

What's your company's political handicap?



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Most business leaders don't see politics or government as something that significantly affects their long-term success. They avoid or discount opportunities to develop political relationships, dodging the annual solicitations for campaign assistance. They fail to see the value of the process until a deal is missed or a decision or imposed tax hurts their bottom line.

If business professionals would redirect a fraction of the time and money spent on

improving their golf game to developing relationships in the political arena, they would be amazed.

Just for a minute think about your business-political relationships and use golf as the framework. Are you spending enough time on your business-political game? How does your participation match your competitors? What is your company's "political handicap?"

For starters, take a serious look at what level of "game" you need. What level makes the most sense? Amateur or pro? PGA or Nationwide? Or will "basic client" golf do? Remember, this is about your company's bottom line.

Be honest, what does your current skill level give you? Does your level of play provide the knowledge and experience to succeed no matter what course you are playing and what political hazards, woods, water or sand traps you encounter? When it comes to protecting and insuring your business in the political arena, is your game suited for Augusta National or for a remake of *Caddyshack*?

Part of improving your golf game involves using the right set of clubs, challenging yourself. You can't afford to take the *Golf for Dummies* approach when it comes to your company's success. We know that the clubs don't make the golfer. Still, most of us need all the help we can get and it's the same with business and political relationships.

If you are in banking, get to know the chairman and members of the respective Banking and Finance committees. If you build roads, then having a relationship with a member of the Transportation committee might be the sand wedge you need. If you sell power, having links with those on the Public Service Commission is a pretty good call.

This does not mean things are always going to go your way. It does, however, give you a better opportunity to make your case

on a topic from time-to-time. If nothing else, you need to know your congressman, state senator, house member, and county and city council members. You are just one hook or slice away from really needing help. Better to have the right club.

You can't expect to play par golf if you only play three rounds a year. The same is true in the business and political arena. Practicing how you connect with political leaders is like going to the driving range. Repetition leads to consistency. It's said that what separates the duffer from the pro is the short game. There are plenty of business leaders who can lay up in two, only to three-putt the political hole.


In golf you have to be focused first on getting to the *green*. You spend *green* to get the right equipment, pay high *green* fees to play nice courses, and if you are good, you may win some *green* along the way. In business, you spend money to make money, and stay focused on the bottom line.

In politics, you often get reelected for bringing home the *green*, saving taxpayers more of their own *green* (which some use to play golf), and as a candidate, you then have to go out and raise *green* for the next, increasingly expensive campaign.

At some point, serious golfers usually seek some kind of help — a how-to book, a training video or hiring a professional for lessons. Some things can only be corrected with an objective set of eyes. Business and politics are no different — so get help!

Your regular playing partner knows you, but is not qualified to help you navigate your business through the hazards and sand traps of the political arena. Many in business act like Kevin Costner's character Roy McAvoy in the movie *Tin Cup* — stubborn to the end, unwilling to admit what he can't do, willing to risk it all for the sake of doing it his way. A few quick lessons here and there could save you a lot of frustration.

So, what is your company's "political handicap?" It might be the difference between bogey golf and scratch golf, or in success or failure.

Take a "captain's choice" view and see how your leadership team helps your business in this arena. Hopefully, you will find a balance of play that includes great drives, strategic approach shots and accurate putting. It's the difference between your company consistently being on the leaderboard and failing to make the cut. Fore! 

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