

## THE GREEN

It was 6.39am when the chopper landed on the first tee at Golden Downs Golf Club. As the rotor blades troubled the still morning air, Mark Mercure stepped out tall — and very much untroubled. He acknowledged the group awaiting him with a sharp jut of his chin and a cheers gesture with his espresso cup. Mark's harried-looking assistant Kevin bustled out behind, awkwardly juggling a laptop and a set of clubs.

'Gentleman', said Mark, looking well past his smiling welcome party of three plaid wearing, flat-capped men.

With a fortune recently surpassing the GDP of India, tech founder Mark Mercure was — at his heart — a golfer. He loved to describe himself as 'a golf nut with a sweet side hustle'. That fruitful side gig was his company, Spindle, a pioneer in the pharmatech space. Mark's company had developed a hugely successful weight reduction implant. Getting a Spindle had helped millions drop weight by reducing human bone and organ bulk by more than 32 percent. And Mark was pushing his dev team hard to reach 35 by next quarter.

The round proceeded as usual. Mark's adoring crowd slapped backs and guffawed in all the right places as he served up his usual quips about shaft length, ball washing and handicaps.

Caddy/Barista/Notetaker Kevin hovered close by, wincing at Mark's latest, 'I like big putts.' 'And I cannot lie - hahahah,' da boyz sang out in chorus. 'Dude, you built a fricken empire on big butts,' said bro number two. Everyone was having a great time.

At the 18th hole, Mark paused, and hit the flagstick for an easy par. Leaning over to retrieve his ball, Mark spoke to the hole with a carefully casual air. 'So, anyone heard about this new club, 58?'

The crew were unusually silent. Eyes met each other briefly from the sidelines.

Reaching for a little more vocal swagger, Mark tried again, 'Come on — someone surely knows someone who knows something. How do we get on, boys?!'

Whispers about a new and super exclusive golf club had been circulating for a while now. Mark had heard the rumours about rugged dunes, blind shots and fairytale fairways. But he was confused that no-one — like, no-one at all — had offered him a membership, or even a hit. What was that about? So far, he'd collided with a series of brick walls trying to find out anything about 58. But the dwindling number of high-profiles out and about at Golden Downs had not skipped his attention.

'Tell you what, a million bucks to whoever knows anything about that club.' Mark added a 'hahaha' which did little to mask his desperation.

A rustle went through the clutch of plaid bros, gathered like colourful boy scouts round the flag. But it was assistant Kevin who piped up first.

'I could make a call.'

Like gunfire, heads snapped in unison towards Kevin. Mark thwacked his putter on the green and grinned. 'You been holding out on me, Kev?' He had never called him Kev. 'Okay, then! Make it happen.' Mark turned and walked towards the clubhouse without farewelling his golfing buddies, a new spring in his step. 'Kev' followed.

12 hours later, Mark received an email from [admin@58.com](mailto:admin@58.com)

*Thank you for your interest. New members must first demonstrate 58 points. Details to follow.*

*Sincerely,*

*58 Group*

By midday, Kevin was a millionaire. By 2pm, he had tendered his resignation to Mark Mercure and the Spindle Group. Mark hardly noticed. He was giddy with the anticipation of being a part of 58 and pumped for the membership qualification process to begin. Proposers, seconders, joining fees, green fees, board 'fees' — these tests of financial prowess would just give Mark another chance to peacock his obscene wealth to these underground clowns. 'Bring it on,' he thought.

All day, Mark had been hungrily awaiting the ping he'd set up especially for alerts from 58.

Finally. The sound released a dopamine surge and prompted a swift exit from Spindle's monthly

board meeting. 'The wife,' he announced to the boardroom with a cartoonish eye roll. Joyful murmurs rippled across the sea of polished mahogany and Italian wool. As First Lady of the Spindle empire, Jacinta Mercure's support was integral. Reports of Mark's less than behaviour from 'sources close to' the FLOS had been creating wobbles in Spindle's share price recently. This new enthusiasm for his marriage had to be good.

Mark's fingers vibrated with pleasure as he opened his inbox.

*Please report on your greenhouse gas emissions YTD.*

*Sincerely,*

*58 Group*

'What the f--?' Mark's high was well and truly killed. He tapped out a response.

'Hi' he started the email. Last thing Mark wanted to do was piss anyone off, but like, what?

*Hi, I'm applying for membership to the club. To your golf club. Please confirm fees and I can arrange today.*

*Regards,*

*Mark Mercure*

The email response from 58 was instant, and entirely unchanged.

*Please report on your greenhouse gas emissions YTD.*

*Sincerely,*

*58 Group*

'Where the hell is Kevin?' Mark said to no-one. He suddenly remembered the earlier payment and resignation. 'Hey Siri!' he shouted, much louder than Siri deserved, 'Call Kevin.' The call went immediately to Kevin's voice message, which Mark realised he'd never heard. He exhaled, reset. 'Hey Kev! It's a—it's Mark here, buddy. Call me.'

Mark headed back into the boardroom, rattled but battle-ready. 'Sorry, err, sorry about that. Right. Where were we?' The Spindle board quickly brought Mark up to speed and back in the game.

The rest of the meeting proceeded as usual. They signed off on the breakthrough deal for 35 percent organ debulking. Even Spindle copycats couldn't achieve the tech for more than 28 percent. There'd been some worrying medicolegal rumours swirling because of a few recent nut jobs suing Spindle. Apparently, current loss targets for organ and bone bulk were 'incompatible

with life'. But apart from a few bad eggs, the magical weight changes that Spindle recipients could achieve was unlike anything, ever. Mark liked to say, 'Fatties are just friends Spindle hasn't met yet.'

'Anything else, Mark?' asked Spindle's chairman. 'Actually,' Mark began, 'I've been thinking. Where are we with our greenhouse gas emissions?' The boardroom fell silent, disoriented faces finding Mark's. 'Yeah,' he dug in, his voice now boasting more command than he felt. 'I want a report on our emissions. Year to date.' The chairman made a note, a secretary typed, eyes darted tennis style across the room. Mark left. Chairman shrugged.

Two days later, Mark sent an email to 58.

*Spindle Group greenhouse gas emissions YTD. Report attached.*

*Regards,*

*Mark Mercure*

Within half an hour, a Ping! almost knocked Mark off his treadmill.

*Points will be assigned once emissions drop by 22 percent.*

*Sincerely,*

## *58 Group*

'What?! Who? WHAT?' Mark was upset, confused and really, really pissed off. But he was also determined. It was now clear that Kevin was long gone, even HR couldn't track him. He'd actually have to get in bed with these hippy freaks. If he was honest with himself, this twisted challenge had made Mark even more desperate to join this underground club. He'd do whatever it took.

Much to the board's bewilderment and disappointment, the Spindle Carbon Offset and Reduction of Energy program was launched with great media fanfare. SCORE, as Mark loved to call it — he thought 58 would get a kick out of that — was headline news across the globe.

The world's media was shocked to hear Mark Mercure, diehard capitalist and anti-climate change legislation lobbyist, announce his commitment to reducing the carbon footprint of Spindle. They asked a simple question, 'But why?' Cash cow Spindle had never, ever showed interest in or acknowledgement of EPA rules. Most media outlets dismissed Mark's words as corporate greenwashing. But it soon became clear that his intentions — and actions — were very real. And what felt like overnight, the Spindle Group had announced long-term measures to reduce their massive carbon footprint. Suppliers were switched out, energy efficiencies were made, private jets were ceremoniously dumped.

58's next email confirmed points achieved. Mark pumped his fist and felt triumphantly firm. He'd succumbed to a bunch of greenies and their whims, going against every corporate instinct he'd ever had. Of course, the board had been aghast at his proposal. And as predicted, the share price had dropped sharply on announcement. But for someone who claimed total disregard of the press, Mark lingered on his media metamorphosis that day, enjoying the mood of 'Spindle Cuts Carbon Fat', 'Counting Carbon Not Calories', 'Mercure's Footprint Slims Down'.

He was so ready to tee off. Ping! But they weren't done with him yet.

*Send employee engagement results YTD.*

*Sincerely,*

*58 Group*

'What the actual f-?!' thought/growled/gestured Mark. He'd done what they asked. The Spindle Group had halved their fortune since this 58 debacle — and they wanted more? He tried ignoring his fixation, he tried calling Kevin, he tried putting the whole thing to bed. But the more these guys pushed him, the more he wanted it.

Once again, the board were stunned by Mark's new request. And as expected, the recent engagement survey results were subpar for a Fortune 500. Certainly for a Fortune 3. So again, he pandered to the crystal-clear demands of the invisible 58-ers, and began implementing major



changes for all employees of the Spindle Group. Within days, flexible working hours, mental health leave, extra vacation days, and 'meeting people where they are' were all on the table.

Wellbeing at Spindle soared. Unimportant people within the company smiled at Mark, even high-fiving him as he walked the halls. He was a little drunk on it. Mark could hardly believe he was signing off on something called 'gender reassignment leave'. But he did. And once again, Spindle Group's share price travelled south. 'Mercure Makes Nice', 'Spindle Slashes Overtime', 'Lose Fat - Gain Benefits'. Who even was he?

Mark Mercure. Called out for being nice. Mark was feeling more at ease than he had in years, despite the shambles of the share price. Mark's wife Jacinta had even given him a call, 'Just to say hi', and then bread-crumbling future gala and yacht-related plans. Maybe this feel good crap actually had some merit. He thought about those sabbaticals he'd been learning about during the employee re-engagement program. Good time to get some golf in. He waited for the final ping.

Ping!

*Send charitable donations YTD.*

*Sincerely,*

*58 Group*

Mark slammed his fist into the dashboard of his new Tesla. He felt a wash of fury that had strangely eluded him in previous weeks. What were they expecting? That he'd transfer his fortune over to Greenpeace? Spindle were not known for their corporate philanthropy. Not that this had been mentioned by anyone in the Mercure-loving media recently. But with board members leaving in droves — along with their fat bonuses — Mark had to act fast. He jumped on the front foot.

*What is the investment expectation?*

*Regards,*

*Mark Mercure*

The return Ping to Mark's pong arrived sooner than expected.

*25 percent of profits for the next 10 years. To a globally registered hunger-fighting charity.*

*Sincerely,*

*Mark Mercure*

It was funny, Mark thought, he didn't really feel that mad. Spindle haters had forever been calling for this sort of wild corporate benevolence. 'Trim the fat to feed the thin' type thing. And

as much as he'd always ignored this rhetoric, it made sense to him now. Mark held a press conference announcing the newest Spindle Group permutation without even checking with the board. They pretty much all hated the guy now, the ones that were left. And despite the share price's daily downturn, he pressed on. 'From today,' he declared to a pleasing sea of mics, '25 percent of Spindle Group profits will be pledged to end world hunger.'

For the first time in his life, Mark felt like a good person. A nice person.

Ping!

*Congratulations. Your membership to 58 has been approved.*

*Sincerely,*

*58 Group*

Mark sat heavy and exhaled long. He considered his transformation. His old golf buddies — all his buddies actually — were MIA, but he'd made some new connections. He was hanging out with his son, he was on friendly terms with Jacinta, and some people spoke kindly to him. Life was surprisingly enjoyable. And he could breathe. Mark even looked forward to some downtime and getting to know some of these barefoot billionaires. Bring on the fairytale fairways.

*Thanks guys. I look forward to a round with you.*

*Mark :))*

He couldn't help himself. Who was this man sending emojis to strangers? To anyone?

The next morning, Mark took a drive down the coast towards the address he'd been sent, enjoying the view, the quiet purr of his Tesla. Siri gently encouraged him to turn down an unnamed dirt track and advance 200 metres. And the sight — well, it took his breath away. He came to a silent stop at a circular, copper-coloured structure emerging from the sand dunes like half-buried space treasure. To the right of the gleaming prize, a section of the dune began lowering, revealing a long, sloping drive. Mark beamed, his skin raised in a single, whole-body goosebump as he drove over the threshold.

In a semi-dream state, Mark handed over his keys and followed a linen-clad figure down a dim hall piped with soothing birdsong. 'Please change here, Sir', they said, and ushered him towards a private dressing room. He gazed toward a 20-foot tall rain shower and eucalyptus-scented steam room. He'd made it. Golf nirvana. Hanging in the brushed concrete wardrobe, Mark found an embroidered shirt, 'Mark, 58 Group'. He buttoned up, took a deep cleansing breath and opened the heavy door on an inhale. 'Here we go,' he thought.

The linen-wrapped form appeared again, handing Mark a green juice and a breathtakingly beautiful putter. As his fingers caressed the intricate hand-engraved, 'Mark, 58 Group', he closed his eyes in heavenly reflection. But his meditation was swiftly punctured by a 'Oh yeah, take

that!' from a few yards away. Mark looked up and took in the scene before him. He recognised a clean energy entrepreneur high-fiving a major Hollywood director. Then, casting his gaze to their line of vision, Mark's ability to breathe escaped him. His ears thrummed. Mark swallowed and felt his stomach crackle, his guts lightly carbonated.

A six-foot high waterfall flowed into a moat surrounding a tiny replica of — what was that — Edinburgh Castle? A preposterous sign announced the entrance to Hole 1. Mark forced himself to look further afield. 'Hole 2' revealed a hollowed out hot dog and a glowing gumball machine. He saw a glimpse of 'Fairytale Fairway' ahead. Miniature golf. No. NO.

As Mark fought to contain his rising nausea, he heard a familiar voice. 'Mark, hey!! Really good to see you, man.' Kevin grinned, his hand outstretched.