

PGA PROFESSIONAL SPOTLIGHT: CRAIG WEST

PGA of Germany



South African-born Craig West has been a PGA of Germany Professional for 22 years and in that time has overcome the challenges of moving to another country and not knowing the language to build his own business, West Golf.

IGPN spoke to Craig to find out how he built his career and how what he learnt is now shaping how he employs people and advances his business.

IGPN: How did your career as a PGA Professional first begin?

Craig: I started as an Assistant Professional at the Fancourt Resort in South Africa in 1992, under Jeff Clause, the American Director of Golf there. After moving to Germany in the mid 90s, I did the PGA of Germany program, which was a very thorough experience and one that I am very glad to have done.

IGPN: How did you end up in your current position in Germany?

Craig: At Fancourt we had many German guests staying in the hotel. They were always telling me how the game of golf was booming

in Germany (Bernhard Langer had won the Masters in 1985) and there was great potential for Professionals who wanted to teach or run golf clubs.

The owner of a driving range was a guest at the hotel and after we had spent a round of golf or two together he asked me if I would consider coming over to Germany and working for him. He didn't have to ask twice and six weeks later I was on a plane to Germany.

IGPN: What was it like moving to, and working in, a new country where you had to learn about the culture and the language?

Craig: A lot tougher than I was expecting, that's for sure! The language was tough and the German attitude and way of doing things was very much more structured than in South Africa.

The weather was also a shock. I will never forget the moment I walked off the plane (in February) and was "hit" by the coldest wind I would not even have been able to imagine. And then realising that it was a typical winters day!

IGPN: What was the biggest challenge you faced when deciding to work in another country?

Craig: Leaving the country you have grown up in is about as tough a decision as you'll ever make. Not being able to speak the language properly in the first year or so is very tough and your self-confidence takes more than its share of knocks.

IGPN: What would your advice be to someone looking to work abroad?

Craig: It's great if you have someone there that can help you in the beginning. Going to a governmental department to go and get yourself registered when you cannot speak the language is an experience you either take with humor or you're in for one hell of a day!

If you are moving to country where they speak a language you can't then I strongly suggest doing a language course as soon as possible, maybe in your own country before leaving.

Being able to communicate in your "new" country is THE most important tool to getting ahead in everything else. You need to get





integrated as fast as you can make friends from your “new” country as fast as possible, which as a golf Professional is normally quite easy to do.

IGPN: Explain a bit about your business that you run now.

Craig: I always had the dream of building my own course (what golfer doesn’t!) and in 2007 I managed to get the piece of land and found an investor to finance the building of the course.

In September 2009 we opened West Golf (www.west-golf.com) and we had 300 members even before the course was opened. It’s a public facility, where golf is not expensive and we cater to a younger crowd, making it also attractive to families.

I manage the facility and also run the Golf Academy, which turns out about roughly 350 new golfers every year, where we then get most of our members.

IGPN: What do you look for when you are hiring PGA Professionals?

Craig: I have had several Apprentices and Professionals come through the Golf Academy and to be honest, the most important thing I look for is that someone truly loves the game. Everything else takes care of itself after that. I have never had the feeling of having an actual job; I just love what I do and get to do it everyday if I want to.

I also look for someone who is keen to learn, willing to take advice and spend time

learning from the best teachers, not thinking that what they do is “good enough” for the people they teach.

Being able to communicate and thoroughly enjoy people is also very important. If you have to pretend to be friendly then teaching golf is going to be a tough business!

IGPN: What would be the biggest tip you could give a PGA Professional looking for a new job or trying to develop their skills?

Craig: You have to sell yourself! What can I offer this Golf Academy? Am I good with kids? Not all pros are. Can I teach better players? Can I teach teams? Do I just want to teach private lessons?

Everybody has their strengths and when hiring I look for someone who can give me something that I don’t have.

I also like having different personalities in the Academy, some people like a Professional who talks a lot, others are happy the less they say. Some Professionals are great with groups and entertaining people, others are happy to go the whole day just having one student per hour in front of them. There is a niche for everyone and you just have to find it.

For more information about Craig and West Golf visit www.west-golf.com or contact office@west-golf.com.