Now, as you know, I am not one to criticise but there are certain things that are going to have to be said. Let us face the facts to ourselves and admit that when it comes to getting on with golf club members, some of our performances leave a great deal to be desired. Now before I continue, I have to admit that I have been less than deferential to these good people on the odd rare occasion. Still, like many of my colleagues, I am just going to have to learn a few hard lessons when it comes to public relations. I know some of you have got the punters to the stage where they honestly believe solar energy radiates from the final component of your alimentary canal but believe me, you are in the minority. There is no doubt about it, some of us, maybe the majority of us, view the golf club member as somewhat objectionable, an object, even, of evil and depravity. So how has this sorry state of affairs come about? Well if we travel back in time half a century or so ago we find that we were actually considered to be of the same social standing as our professional golfer friends. Both of us were one step above being in the gutter of society. But as the years have passed, the professional has risen up that ladder to get to the stage where the members give him the utmost in respect. We alas have stayed pretty much at the same level. But when you think about it, this was always inevitable, you just have to look at the life of the pro. Even those sad ones that spend practically all of their dismal existence in those seedy back rooms of their shops perched on a mountain of pornographic literature while watching Peruvian yak racing on Eurosport, have gained a certain approval from the membership. This is simply because they are theoretically at least able to do the one thing that nearly all club members can't, i.e. play golf to a reasonable standard.

As for the good ones, they are at the nucleus of golf club life in daily contact with all those critical key members. They own an Aladdin's cave full of the latest in golfing armoury, guaranteed to bestow the purchaser with eternal tranquillity. They are a veritable oracle of golfing technique, eager to part with this theoretical elixir for a mere 30 quid an hour. With their designer couture, hair by Antoine and sales patter honed at the finest estate agent schools they have taken on an almost God-like status within golf club society. Is it any wonder that when an attractive young female accidentally strays within the confines of a golf club, it is the assistant pros that get to fulfil their thoroughly unhygienic carnal urges on them long before any underprivileged grass cutter gets so much as a sniff in the relevant direction.

Let us now compare the life of we greenkeepers. Firstly, as is befitting to people of our class, we engage in manual work, we get dirty and sometimes drag this disease carrying filth into the clubhouse. We apparently spend vast amounts of the members' subscriptions without actually giving anything back into the club and on top of that just when the greens were getting nice we stick all these holes in them. Add to this the temporary green factor, trolley bans, course closure, our habitual use of deadly chemicals and the fact that the course down the road is always bloody immaculate and what chance do we...
have.

It's a wonder we are not pelied with rotten eggs as we put them off their strokes while driving those noisy machines everywhere.

There is no doubt about it, the life of the greenkeeper comes with built-in unpopularity.

The standard method we have always adopted in trying to gain some sort of respect, is to baftle them with scientific concepts, e.g., the role of the micro-organisms. Our answer would go something like; “Networking” I believe is the modern equivalent of the old-fashioned conversation. I have worked for a Head Greenkeeper in the past who always used this format of conversation when faced with committee members. It consisted mainly of buzzwords.

So what else can we do to drag ourselves out of this sea of loathing? Well it's just an idea but maybe it's bold enough to be the suggestion of having a branch of social pleasantries with them. When dealing with the Lady Treasurer, for example, you can reply to the question, “How was your shot on the 16th today?” with something like, “That was impressive.”

The key is slowly at first, build up further associations some of which may prove to be very useful in the future. Eventually he or she will become a key member of that group.

That mutual regard can then be developed and expanded to other members of the club. They may not know the other members but the greenkeeper will start to get on well with them. What if he then started to play a bit of golf himself at the weekends. He does not have to play with the members themselves. It is when he is in the clubhouse with them before and after that the good work could be done. He could go from one group to another and spotting a previously unacquainted face would ask “How are things going?” “How did you play?” “I saw your shot on the 16th today.” That was impressive.”

It does not matter how stupid the suggestion is and we all know just how stupid they can get, just try to be as diplomatic as possible.

I could go on but I am sure you could all come up with your own techniques. I am not promising the end of all your woes but give it a go; it may just help, it certainly helped me.

Sandy McDowell
Head Greenkeeper, Sludgewcombe Play and Play

picture is not so hypothetical and is indeed happening to literally 100’s of us all over the world.

But what if this greenkeeper came into work one day and as well as his cheery wave to the regular golfers he sees he also has a little chat to them when they get back to the clubhouse. “How was you’re game today?” he may ask. Believe me, to a golfer the most important subject in the known universe is his golf game and so he will relish the prospect of detailing every aspect of his talents to the greenkeeper in question. In reality of course the golfer’s golf game is the most boring subject known to mankind but if that greenkeeper can appear to show genuine interest, he will quickly develop a certain rapport with the golfer.

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August 2000 Greenkeeper International