

# SPORTS TURF RESEARCH INSTITUTE

## WORKING WITH THE CHAIRMAN OF GREEN

A SUCCESSFUL working relationship comes from understanding the other man's problems and making sure he understands yours.

A club member becomes the Chairman of Green for many and varied reasons – it may be a vital stepping stone to becoming Captain; he may be asked to stand because the Captain thinks he knows about growing plants or has a nice lawn; he may be bullied into the job by a few disaffected pals.

Whatever the reason, the common thread is that he knows nothing whatsoever about turf or its management. If he accepts this, then he can be helped through his term of office without any more acrimony that can exist in any working relationship.

Either way, the Chairman of Green is elected on the basis that he will direct and motivate course management to the highest standards for the least possible financial input. While in providing funds for the course, he has, in addition, to compete with the requirements of all the other Chairmen which make up the General Committee, all wanting the lions share of a limited pot. This throws up the first big hurdle, if the Chairman of Green does not understand turf management how can he argue effectively against demands for expenditure which is readily understandable – new carpets/curtains, roofing repairs, nicer tiles in the locker room?

Then within the budget achieved he has to allocate priorities between expenditure on the course on readily understandable items (tree planting, flower beds, digging a lake), expensive but essential treatments which have less obvious benefits (e.g. top dressing) and whatever magic solution to all golf course ills which is in vogue and has transformed the course down the road ("it looked wonderful when they had the Pro-Am, why can't our course look like that all the time?").

Then the final blows to compound the confusion (concussion?) are delivered every time the man steps into the Clubhouse or tries to get some value from his own subscription by actually playing the course. Complaints, suggestions, hints and outright aggression can be virtually continuous, often coming from the same group of 30 or so which exists in any members clubs, usually representing low handicappers and/or senior members whose arguments are difficult to counter at the best of times.

With all these problems associated with an organisation the Chairman will have joined for pleasure or relaxation, it is little wonder his reaction is often to put pressure on the Greenkeeper, who normally is the **only** person at the club who knows what turf management is about, simply to take some of the weight off his own back. The fault lies in the system rather than the individual, but while the movement to change the committee system is growing, essentially it is going to take a long time for the evolution to professional (not Golf Professional) course management to filter through the system.

So, in the meantime, what can be done to ease the burden of responsibility, and consequently to aim for a more equitable working relationship?

Nothing can be done passively, simply by keeping out of the way or by acquiescence. All this leads to is small problems growing into large ones. By the same token nothing is to be achieved through bloody-minded confrontation, nor indeed by the belief that the Green Committee should accept everything the Greenkeeper tells them in gospel, and provide everything that is asked for without question. This does not happen in any working situation whether it be on a golf course or not.

Active development of a working relationship with the Chairman of Green and his Committee comes through provision of usable information, i.e., in a form which is understandable both technically and financially.

And if this usable information can be backed up with an independent viewpoint, so much the better.

Simple measurements are a primary issue here, as figures are so much more convincing than are subjective opinions given to a Chairman and in turn to his Committee, then beyond that to his fellow club members. Measurements and records can be simple and easy to make note of, and with facts concerning the course to hand, arguments can become irrefutable.

### "Nothing can be done by acquiescence . . . nor by bloody-minded competition"

For example, how many know the precise area of mown turf, or the area of sand on a course? Such figures are as essential in preparing budgets as they are in applying effective sprays, or indeed in calculating the necessary number of man-hours per week to keep management ticking over.

Are temperature and rainfall measurements taken? And is soil moisture availability checked routinely during spells of dry weather? Are records kept of when, how, by whom, in what time, and with what effect, for long-term reference? Is information on machinery usage, settings, servicing, repair costs kept up to date?

These are just a few points among many which can be compiled in routine reports on the golf course, which can be tied in with measurements and impressions of the condition of the turf itself (turf quality, green spread, thickness of thatch, depth of rooting, proneness to ponding, etc., etc.) and what action needs to be taken to alleviate prevailing and potential problems.

Such a presentation of information in the widest sense on all aspects of "per-

formance" is routine matter in a commercial undertaking, and similar approaches must be applied too to golf course management if we are to see the status of the man in charge of the course to change from Head Greenkeeper to Course Manager other than in name only, and to bring with this change an elevation in professional respect from the golfing public as a whole.

The availability of this sort of information also helps greatly in getting most value from outside back-up. That is, people to be used for supply of specialist facts and figures – the agronomist, the architect, or the ecological consultant, among others.

Whilst some resist their invitation to a club, at the end of the day this is a negative attitude because they save time, money and blood pressure, by serving to take discussion and debate outside the realms of Clubhouse politics. They have no particular axe to grind at any one club. Being able to reply to any criticism by saying professional advice has been taken and is being implemented is just as valuable to the Greenkeeper as it is to the Chairman of Green.

Beyond the short-term value of impressing employers by being able to present hard facts and figures, and by taking the trouble to measure progress and efficiency, and using outside advice to the best advantage of self and the course, longer term, such information is invaluable in forming the basis for a course management policy document. This is something every club should have, covering every aspect of work on the green, over periods of several years at a time. If voted into the club's constitution, then the swings and roundabouts of constantly changing committees can be circumvented, bringing in vital long-term continuity.

Such documents are only produced if interest and enthusiasm can be generated through committees, because they involve a lot of hard work for a few. But once instilled within the structure of the club's management, setting standards and making provision for meeting those standards becomes a responsibility which cannot be overturned by demands which ultimately cause a staggering from one crisis to the next even bigger crisis. Such an approach is still all too common.

Working with as well as for the Chairman of Green to the general benefit of the course can only benefit one's career in greenkeeping in the long term.

But still it has to be accepted that some Chairmen will never give way to the validity of anything they do not want to agree too, and at the end of the day these people are in charge and have to have their own way – good or bad. It is to be hoped that the current tide of change encouraged by the R & A and the Golf Unions will create a situation where these few become an ever-declining number, and a positive working relationship can be developed at every club.

David Stansfield, STRI Golf Unit.