Questions for Leaders

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Chief Executive - New Zealand Golf

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Learning comes from a variety of options, some of the best lessons can come from those succeeding within the golfing community both inside and outside of New Zealand. As part of the NZ Golf Case study programme we will look to create opportunities for leaders within our industry to answer a number of questions and share their knowledge and experiences.

Dean Murphy Chief Executive New Zealand Golf – an ideal participant in the Questions for Leaders as the recent recipient of the CK Doig Leadership Award recognising outstanding leadership by an executive sport and recreation leader at the 2018 New Zealand Sport and Recreation awards.

The opportunity is to look at the information provided and adapt to your environment.

Tell us a little bit about yourself?

I was born and bred in the Manawatu although we moved around the lower North Island in my early years and I attended a lot of different schools. In retrospect, this was great for me as I learnt to meet new people and adjust to new environments. From High School I went to Massey University where I studied marketing and management. One and a half years into my study I started in a sales and marketing graduate role with Lion Nathan. As a 19-year-old in the beer trade it was a dream job but a massive learning experience and a tough environment. I loved the role and was lucky enough to be involved in all sorts of projects including the university orientation leverage activity and sports team's sponsorships.

After three years working for Lion Nathan I headed to London with a bunch of mates for a 6-month break and ended up staying for 10 years. London captivated me and I loved the energy and opportunity in the city. There I was involved in the tourism trade and had my first look at small business management. Our business was events and festivals all over Europe which was an amazing experience. I learnt a great deal in this role – particularly about people management and dealing with adversity. It's a time of my life I look back on fondly.

In 2006 I headed back to New Zealand with the intention of joining the corporate world, I started a marketing role with NZ Post Group however after 6 months realised the corporate world was not for me. I had a desire to lead and to be part of something that makes a difference so I applied for the commercial role at New Zealand Golf and started in mid 2007. I was in this role for two years and then moved into the acting CEO role in 2009 for a year and then was appointed as CEO in May 2010.

Golf has always been a part of our family however it was never a primary focus and when I was young I remember it as something we did occasionally. I played rep rugby and cricket so was heavily involved in those sports which left little time for golf. I do remember getting a half set of golf clubs at age 12 with just the odd irons and to this day I tend to just use those same odd numbers. It wasn't until varsity that the passion for golf truly took hold. Around the study, I played two to three times a week with some great mates – it was a great way to spend a few years.

Tell us a little bit about your organisation?

I think most people have a fairly good idea about New Zealand Golf so I won't bore you with the standard spiel. I think the best way to succinctly summarise it is to say that we are the leadership and governing body for golf in New Zealand and we are charged with running the game and inspiring the next generation to participate.

What do you see as your greatest opportunity?

I am always an optimist about the future and I think that golf in many ways is an untold story. While the game is centuries old, we have a great opportunity to tell our golf story to new people. There are so many opportunities for golf in our country and I believe that golf has a role in the future of New Zealand. If we can inspire new people to participate, golf has many opportunities.

What are you most proud of?

Personally, I am really proud of my family. Not only my beautiful partner and daughter but my wider family environment and I'm proud to be playing my part in our family story.

Professionally, I am proud of the three great roles I've had to date although my experience with golf has been transformational and it's hard to beat. I'm not sure anyone has a better job than me.

For our business, I am incredibly proud of the journey New Zealand Golf has been on over the past 10 years. Our team has achieved an enormous amount and totally transformed the business. I'm lucky to work with a very special group of people who continue to do very special things.

What are your biggest challenges?

The environment we operate in is increasingly complex – this is not unique to golf or sport. The way our people, societies and cities are developing is very different to what it used to be. The challenge is to be relevant in today's times.

From a New Zealand Golf perspective, we have very scarce resources and we are not incredibly well funded – nor is golf at any level. From an administrative perspective, there is a lot of duplication of roles and tasks and I think that is a challenge we need to overcome. We are a small country and I think we need to organise ourselves a little better if we are to really have a positive impact on the game. Sometimes it feels like we are pushing uphill and the way we organise ourselves is not really helping the boat go faster.

How are you overcoming these?

Slowly, with haste. In a sector like ours, I think it is best to make small systemic changes over a long period of time. We must be strategic and we must plan very well and then we need to have sufficient resources to execute well. Another focus is people – my view is that you need a lot of great people doing good work over a long period of time.

What does golf look like in 15 years time?

My best guess on the surface is that golf will be reasonably similar and I think it will be in pretty good shape. I think the profile and perception of golf will continue to be strong, particularly on the professional stage – our challenge is to use this profile to inspire participation and I hope in 15 years that golf will truly be viewed as a game for all people.

I think the facility infrastructure will see some change. There is likely to be fewer traditional clubs and I think there will be lot more diverse facilities. The game will continue to be played in many ways but I think the traditional format will continue to stand up. The casual approach will continue to grow and there will be an unbundling of the formal experience; particularly for new participants.

It I had my wish, there will be three or four times the number of young people playing the game in 15 years' time.

What have you read or who/what has influenced you as a person and a leader? And what was the key learning?

I read a lot these days and I like to learn and seek new knowledge. I look back to my university days where I found study was easy and I wish I learnt more. I now really understand the need for a lifelong learning approach and I wish I had this mindset earlier.

My parents are continually a positive influence on my life and I seek their advice on almost a daily basis. In the golf world I really admire Sir Bob Charles and what he has done, who he is and the influence he has. I have a photo of him above my desk to remind me of this. I am also very lucky to spend a lot of time each year with Lydia Ko which I enjoy greatly. She has such wisdom for a young person.

Outside of golf, I find inspiration everywhere. The music sector inspires me greatly and I always intrigued how musicians use their platform to communicate and share their art. In general, I learn a lot from other people, I listen a lot and I take notes. It's an interesting journey – every day I hope I can learn and get a little bit better.