Questions for Leaders

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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.

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

Tell us a little bit about yourself?

I started my life in golf at about 12-13 years old, I had been playing both Cricket and Hockey at a regional level and had a best mate who was a golfer, I enjoyed the fact that I could do Golf on my own and I wasn't being compared to my older brothers who were both playing their respective sports at a National level. I found that my experiences in the other sports helped me with progressing my golf. My first handicap was a 7, which is the highest I have ever been. I then went on to have 25 years as a competitive golfer firstly as an amateur, then off to university in the United States.

On my return I was involved at the senior level as an amateur including 2 Eisenhower trophies (I played both Eisenhower's while still at college), I turned professional and played as a pro for 20 years. The last 10 years of my Pro career I took an active interest in golf course design as I had made the decision that once our children got to school age I would transition from playing to a course design role. I found that with playing as a Professional I was exposed to a lot of different courses and environments and I learnt to look at them with both a playing and course design eye. To get ready for my life as a course designer I started a study process, as there was no golf course architecture courses per se, I set about reading and studying all that I could find to boost my knowledge.

Tell us a little bit about your organisation?

In the 90's I started Greg Turner Golf which transitioned in the mid 2000's to Turner Macpherson Golf Design. After a few years in that partnership I decided to revert to GTG and have since expanded that business into a wider consultancy. While involved in the design role I was also involved in the New Zealand Golf Tourism project and this created a large number of conversations with owners and clubs regarding the issues they were having. This meant an expansion of the business into working in this area in conjunction with experts in the tourism, golf operations and finance sectors. It is important to us that any courses we design and clubs we work with are sustainable and successful, and that importantly the design matches up with the business plan and there is alignment and efficiency in operation.

What do you see as your greatest opportunity?

We see there is a real change in the air with the way existing golf properties could operate, this may create winners and losers but not necessarily at the expense of others. The prevailing model in most cases is not particularly practical. We need successful and healthy golf businesses moving forward as our accessible and relatively cheap approach won't survive without change. A radically different approach is required with clubs being more focussed on casual golfers and offering a different range of facilities to attract golfers and members. This needs to be done for the right reasons as it always comes back to the why, there has to be a viable business.

What are you most proud of?

I am pleased I had the courage to make the decision to stop playing and put my family first, it was great that it was my decision not the games. It is very easy to keep doing what you are doing. I am also pleased with the inception of the Charles tour, and the part it has played in player development for example Ryan Fox started his career on the Charles Tour with the aim of making cuts and now he has certainly progressed on. I think it is important to have this opportunity for players to learn their trade.

What are your biggest challenges?

This has been a challenge for a long time, getting people to accept when you are doing stuff it's not about self-interest. Their first instinct is usually "what's in it for them?" any time you challenge the status quo you are viewed with suspicion. Change needs to be viewed as an opportunity not a threat, we are always looking to make things better. We also find that the club governance structure can be averse to change.

How are you overcoming these?

Our most effective method is by talking about it with diverse groups, at a recent meeting there were representatives from the local council, including the Mayor, local tourism and accommodation providers and club representatives. The conversation was collaborative and the opportunity to show all the diverse groups the possible benefits to the whole community. We need to show how to use the golf facilities to drive benefit to the whole community. The reality, unless you are like a Millbrook who captures the accommodation and meals, is that the real benefit of increased usage will fall elsewhere.

What does golf look like in 15 years time?

I see 2 different stories, those clubs that are able to diversify their offerings and amenities and those that are geared towards the casual visitor will both do well.

Those who are not in major urban areas and without the opportunity to diversify or attract the casual golfer will potentially fall by the wayside. There needs to be a regional view of what is required to make sure the relevant golf opportunities are available. What will survive here? Needs to be asked and answered. I don't see this as a NZ Golf role and it eeds to be driven by an independent.

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

In a golf design sense I have -particularly admired Harry Colt and Dr Alister McKenzie for their work during the golden age. And modern day doyen Tom Doak has been an inspiration.

In the 90's I had the great privilege of meeting Nelson Mandela. Who could not have been impressed with his credentials as a leader during that period.