



PUT ME DOWN FOR 5



## Q&A: Dan Hallen

**D**an Hallen is the CEO of Professional Golf Services of America, a Connecticut-based membership-marketing firm that does consulting for private golf and country clubs. Hallen founded PGSA in 2013 and has succeeded in attracting more than 100 new members to numerous clubs. He answers five questions from E. Michael Johnson.

### **1. Your firm touts it can bring in 100 new members to a club. Where do you find these people?**

"The real secret is no secret at all. Clubs in the 21st century need a sales-and-marketing component to unearth leads that result in the numbers we generate for each club. If you have dedicated salespeople, they are able to efficiently explore all the leads that come in. Memberships don't just happen anymore. They need to be sold. It's not a task for the squeamish. It takes stamina and determination. It takes dedication and professionalism, and you need to have a person that can communicate the right message to the membership. On the surface these would seem to be rudimentary sales skills, but members of clubs are not experienced in the ways of selling club memberships. In addition to following up on leads from members, we have alternative means to attract leads via social media and other components. It's not just member referral."



## **2. What are some of the things you've learned from your first batch of clients?**

"The most significant thing we developed was our concierge system. Originally we did not have that in place. We were leaving the responsibility up to the members and membership committee to do the actual recruiting. Although we were successful, we felt would be substantially more successful if we did the recruiting ourselves. Now we have a professionally trained salesperson acting as the concierge to our clients. That person does all the recruiting and all the selling. Members join a club for recreation, not to work and membership recruitment is not a part-time job. We leave no stone unturned in order to recruit the maximum number of members. It's our competitive advantage."

## **3. So how involved—or not involved—is a club's membership chair or committee?**

"They're involved because there is some cross interaction between the concierge and what the membership committee might do on its own. Also, the club member in charge of the membership drive has access to all the reports we create. That cross fertilization leads to a highly productive interaction. But the bulk of the recruiting work is done by us."

## **4. What's the number one mistake clubs make in their membership-acquisition process?**

"They try to apply a 20th-century model to a 21st-century business. The era of the good ole boy private club is passé. The 20th century was the golden era of country clubs, and those are hard habits to break. But here we are in 2017, and many clubs have not shaken off the dust of those old habits. You want to involve the entire family in the club experience and not just the male golfer in the household. But breaking that cultural shift is not easy. Clubs used to be exclusive. Now they need to be inclusive."

## **5. How do clubs get all these new members to stay?**

"The reasons people join a club are different than the reasons they stay at a club. The drivers to join are the activities of golf, tennis and swimming. But they stay by finding a social network. They meet someone who engages them and makes them feel like they would be welcomed there. No one stays if they constantly walk into the grill room and don't know anybody. They want to feel like part of the fabric of the club. Those are the things people are looking for."

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