




Case Study

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. Michael Williams from the Mt Maunganui Golf Club.

Tell us a little bit about yourself?

Born and Bred in Napier, was involved in sports as a kid with Cricket one passion. I still vividly remember my first attempt at Golf at the hole in 1 challenge in Taupo – we were passing through and Dad said let's have a go I was about 14 at the time. I used a 4 iron had 2 shots and hit one just to the left and one just to the right. I think my cricket ball striking helped me. The next weekend we went out to a local 9 hole course and I think we both played every weekend from there. Dad had played golf previously and I helped him back into it. After a few rounds at the 9 hole course we decided to join the Napier Golf Club, where Dad is still a member today. At about age 16 and with a 12/13 handicap I started playing with the Men on a Saturday and I think this experience has been invaluable in understanding some of the dynamics of club golf. Education wise I always had a real interest in economics, money, business and sport so I went and completed a degree in Sports Business Management at Massey, it was the early days of sports professionalism and the course was purely around the business side of sport. In year 3 I completed a placement at the Palmerston North Squash and Gym running the secondary schools squash for the year. It turned out to be a fortuitous placement as over the year I increased my hours of work through part time bar work, pro shop and also involvement in some volunteering. This allowed me to have a fulltime role at the club when I finished my degree, after 6 months I went on a holiday to Melbourne and came back with the intention of resigning and doing the big OE. When I got back I was told by my boss that he had resigned and that I should have a go at the job. I did a 3 month trial the doors stayed open so I continued in the role for about 5 years. I met my wife Megan at the Squash club, I actually sold her a pair of shoes and in 2015 we got married and our son Maverick was born in 2019. In 2011 I moved to my first golf management role at the Manawatu Golf Club, I was a brave choice by the club as I was a young candidate. The club had a brand new facility and it was a great opportunity to develop and grow the club. I really enjoyed my time at the club, it is a great golf club and I was there until March 2017.

Tell us a little bit about your current club?

I have been at the Mt Maunganui Golf Club since March 2017, I finished the NZPGA Golf event at the Manawatu Golf Club on the Sunday, worked part of the next week and then drove up to the Mt and started work on the following Monday. It was a busy time. The Mt Maunganui Golf Club is in a strong position after some good decisions made by the club over recent years. It is located in a booming area and has a prosperous future ahead we own our land, we have a good membership and loyal members who support our club and all it offers. It ticks a lot of the boxes for a successful golf club.

What do you see as your greatest opportunity?

We have a couple of real opportunities – one is the growth in tourism through the area, we need to look to maximise our opportunities around this. Though with the current coronavirus is going to challenge all golf clubs not just ours in coming times. Our other opportunity is our ongoing gym project an exciting opportunity to diversify the clubs offerings. The gym will require a redevelopment of our existing downstairs area and also create a deck area for our golfers benefit overlooking the 18th green.

What are you most proud of?

Getting into these roles at a young age and sticking with it, there were certainly times when I could have easily bailed and headed off travelling or taken something with less responsibility. So I am proud of the fact that I have stuck at a sometimes difficult role and I am making a real career of it. I am proud of the fact that over my time in my roles I have been involved with teams that have had the courage to make changes and see them through with them working out well. With the recent arrival of Maverick I have become very conscious of my work/life balance my work has become more effective allowing me to get home to the family and also make time for the game of golf which I still enjoy. I give more thought now to my work life and ask myself how any additional demands will affect the family?

What are your biggest challenge

It is always finances, Golf Clubs are bottomless money pits and your finances dictate your opportunities for growth. Change is another challenge how do you bring others with you when you are looking to make change and how do you manage the variety of opinions?

How are you overcoming these?

Finances – through making smart financial decisions and looking at ways to diversify our income streams for example the Gym. Change – always working on the communication and looking to pre-empt the questions, this comes through experience of all involved with the board a big part of this role. It is important you know your customer and how they have reacted previously. Being in touch with your members and understanding them is so important.

What does golf look like in 15 years' time?

Golf has stood the test of time, it's been around for a long time and I believe it can prosper in the future still. As you get older the recreation opportunities get less and it is a game that you can either return to later in life or take up. This is a real positive. We still have a responsibility to introduce the game to the younger generations to ensure that if they don't take it up straight away, they can have confidence to get back to it. I also believe that we don't need to be playing for a trophy every single week in club golf and we need the opportunity to play for fun and enjoyment. We need to be careful about an over emphasis of casualization which creates an uncertainty of income. We need to create a real value in membership. In 15 years' time hopefully clubs will truly understand their role in the golf landscape and will be delivering that well instead of trying to be something to all. There will be clubs that may need to merge or close. Technology needs to be embraced or we may alienate the younger demographics with for example the need to have scorecards when they could easily use their phone. Live leader boards when playing in club days, technology to help with speed of play etc..

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

My original squash boss, Grant Smith (now the mayor of Palmerston North) has influenced me dramatically and a lot of how I operate I learnt from him. The key learnings from him are positivity, calculated risk taking and not being afraid to give things a go, always find the silver lining and the opportunity everywhere and importantly give everyone the time of day which helps bring people with you through strong relationships.