

It's a jungle out there!

By Barbara Puett and
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The traffic light turns green and the car ahead of you doesn't move fast enough. Is your inclination to jump on the horn or give them the benefit of the doubt?

We all know someone (maybe too well) who opts to mercilessly blast away. Driving seems to bring out the worst in mankind, and it's a small step from the tailgater on the highways to his unfortunate equivalent on the fairways. Not surprisingly, being hit into remains the most common complaint heard from women golfers.

Studies have shown that women play on average four times slower than men, that the slowest golfers are men earning \$75,000 a year, who seem to view letting golfers play through as attractive as a hostile takeover.

In a broader sense, our actions on the golf course speak volumes about our approach to golf, and to the world at large. Golf may expose intellectual and social deficiencies better than anything short of bumper to bumper traffic. It may seem like a jungle out there sometimes, but golf courses were never intended to be battlefields.

Think about the people you most enjoy playing golf with, or, for that matter, being around or doing business with. Are they the type who aggressively, instinctively go for the horn? Would they push someone in line at the movies? Or nudge someone out of a parking space? Probably not.

When we hear the pros explain their actions by saying "that's just how the game is played," they're not speaking strictly about adhering to the rules. We admire them not only for their exceptional play but also for their sportsmanship. Steve Jones and Tom Lehman walking down the 18th fairway of the final round of the U.S. Open weren't at each other's throats.

Here were two competitors in the throes of the highest level of competition the sport offers. The championship was on the line, and major financial and career opportunities at stake. There was no trash talking, no technical fouls, no tantrums. It points out once again, the special, civilizing, aspect that permeates golf at all, including the highest, levels. What other sport puts so much premium on demeanor or courtesy?

Golf's civility provides a sustaining source of pleasure that all of us willing to risk teeing it up and tempting the Fates can enjoy, and share. Camaraderie is as much a part of golf as keeping score. All that is asked of us is that we treat each other fairly and respectfully.

So pervasive is etiquette in golf that it impacts everything from course conditions to slow play, and has more to do with our enjoyment than most of us realize.

If it boils down to one word, that word might be 'respect,' a quality, incidentally, worth cultivating as much off the course as on it.

In Stephen Covey's "The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People," he writes that, "effective people see the world as having enough for everyone" while ineffective people "turn on an adversarial orientation."

A little attitude may be useful in dealing with the complexities of modern life. But all of us who care about golf share a responsibility to keep it civilized.