



Gold Standard Awards 2009 Transport Operator of the Year

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Gordon Donaldson
St Andrews Executive Travel

Gordon Donaldson, proprietor of St Andrews Executive Travel, has some simple advice for anyone involved the golf industry, and it has nothing to do with ROI, USPs, or any other management buzzwords. The straight-talking proprietor of the only coach operator based at the Home of Golf simply suggests that if you're in the golf game, you'd better know what you're talking about.

"It's critical that people working in your organisation have knowledge of golf," he says. "We'll pick someone who plays golf or knows about golf and train them to drive coaches. I'm quite happy to spend £1,500 to put them through the driving test as long as they are able to talk about golf and speak to people politely. We'd prefer to do that than pick a coach driver and try to get them to learn about the game."

Golf, it seems, isn't merely a sector in which St Andrews Executive Travel operates, it's more like the company's lifeblood. It defines it and, perhaps more importantly, helps select its employees. "If anyone asks me what's the one thing we do that others don't do, it's that we pick golfers who are willing to drive coaches and teach them to drive, rather than the other way round."

It certainly seems to work. In 2004, Gordon picked up the title of Transport Operator of the Year at Golf Tourism Scotland's annual awards bash and repeated the feat at last year's Gold Standard Awards. Although he admits he had hopes for clinching a double, he says that on the night he wasn't so sure.

"I had been tipped off that someone else was going to get it, so I wasn't expecting to be clambering over guitars and keyboards to pick up an award," he recalls. "But when I did, I was thrilled. If the sector you're working in gives you an award, then you feel you must be doing something right."

Asked to pinpoint what warranted him picking up his second award, Gordon quickly returns to his theme of golfing knowledge. "It's the quality of our vehicles and the standard of our drivers that are important," he says. "I ensure everyone who works for me is adaptable, polite and knows about golf - that's the important thing. In this industry, it's critical that people know about the game. Most of them do, especially tour operators, but there are some people who don't have a clue and it scares me."