Club management, membership and golf course superintendents who work together effectively.

The following steps are helpful in developing maintenance objectives:

1. Establish an open conversation among club management, the board and the superintendent and define expectations for the golf course. Decide which areas of the course deserve priority attention; for example, the health of a course’s putting greens is generally more important than that of the fairways, while the fairways are more important than the putting green surrounds. Discuss the level of conditioning that is expected for each of the playing areas. There will be differences in opinion, but compromises should be offered until all parties arrive at an agreement.

2. Develop an agronomic program to meet these objectives. Remember the superintendant and USGA Green Section are excellent informational resources.

3. Ensure that funding and staff can meet your chosen objectives. If the existing budget will allow complete implementation of your agronomic plan, the club is on the road to success. If not, consider reallocating resources from lower priority areas, changing the budget or staff size, or reducing the level of expectations to meet those objectives.

4. Implement and closely follow the plan. This ensures that the budget will be spent as efficiently as possible. Priorities will be well defined and inefficient use of resources will drop dramatically. Continue to involve the membership in your maintenance objectives as you carry out the program. A defined long-range plan and maintenance goals will provide continuity and help demonstrate the progress being made on the golf course.

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Credit: Through the Green, January/February 1998

Evaluating Golf Course Equipment for South Florida

The uniqueness of golf course operations in South Florida is often misunderstood when evaluating turf maintenance equipment. It is a fact that no other part of the United States places the severe demands on turf equipment like the golf course operations in South Florida. The following considerations are often overlooked in evaluating the initial purchase, replacement and maintenance of turf equipment.

First, consider the required daily time of use of machines such as mowers, utility vehicles and tractors. These units will be used in South Florida 1,000 to 1,600 hours per year as compared to 760 to 1,200 hours in Georgia and Texas, 400 to 650 hours in Ohio and Illinois, 300 to 600 hours in Michigan, New York and Canada. The element of use alone illustrates the drastically reduced life expectancy of equipment in South Florida as compared to other parts of the country.

The second consideration is the elements of sand, heat and corrosion. Florida sand does considerable damage to engines, bearings, chains, sprockets, blades and other vulnerable areas of equipment.

Compounding the problem is the extreme heat and humidity machines are exposed to during the summer causing special difficulty in air-cooled engines. The humid, salt air causes extensive corrosion damage on exposed metal components.

Another consideration that places demands on equipment is the bermudagrass used almost exclusively on South Florida golf courses. Bermudagrass requires constant de-thatching and aerating for best playing conditions and appearance, placing a burden on specialized equipment designed for these procedures.

A final consideration that is often overlooked is the time available for preventive maintenance. In the Northern states, the winter season allows time for complete inspection and rebuilding of equipment, preventing damage to major components.

The winter simply does not allow time for South Florida courses to do any major rebuilding because of the continued demand for attention by the golf course.

Courses that receive maximum life and efficiency from their equipment have a conscientious and detailed preventive maintenance program for replacing filters and oil, cleaning, lubricating and adjusting equipment. The superintendent has correctly found time to implement these daily procedures to assure maximum benefit and life from the equipment.

If all of the above factors are properly considered, the realistic expected life of equipment in South Florida is as follows:

- Greens, tees, apron mowers, 3 to 4 years.
- Fairway mowers, 4 to 6 years.
- Tractors, 4 to 6 years
- Utility vehicles, 4 to 5 years.
- Specialty equipment (aerators, de-thatchers, sprayers and sweepers), 5 to 6 years.

Several variables are involved in the life span of a piece of equipment, but the above schedule has proven to reliable for anticipating extensive repairs to equipment.

A realistic depreciation schedule of equipment would be even faster than the
Once you start gathering information on the problem, avoid the temptation to make hasty judgments. It may be helpful to walk away from the attention to detail as possible. The adage “leave no stone unturned” is applicable in this step. Factors that you want to consider are costs, labor, long-term savings verses short-term costs, environmental impacts, local, state and federal regulations and ordinances, in-house repairs verses contractors. This list will be dictated by your particular situation. Remember to be thorough in your computations. The more answers you can provide to management, the more competent you will look in their eyes.

STEP ONE - Define the Problem

It is impossible to fix a problem if you do not know what is broken. This first step is crucial to the process as a whole.

STEP TWO - Compile Data

Once you start gathering information on the problem, avoid the temptation to make hasty judgments. It may be helpful to walk away from the attention to detail as possible. The adage “leave no stone unturned” is applicable in this step. Factors that you want to consider are costs, labor, long-term savings verses short-term costs, environmental impacts, local, state and federal regulations and ordinances, in-house repairs verses contractors. This list will be dictated by your particular situation. Remember to be thorough in your computations. The more answers you can provide to management, the more competent you will look in their eyes.

STEP THREE - Present Your Proposal to Management

You have defined the problem and found a solution. The final step is the most critical – selling your ideas to management. There is nothing more frustrating than having all your hard work and effort go to waste because you failed to properly prepare.

It may be helpful to think of yourself as an attorney going to court to defend a client. Each golf course is different in its superintendent / management hierarchy. It might be as simple as the superintendent and owner discussing business matters over lunch or as complicated as a superintendent having to deal with several layers of management. Whatever your situation is, the preparation should be the same.

In her book, Elements of Argument, Annette T. Rottenberg identifies five key areas to help you with selling your idea to management. Make your proposal clear. All terms of the proposal should be precisely defined.

If necessary, establish the need for a change. Sometimes a problem does not exist but a need for change is in order. The old saying, “this is the way we have always done it” comes into play. As a superintendent, you should always be looking for ways to constantly improve