

Sports Etiquette

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Since most businesspeople will entertain either by participating with their guests in sporting events or being spectators at such events, it is necessary to understand the importance of sports etiquette to business success. Businesspeople will be evaluated on their demeanor during such events, and a determination is often made on their suitability as potential employees or business partners during these social outings (Chaney & Martin, in press). Students, who are future employees, need to understand the role that sports etiquette could play in their success in the business world. While the rules of sports may vary, depending on the cultural or regional preferences, the rules discussed here are generic to the majority of people in the United States who are engaging in sports as part of business. Since sporting activities can be used to help people who are currently working or thinking of working together, the events may be used as bonding experiences or to discuss business activities. Some sporting activities are more useful for discussion such as golf, tennis, or running; and some sports would not be as effective to discuss business such as working out in a gym. However, all sports can be used as a means of bonding and getting to know your business partners.

The goal of all sports is “to win, to provide valuable exercise, and to entertain while others watch” (Baldrige, 2003, p. 90). In accomplishing these goals, players and spectators should practice good sportsmanship. According to Ford (2001), “sportsmanship, like courage, is merely grace under pressure” (p. 270). Being a good sport is actually about showing kindness and consideration to others. Sportsmanship involves following the rules. Rules of the game exist for a reason; they prevent chaos and give structure and direction to the game being played. While some sports rules are for the safety and courtesy of the players, other rules exist that govern the behavior of spectators (Moore, 2003; Post & Post, 1999).

Etiquette Guidelines for All Sports

Being a good sport means playing by the rules, playing safely, and dressing in appropriate attire. One rule that applies to all sports is arriving on time, whether you are playing or watching a game; it is rude and inconsiderate to be late. Fans that are late should wait to take their seats until there is a break in the game (Bixler & Dugan, 2001; Cole, 1999). Greeting and shaking hands with each player or with fellow spectators upon arrival is another important rule. Players should be honest about their ability to play the sport and should take lessons before trying to play a game (Bixler & Dugan, 2001). Players should be gracious winners and gracious losers; they should not argue about the score or the referee’s call. The loser should take the initiative in

shaking the winner's hand to offer congratulations (Stewart, 1997). Fans and losers may applaud the winners; winners may not applaud themselves. According to Martin (2005), "Applause is a gesture by which outsiders demonstrate their approval. It should not be used to display one's own conceit, family pride, or mutual admiration" (p. 733). In addition, players and spectators should not ruin their image by using profanity, vulgarities, or drinking to excess; they should not criticize other players, the club, the court, or the surroundings (Mitchell, 2004; Post & Post, 1999).

When invited to a private club, guests should identify themselves and give the host's name at the gate or to the doorman upon arrival. Waiting for the host in the reception area is appropriate. When ordering food and drink, guests would order something similar to what the host orders. Guests would not typically offer to pay as private clubs allow only the members to pay. In addition, guests would tip only with the host's approval; they are expected to reciprocate by inviting the host to another event unless the outing is strictly business related. In both situations, however, a note of appreciation to the host is appropriate (Mitchell, 2004; Tuckerman & Dunnan, 1995).

Being a good fan means consideration for other people. Fans should not use bad language or throw items at the players or at other fans. The ticket to the event does not give anyone the right to "offend, berate, or belittle anyone" (Keim, 2003, p. xvii). It is helpful for both the coach and players to show signs of moral decency. Research shows that the more the coach exhibits proper behavior and expects players and fans to behave correctly, the more likely everyone will be able to enjoy the event without unnecessary violence (Chaney & Martin, in press; Keim, 2003).

Player Etiquette

Etiquette for players is examined for the following sports: racquet and water sports, golf, and running, biking, and rollerblading. Gym or health club etiquette is also discussed.

Racquet Sports Etiquette

Tennis, handball, squash, and racquet ball are the most common racquet sports. As with other sports, before accepting an invitation, players should learn the rules of the game and take some lessons. In addition to following the rules of the game, players should also follow the rules that are posted by the club. Another etiquette rule includes not walking across someone's court to retrieve a ball. Balls should be returned to their owners during breaks in play so as not to interrupt the game. Prior to beginning the game, the height of the net should be checked to be sure it is at the proper height; necessary adjustments should be made since net balls are an important part of the game (Chaney & Martin, in press; Stewart, 1997).

During the game, players should be aware that their voices carry across tennis courts and should speak in a low voice. Players are expected to compliment others on nice plays; however,

conversation should be kept to a minimum on the court. When officials are used, their calls should be respected. Questions should wait until after the game. When no official is present, the players are responsible for line calls on their side of the net. At the end of the game, players always shake hands with their opponents (Craig, 1996).

When playing racquetball or handball, players need to be sure to wear shoes that do not have black soles; many clubs do not allow black-soled shoes. Eye protection may not be required, but it is highly recommended. A common complaint of racquetball and handball players is that the opponent does not move out of the way fast enough. Players should be sure they are physically fit to play this demanding game (Chaney & Martin, in press; Craig, 1996).

Many times those who play racquet games are unequally matched in skill. Weaker players should let their opponents know their skill level. Asking for advice from an accomplished player is flattering to the better player. Likewise, advanced players should make the game fun for less accomplished players rather than destroying them (Fox, 2001; Martin, 2005; Tuckerman & Dunnan, 1995).

Golf Etiquette

Golf has become a major sport for businesspeople to pursue. People who do not know how to play golf and who want to learn may take advantage of the numerous courses offered by universities, community colleges, and golf schools. The Professional Golf Association (PGA) has an easy-to-read rule book and CD concerning the rules of the game which every player needs to follow (Chaney & Martin, in press).

Golf and business go together. Golf can be an icebreaker and dealmaker. However, golf can also be frustrating and test a person's stress-management abilities. People do not have a good round of golf every time they play (Fox, 2001).

Some business rules of golf include trying not to outplay the boss or client; talking business only after everyone is playing comfortably, not during tense shots; refraining from making bets unless your supervisor or client suggests it; and observing proper tipping etiquette. (Tipping is done by the host; however, personal caddies may be tipped by a guest (Fox, 2001; Pachter & Brody, 1995).

In addition to the business rules of golf, a number of general rules should be followed. If men and women are playing together and the women are playing from the women's tees, then the men will hit first since their tees are further back and the women's tees are forward. The person who hits the lowest score on the previous hole hits first on the next hole. However, men will always hit before the women because of the tee positions. Talking or moving while another person, either in your group or in another group, is hitting a ball is inappropriate; also make sure your shadow does not interfere with someone's play. Cell phones should be turned to vibrate

and should only be answered if it is an emergency. Slower groups allow faster groups to play through. If someone loses a ball, everyone in the group looks for it. The owner of the lost ball only looks for a minute, then takes a penalty stroke, and drops another ball to keep the play moving (Pachter & Brody, 1995; Stewart, 1997). Players should be ready to take their shots and should not take too long to take a shot; they should leave the golf course immediately upon finishing play. Trash should not be left on the course; trash receptacles and water are usually available on the course. Players who make a divot (a chunk of dirt or grass that is dislodged when hitting a ball) should repair it, and anyone who hits out of a sand trap should always rack the sand smooth (Chaney & Martin, in press; Tuckerman & Dunnan, 1995). Players should use a ball marker on the green so that others do not have to be concerned with hitting another player's ball while putting. Players should offer to tend the pin when the hole is a long way from where the putter is standing. Not stepping on the imaginary line the ball is to traverse on the putting surface is also important (Moore, 2003; Pachter & Brody, 1995).

In addition to the preceding guidelines, rules of etiquette for drinking on the golf course were addressed by Cindy Grosso, founder of The Charleston School of Protocol and Etiquette. Grosso suggested that players should not have more than two beers or other alcoholic beverages during the game. Players who plan to have a drink at the 19th hole should limit their consumption to a single drink on the course. (Of course, if guests do not drink, neither does the host.) At other times during the game, the host provides soda or water. Players should understand that they are being watched by other players, and decisions on whether to hire a person or to do business with someone are often being made (Foust, 2007).

Since golf is a game that can reveal someone's personality, it is best for players to be on their best behavior—throwing clubs, swearing, excessive drinking, or other childish activities have no place on the golf course. Many businesspeople take potential clients to play golf so they can tell what they are really like and to determine if this is the person with whom they wish to do business. While playing golf, it is advisable to refrain from giving other people advice on their game, unless they ask for the advice (Pachter & Brody, 1995; Tuckerman & Dunnan, 1995).

Cheating in golf, as in other sports, is not allowed. In golf, however, it is unthinkable as players keep their own scores. Knowing that a customer or one's supervisor has shaved a stroke off a hole makes it difficult to maintain composure. However, remaining silent speaks volumes about a person's character; the player can then "walk away with dignity intact, honesty unflawed, and job secure" (Bixler & Dugan, 2001, p. 216); the experience will provide important information about business behavior since how people play a sport is typically the way they conduct business. Golf enthusiasts can probably recall when Tom Kite once called a penalty on himself when his ball moved, though no one else saw it. "The informal penalties for cheating are worse than disqualification. Players who are caught cheating can be blacklisted for the rest of their lives," according to Eddie Merrins (Henninger, 2006, p. A10).

Water Sports Etiquette

Water sports include swimming, sailing, and water skiing. Most swimming pools will ask that all swimmers take showers before they swim. Also, because water may contain germs, it is best not to go swimming in a pool with an open sore of any kind or with a communicable illness. When swimmers use a lap pool, they should keep to the right side so that faster swimmers may pass on the left (Craig, 1996). If the pool is also used for aerobics or general swimming, each group has its own area in the pool. Lifeguards can be consulted to confirm where groups are to do their swimming (Tuckerman & Dunnan, 1995).

Sailing and motor boating can be wonderful opportunities to do business. People who have never sailed before should be honest about this fact; otherwise, what was intended to be helpful behavior may result in an unexpected swim. Whoever owns the boat is the captain and is considered the law on the boat. The boat owner should avoid inviting more guests than can be accommodated comfortably and should brief guests about what they should wear for the day, including deck shoes to avoid slips and falls. Seasickness is preventable with medication; being prepared with proper medicine is advisable for those who are inexperienced on the water (Chaney & Martin, in press; Fox, 2001; Tuckerman & Dunnan, 1995).

Running, Biking, and Rollerblading Etiquette

A number of businesspeople are starting running clubs or joining existing running clubs. Joining these clubs is a wonderful way to network and get to know other people. Wearing reflective clothing when running is recommended; when running alone, it is important to inform someone of the route. Since runners are generally gone for an extended period of time, it is a good time to talk about business (Tuckerman & Dunnan, 1995).

Biking and rollerblading can be good sports for business as one can talk with a fellow biker or rollerblader and bike or rollerblade at the same time. As with runners, there are generally local biking or rollerblading groups; and these are an excellent way to meet other business people (Chaney & Martin, in press).

Running, biking, and rollerblading have their rules; knowing the proper etiquette is necessary for these sports. Wearing proper attire and having the proper equipment for each sport is essential. Proper clothing will signal to others one's seriousness about the sport. Wearing protective gear with these sports is necessary to protect the body. Since these sports tend to take place where other people may be walking or driving, it is important to respect and follow the rules of the road (Chaney & Martin, in press).

Bikers should remember to go in the same direction as the traffic. Bikes are legally subject to the rules of the road; pedestrians have the right of way. Bikers should be aware of motorists, pedestrians, and other bikers; they should pass other bikers on their left and as they come alongside say, “On your left” to inform the other biker of their whereabouts. Runners and rollerbladers should go against the traffic. Running when it is dark is dangerous since drivers may not be able to see runners (Martin, 2005; Mitchell, 2004; Tuckerman & Dunnan, 1995).

Gym or Health Club Etiquette

While working out at the gym or health club is a personal routine, courtesy is necessary so that everyone can enjoy working out. Two towels are needed: one to wipe the brow and one with which to wipe the equipment. Towels and other supplies, such as water bottles and charts, should be kept out of the walk ways so that people do not trip over them. Also, the locker room should be kept neat and clean by not leaving items in front of other people’s lockers or on the floor. The shower area must be kept clean; empty shampoo bottles should not be left behind for locker room attendants to dispose of (Mitchell, 2004). All guests who use the facilities should be considerate of others who may wish to use mirrors or other accessories provided for the use of other members. When using the steam room or sauna, guests should not take up excessive space by lying down when other people need a place to sit. After leaving the steam room or sauna, all guests should remember to take a shower before entering the pools (Chaney & Martin, in press; Ford, 2001).

When guests go through a rotation of exercise equipment, they should return the equipment to the starting position and should never leave weights where others can trip over them. In addition, guests should remember to wipe perspiration and body oil off of the equipment. Equipment is not always supervised (particularly in hotels); thus, someone at the facility should be notified if a piece of equipment is not working properly (Craig, 1996; Ford, 2001; Tuckerman & Dunnan, 1995).

If the exercise room is busy, taking turns on each piece of equipment is considerate; no one should hold up the rotation of people through the equipment circuit. It is not appropriate to jump ahead to the next machine or to talk to others when people are waiting for their turn on the machine. When it is necessary for a guest to leave briefly, they should be considerate enough to tell the next person waiting in line that they will be back shortly. Also, counting aloud should be avoided as this will be distracting to others who are counting as well. Since making grunting and moaning sounds can increase blood pressure and put strain on the respiratory system, it is not advisable to indulge in these theatrics (Chaney & Martin, in press; Mitchell, 2004).

Dressing for the gym should include comfortable, stretchable clothing and shoes that will not slide easily. Skimpy clothing has no place in a gym. Wearing appropriate footwear is important as wearing inappropriate shoes may result in a broken toe or foot (Mitchell, 2004).

Young children should not be brought to the health club or gym unless a babysitting service is provided. The exercise floor is no place for children to play; it can be dangerous. Their presence can also be distracting to members. In addition, cell phones should not be brought into the facility as this is disruptive to others. (In fact, many health clubs do not allow them.) Excessive conversations with others who are exercising should be avoided; chitchat should be saved for after the exercise session (Ford, 2001).

When the personal trainers provided by the gym are used, they should be given 24 hours' notice to cancel an appointment; otherwise, the appointment should be paid for. While the trainer should be in control of the workout, it is important to let the trainer know immediately when experiencing pain. When arriving for an appointment, if a trainer is with another person, it is polite to wait until the trainer finishes helping that person rather than interrupting the session (Mitchell, 2004).

Spectator Etiquette

Spectators' responsibilities are to enjoy themselves without bothering other spectators or interfering in any way with the play. While it is expected that people will yell for their teams, it is inappropriate to criticize the other team. Applauding a missed shot is poor sportsmanship on the part of the spectator. Other inappropriate spectator behaviors include hissing, booing, and "coaching" from the sidelines (Pachter & Brody, 1995). Many times a host will have a business guest who is a fan of the opposing team. If the guest's team wins, offering congratulations is the correct behavior. If the guest's team loses, it is polite to offer kind remarks about the guest's team (Craig, 1996; Ford, 2001; Post & Post, 1999; Stewart, 1997).

Two points of etiquette are of special importance: proper use of cell phones and appropriate behavior during the playing of the national anthem. People who use cell phones during a sporting event are rude, self-centered, and inconsiderate. Research has shown that many people are reporting negative results with taking work calls at home and home calls at work; lines are becoming blurred between work and home. Family wants the family member to pay attention to the family when they are home and not work; and fellow employees consider too many personal calls not proper at work (Carter, 2006). Basically family and friends find it annoying when someone feels connected to work 24/7 with electronic devices. The "Star Spangled Banner," the U.S. national anthem, is sung at most sporting events. Everyone should rise and sing the national anthem. It is improper to walk, find one's seat, eat, smoke, or otherwise move while the anthem is being played. Men and boys should remove their hats and place them over their hearts. During the Pledge of Allegiance, the right hand should be placed over the heart while reciting the Pledge (Chaney & Martin, in press; Moore, 2003).

Heckling players is not an act of sportsmanship and should be avoided. While many players will ignore most verbal heckling, it is a little more difficult to avoid items that are being thrown. Noise is acceptable at certain spectator events and taboo at others. Dealing with noise is a

challenge for many athletes. Although at times it may be distracting, noise is considered a big advantage by a home team's athletes and coaches. At spectator events such as football, baseball, and basketball, it is considered appropriate to yell and cheer for your team. It is not considered appropriate to yell comments about a player's family, race, or any other disparaging remark. In the game of golf, however, noise is disrespectful (Chaney & Martin, in press). One golfer, following a noisy tournament, commented: "I'm certainly not going to go out and disrupt a business person in their business life, and they shouldn't disrupt our game" (Sullivan, 2006, p. 1).

Another inappropriate behavior by spectators is running out on fields and floors after their teams win. While this was previously done only when a team was ranked and played a ranked team, it now happens for no apparent reason. Fans should consider taking this bit of advice: "Try winning like you've done it before" (Hummer, 2004, p. C2).

Fans should be careful not to interfere with play. Many fans are familiar with the story of the Chicago Cubs fan that cost his team the game and more. On October 14, 2003, a Chicago Cubs fan caught a ball that was not foul and that would not have made it to the stands. The fan reached out and caught the ball as it was falling into his team's outfielder's mitt. By catching that ball, the fan cost the Cubs a chance at the World Series that year. Needless to say, there were and continue to be very angry blogs on the web about the situation. Fans must remember the rules of the game, and in baseball that includes not reaching out to catch a ball that is in play no matter how much adrenaline is in their veins (Drehs, 2005).

Dr. J. Wesley Robb developed a four-step model for being a good fan. First, fans should consider their motive for attending the event. Second, they should consider how their conduct at the event is viewed by others and how they want to be perceived. Third, fans should consider the consequences; behaving unprofessionally may have a negative impact on significant people in their lives. Fourth, fans must consider the legality or appropriateness of what they are doing. If people consider their actions before engaging in inappropriate behaviors, perhaps everyone could enjoy sporting events more. Although some fans try to blame their bad behavior on alcohol, excessive alcohol consumption is not an excuse for bad spectator manners (Keim, 2003).

Integrating Sports Etiquette into Business Communication Courses

The responsibility of teaching proper behavior, once assumed by parents, seems to have shifted to the schools. Employers look to the academic world to provide instruction and guidance in developing students' social skills. Teachers of business communication can integrate the principles of sports etiquette into their course in the following ways:

- Include in discussions of etiquette the proper attire and behavior for different sports.

- Assign students to read and report on journal articles related to the various areas of sports etiquette addressed in this paper; a chapter on sports etiquette in a recent book on etiquette is another assignment option.
- Ask students to talk for two minutes on some aspect of sports etiquette that they have found by searching online. Another idea for a short oral presentation is to encourage students to share examples of inappropriate sports etiquette, either by a player or a spectator, which they have observed.
- Invite guest speakers from local sports teams to address the class on the importance of spectator etiquette. Another guest speaker choice is the manager of a local gym or sports club to discuss gym and health club etiquette.
- Administer a self-check exercise to students, used as either a pretest or posttest, to determine students' knowledge of sports etiquette. Here is a suggested true-false exercise:

1. Punctuality is more important for players than for spectators.
2. Tennis players should not walk across another court in use to retrieve a ball.
3. Players of racquet sports should be equally matched.
4. Guests at private clubs should remember that tipping is usually done by the host.
5. Consuming alcoholic beverages while playing golf is inappropriate.
6. The host remains silent when his guest at a golf course shaves a stroke off the hole.
7. Swimmers using a lap pool should keep to the right so that others may pass on the left.
8. Runners should go in the same direction as the traffic.
9. Many health clubs do not allow guests to use cell phones at the facility.
10. Noise is sometimes appropriate at sporting events; at other times it is inappropriate.

Answers: 1 – F; 2 – T; 3 – F; 4 – T; 5 – F; 6 – T; 7 – T; 8 – F; 9 – T; 10 – T

In summary, business decisions are often made in non-business settings, such as while playing or watching sports. Thus, instruction in proper sports etiquette should be integrated into appropriate business courses, such as business communication, so that students will have an edge for winning in today's highly competitive corporate world. Many top-level executives maintain that the winning edge is good social skills. They have observed that employees with good social skills are assets to the organization and are probable candidates for moving up in the firm. These executives have found that behaving appropriately in business and non-business settings has influenced their own success as well as the success of the companies they represent.

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