long term ex-golfer.

A few years ago, now an active mediator spending a lot of time at events where I network with lawyers and catch up on the latest legal developments, I decided to play at La Costa at a LACBA Labor & Employment retreat. I bought new shoes (my old ones with the metal cleats were no longer allowed on the course), took several lessons locally and went to the driving range. It seemed like I had the swing back, but it was so short lived. At the golf outing, I felt completely inadequate, couldn't hit the ball, was frustrated and felt that I was putting everyone out. I kept saying how terrible I was. I realized this was going to be anti-business development so gave up for good. The notion that this was a man's game and I would never be good enough took hold.

Business Development and Golf

A couple of years later, in December 2012 I saw a flyer for a business development seminar followed by a golf league sponsored by WLALA. Really? Women lawyers playing golf to develop business? I doubted that this would work, but I thought, gee, I used to have fun playing golf, and it is good exercise, and it might be fun; oh, what the heck I will try it out. So, half-heartedly I signed up. The panel of women lawyers ranged from law firm partners to in house counsel. They shared common stories about how their male counterparts encouraged them to play the game for business development, and how important relationships are to developing business. Golf is one of the mainstays of male business development, they said, and an activity at practically every firm retreat and business outing. It all made sense....but I was so bad at the game.

Rebooting my Golf Skills

Still doubting...the panel identified only three things I needed to do to play the game, enjoy it and build great relationships at the same time:

1. **Obtain and wear the appropriate attire:** shoes, hat, golf shirt and golf pants (I interpreted this to mean: look good). I thought to myself, I would have to go shopping at a golf store, but I could do that.
2. **Learn the basic skills and the etiquette of the game.** The league included monthly 9 holes sessions and optional lessons before the game. I thought to myself, I could do that, it might be fun and perhaps I could learn the game again.
3. **No matter how bad you are, always say "I am having a great time."** They explained that plenty of men are not that good at the game, and no one likes to play with people who are negative or self-effacing. So show how much fun you are having. Wow, I could do that!

Immediately excited after this pep talk from these veteran women lawyer golfers, I launched into the golf league with abandon. The first day learning to swing, putt and pitch at a lesson, then playing 9 holes left me hopeful and discouraged at the same time. No matter how inadequate I or others felt, we encouraged each other to say we were having a great time. We laughed a lot. Soon I was outing with other beginners, intermediates and a few advanced golfers at the monthly league and informally on non- league weekends. Mostly we played just 9 holes, which is easier for most beginner and intermediate women. But from the get go, some of we adventurers also played some rounds of 18. It took me a while to hit the ball off the tee more consistently, even longer to hit it straight and into the fairway. But from the moment I started I began to have fun.

The league plays a scramble format, so the 6 or 7 foursomes compete against each other. Each player on a team hits a ball, and the lie of the best shot becomes everyone's second ball. The team has only one score. This makes the game less competitive and more fun, because while I couldn't hit the ball far from the tee on the long holes at the beginning, I was pretty good at chipping and putting. Others hit the ball down the fairway, so we all contributed to the team score. Sometimes I call our women's league "hit and giggle." It doesn't matter how much of a beginner you are, if you keep playing you just get better, and it is always fun. The more experienced players help women find the right attire, purchase used or new clubs, get the hang of the pace of the game and find your way around the course. Snacks and drinks are part of the 19th-hole experience at the end of our league.

I didn't realize how much fun it would be to get outdoors with a group of women several times a month, have a bite to eat afterward and share common interests. As I age I have focused on sports that are good exercise and easy on the body, like hiking, bicycling and swimming - it turns out golf is great for seniors (that's what all those forward tees are for).

The Los Angeles County Bar Foundation Charity Golf Tournament

When the June 2013 Los Angeles County Bar Foundation Charity Golf Tournament invitation arrived in my email inbox, I thought – why not put together a WLALA team? After all, sometimes I can hit the ball off the tee, and there are actually some good players in our group – by now I had been out on the greens about a dozen times, and even had the outfit together. Haley Greenburg designed shirts with a WLALA Golf League logo and four of us registered as a team and played on a very hot day at the Tournament Players Club in Valencia.

Out of 144 golfers, maybe 6 to 8 were women, and 4 of us were on one team, all wearing pink golf shirts with our WLALA logos. No kidding, the players thought we were aliens. Many came up to us in our starter carts, taking pictures. "Look, four women on a team!!" Need I say more about why women should play golf?

Needless to say, we had a terrific time, laughing all the way. Like, what were we going to do with the shaving lotion in our goody bag? Or the cigar swag on the course? We vow to sponsor a hole at next year's tournament with pink lemonade and gin, spa towels and suntan spray! We spread our enthusiasm for the women lawyers' league to other players and encouraged them to send their female colleagues to join our effort in playing the game. I think we started something, because when we got to the LACBA sponsored hole, Executive Director Sally Suchil ran up to us to get her picture taken (*right*), and soon we helped her sign up for the WLALA Golf League. Go Team!

I have now met and developed relationships with over 30 women golfer lawyers and others in the legal business. Some I knew before, but most of them I have recently met.



Jilleen Stelding, WLALA Past President and LACBA Executive Director Sally Suchil, WLALA Board Member Maria Hamar, WLALA Life Member Caroline Vincent and WLALA Life Member Patricia Collins

Now I know why men are such avid golfers, and why women will follow. It's a great way to relax and take a break away from all the reading and writing we do, replying to emails and making phone calls. The golf course is a serene and beautiful place, and it's great exercise. And as a business development technique, it is hard to beat – for several hours you get a chance to truly connect with people. The WLALA Golf League has been the most fun and rewarding activity I have enjoyed all year. A special thanks to Cynthia Cohen for creating the WLALA Golf League and expanding our development and opportunities as golfers who proudly venture out to any golf course, any tournament, any time. I'm having a great time.

Caroline Vincent is an attorney mediator, neutral evaluator and arbitrator with ADR Services, Inc. in Los Angeles and Orange County. She specializes in employment, complex business and real estate, torts, probate/elder abuse, insurance, and professional liability. A graduate of the USC Gould School of Law, she is a former member of the WLALA Board and a proud WLALA Life Member.