

Selling your ideas

THE following is the text of a paper by Gordon West, Head Greenkeeper, Auckland Golf Club, at a recent Greenkeepers' Seminar.

I TRUST that this paper will provoke discussion because the subject I have chosen deals with an important phase of golf course management, the results of which can have a profound influence on the golf course in general and the welfare of the Head Greenkeeper in particular.

If I were to ask what makes a good golf course I would receive a wide variety of answers depending largely to whom I directed the question. This question would be of interest to some Professional golfers who have been playing in New Zealand recently and seem to derive some pleasure in being quoted in the press as experts in course design and it appears also that agronomy is one of the attributes of a professional golfer, because they sometimes can recognise Poa Annua. Perhaps the Professionals could send our Head Greenkeepers overseas on a regular basis to places where all the right knowledge can be gained, and on return to this country go about the task of completely eliminating that grass which is always causing their nightmares. They then could be justly proud of what they had done for golf in this country. So much for the Professionals opinion, every golfer I think could offer you his ideas and some are always only too ready to do so, as most of us can vouch. But good golf courses need good Head Greenkeepers and there is one asset that a good Head Greenkeeper needs and that is the art of being a good salesman. The Head Greenkeeper who can master the art of salesmanship will discover that he can function more effectively in his job and I will presume for the purpose of

this paper that the greenkeeper has gained enough knowledge in turf culture that will enable him to be raised to the position of Head Greenkeeper. So he has to be able to sell his knowledge to both committees and individuals.

You may have great ideas for the betterment of your golf course but if you can't sell them they are virtually worthless. Salesmanship can be defined in many different ways. My favourite definition is that salesmanship is the art of persuasion. Whether a product, a service or an idea is involved, the same principles of selling apply. Head Greenkeepers essentially sell a service, that of administering and supervising Golf Courses. In order to perform his service of providing the members with the best possible playing conditions he needs tools, men, supplies and equipment and salesmanship is the key to obtaining these materials. The art of persuasion must be set in motion in order to win approval for expenditures that will enable the best playing conditions to be provided.

Many greenkeepers will admit that they are not very good at persuading. Many have chosen this work because they like outdoor work, communicating with nature which silently proceeds from cycles of growth to rest. Head Greenkeepers have become skilled in the art of growing turf and in all the technical aspects of grooming and maintaining a golf course. They have learnt through years of experience and study the many ramifications of their highly skilled art. Some will say that it is a profession, but with this I disagree because in New Zealand it is not neces-

sary even in the most discerning of clubs for the Head Greenkeeper to have a University degree, and until such time as this is deemed essential for the position of Head Greenkeeper it will in my opinion remain a highly skilled art. By and large very few have had any training in salesmanship and as a result many find it difficult to challenge a fast talker or a committee that is charged with the responsibility of managing the club's affairs. The unprepared is at a loss. He has little knowledge of assembling facts outlining the problem and persuading the committee of the course they should take to provide the club members with exactly what they want.

The art of persuasion is an extremely interesting topic. It can be challenging and fascinating. You become more alert to people's reactions when you speak to them. It is a subtle honest approach to win people over to your particular way of thinking.

If the Head Greenkeeper happens to have a club where the committee is small and the club captain is the chief executive officer and who is therefore in a position of making firm and binding decisions without having always to consult the entire committee, he has a decided advantage over the Head Greenkeeper who has to climb over layers of red tape to get a decision on some matter concerning the course. How often have we seen greenkeepers besides themselves with frustration because too many people have to make the final decision. You get large committees arguing the pros and cons regarding the matter of cost and sometimes shelving the Head Greenkeeper's proposal and spending the money on some unproductive unit of the club. It is here that the Head Greenkeeper must make himself aware of other demands being made on the committee and if there is a likelihood of a division of opinion you must be able to supply and press home all the facts of your case. In other words you have to sell it.

It is often in this area that the art of salesmanship comes into play in the true sense of the word. It is important to remember at this point that a good salesman never really sells anything. He finds out what people want and then helps them obtain it. A rewarding feeling is experienced by the person who succeeds in helping others to acquire what they want. To persuade the committee or a chairman of a committee to obtain something the first thing one must do is to find out if the membership needs or wants it, and if it stands to benefit from the new acquisition.

In presenting a proposal the Head Greenkeeper should be sure that he is in possession of all the facts and that they are presented in terms that can be readily understood.

What kind of approach should be used? Does he explain in detail all the technical information which often is only of passing interest to most committee members. They are not interested in the details. They often can't see what difference it would make if the roots are 2in. deep or 10in. deep. This type of presentation only emphasises the things that are of interest and importance to the greenkeeper. Committee men will be far more impressed if the Head Greenkeeper minimises his own day to day problems and makes a presentation based on the things that are of interest to him and the club members. Whatever you are trying to sell you must relate it to the effect it has on the game. Low Scores, Better Lies, Truer Surfaces are magic words. If what you propose directly or indirectly has an effect on the golfer's score you will find that your request will receive a great deal more attention. Likewise if tree planting is the subject and explaining that a particular planting will make the better golfer have to play better golf to score, but that it will not impose too great a penalty on the bulk of the membership who in the main

[Turn to Page 21]

[Salesmanship from Page 19]

are on middle to longer handicaps the same interest will accrue.

Most club officials and members are interested in beauty. A beautifully groomed course that is well landscaped may even make a golfer overlook his poor score. Your presentation should show him how the products you wish to introduce will directly or indirectly affect the beauty of the course. Probably the most important interest of club members is prestige. What golfer doesn't want to belong to a club ranked amongst the best. There is great pride in membership and golfers like to tell others how great their course is playing. Playing up the prestige angle in your presentation may also help in winning committee approval for what you need.

Score, Beauty and Prestige. Let's have a look at what practical application can be made with these attractions.

Suppose we use as examples grasses and a machine that are going to affect the quality and growth of the turf. Are you going to tell the committee—"If these are approved my grass will be healthier, have a deep root system, will resist disease better and I will have far less worries", or are you going to state, "These will help me produce strong turf that will give you a good lie of the ball. Your score should improve, the course will be more beautiful because we can get a denser cover of high quality turf, and that will give us a course that ranks with the best". Which would you choose?

The first approach obviously relates to the areas that are of primary interest to you. The second approach appeals more to the interests of the committee and the membership.

Becoming a good salesman can be rewarding, it can profoundly affect your future as a Head Greenkeeper. It is essential that you make a close study and gather all the facts and figures necessary to present a good case and be in a position to answer most queries.

Seek and obtain co-operation from those concerned in the channelling of all the correct information.

All of us are going to see machinery and other products on display on Wednesday, the success of what you will obtain for your course will be how well you use your salesmanship when you get home. If you are fortunate enough to convince the powers that be that your recommendations are the best for your course, then make every endeavour to show that your judgement has been wise. Not only will this satisfy the membership but above all it will considerably enhance your status within the club, and show that your your knowledge demands respect.

NEWS

MAXWELL M. Mart (London) Ltd. have available a new grass seed and fertiliser chart and an up to date amendment list of prices of all products supplied by them. Copies can be obtained on request.

MR. JOHN MELLOR, agricultural sales manager of Lindsey and Kesteven Fertilisers, has been appointed an associate director of the company.

A. B.Sc. (Agric.) of Durham University, Mr. Mellor spent some time as a farm manager in his native Yorkshire before entering the fertiliser industry. He joined L and K as an advisory representative ten years ago, and afterwards spent three years in charge of merchants' accounts in the midlands and the north before being promoted to the post of agricultural sales manager in 1971.

Married, with three children, he lives at Swallowbeck Grange, Hykeham Road, Lincoln.