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Leadership through golf: Career lessons from the course

By Thomas H. Pierce

For years business deals have been done on the golf course, or at least at the 19th hole—the watering hole. But what can association professionals learn from the game of golf about the business of leadership?

Two books address that question: “In a golf club, everyone knows the player who does not replace his divot. One can only guess how he leads the rest of his life,” writes Michael Murphy in *Golf in the Kingdom*.

“Imagine the styles, then, as the array of clubs in a golf pro’s bag ... the pro picks and chooses from the bag based on the demands of the shot ... The pro ‘senses’ the challenge ahead, swiftly pulls out the right tool, and elegantly puts it to work. That’s how high-impact leaders operate, too,” say Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis, Annie McKee in *Primal Leadership—Learning to Lead With Emotional Intelligence*.

Links between leadership and golf will be explored in the workshop *Leadership Through Golf—Learning From Life’s Divots* at ASAE & the Center’s Great Ideas Conference at The Broadmoor in Colorado Springs. This physical and experiential ses-

sion will introduce cutting-edge leadership strategies while demonstrating cutting-your-score golf tactics.

Presenter Ron McNally, CAE, is a powerful and patient golf coach; off the course, Ron serves ASAE & The Center as chief community officer. Presenter Reggie Henry is one of Ron’s star golf students; Reggie keeps ASAE & The Center on course as chief technology officer.

I’ll pose a couple of the thought-provoking questions that we three amigos will explore during Leadership Through Golf:

- The setup in golf includes your grip, stance, alignment, posture, and the ball position. What are the factors that assure you’re setting up effectively for leadership?
- Golf pros know that a divot is much more than a swipe in the turf. An instructor can study this earthy record of instant history, carefully studying the divot’s direction, length, and depth to unearth clues about his student’s swing. If a consultant studied the marks you leave on an association and its people, what would she discover about the direction, length, and depth of your leadership?

“Golf is a game of blows and weapons. In order that the game continue, we must make amends for every single act of destruction,” says the character Shivas Irons in *Golf in the Kingdom*. No matter where you rank on the “leader board” in golf play or in association work, what do you do after you’ve made a deep divot? Do you march on toward your future, never looking back? Or do you gently replace the turf to help nurture everyone else’s future?

Thomas H. Pierce, MBA, is president of Pierce Management Development and a member of the ASAE & The Center’s Consultants Section Council. Tom will facilitate Leadership Through Golf on March 8 and the Idea Lab “How Emotionally Intelligent Is Your Association?” on March 9 during the 2010 Great Ideas Conference. Visit his website at www.piercemanagementdevelopment.com.

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