



Superintendent Public Relations

It's Frequently Much Harder Than Growing Grass:

Sometimes, when the subject of golf course superintendents' image and visibility comes up, people either get angry, anxious or ambiguous. The word "image" today can conjure connotations of spin doctors and Madison Avenue hype... inferences of smoke and mirrors or sound bites. There is definitely something about the terminology that seems foreign to the traditional perceptions of the superintendent's role in golf.

Perhaps it's because the superintendent's traditional role has changed not so much in substance but in scope that many think special emphasis on our "image" is indeed warranted. Image is perception and perception is a person's reality. There is nothing wrong about superintendents being perceived as professional businessmen. The fact that part of their day may be spent getting their hands dirty is not a complete reflection on the rest of their responsibilities. A surgeon gets bloody hands, but he is also highly respected for his knowledge and skill.

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I learned that lesson the hard way. I will never forget the day I was standing with the golf pro on the steps of the Isleworth clubhouse and a member pulls up in his cart and says to the pro, "Hey Dave, the course is looking great!"

Here I was busting my butt trying to manage bentgrass greens in Orlando, working 358 days straight my first year and the pro is getting a compliment on course conditions! Obviously, I was doing my turf job very well, but my public relations and image needed some work.

For all those who view efforts to enhance the superintendent's image as

misguided, off target or a waste of time, please remember that communications and information are the currency of the times. A superintendent's image should not be a veneer and visibility should not just a photo op! Thoughtful, factual communications paired with performance and timely appearances will generate the kind of positive image and visibility our profession is seeking.

Salesmanship - From A Superintendent's Perspective

The image that a superintendent has of himself as a turf manager is certainly understandable. What I see is the lack of conscious understanding by many of my peers that a superintendent is re-

The Superintendent as Salesman

Selling your budget will include:

- Financial compensations for yourself and your staff.
- Projects, renovations or course improvements.
- Reasons to replace old and worn out equipment.
- Reasons to attend educational and chapter meetings to better yourself.
- Long range programs.

To your members you will have to sell:

- Specific maintenance procedures and how it effects golfers like topdressing, aerifying, pesticide applications, etc.
- Specific maintenance/playing condition/pace of play issues like green speed, rough height, cup positions, etc.

- Yourself as a complete business professional not just a turf manager or a greenkeeper.
- Solutions to problems whether they be a result your decisions, your staff, your superiors or natural disasters.

To your staff you will have to sell:

- The why's and how's of specific maintenance procedures.
- Membership requirements.
- Club rules and policies
- Training and compliance with safety procedures and requirements.



ally a salesman with a turf management background.

When you're sitting across the table from a sales representative have you ever thought, "I could never do what he does. I couldn't sell for a living." Well, it just isn't true.

More and more younger people are getting into the turf management business. They come with education geared

for the turf industry. They've worked at some very impressive clubs. They have turf experience in all areas but there's a gap in this education — salesmanship.

Right from the time you get your staff started in the morning, you become a salesman. As you explain the assignments for the day, you're telling them that this is important and necessary. You may even explain why and how what they do

will benefit the course, the club, members and themselves. Isn't that selling? You're selling ideas, concepts, programs and even a feeling of self accomplishment. You're selling them the purpose of doing their job in a particular manner and why. How good you sell it will determine how they feel and how well they do it.

Later in the morning you stop by the pro shop. In the course of conversation you let the pro know about a problem with a particular green and, for the next few minutes, you give him some basic facts of what occurred and what you are doing to correct the situation. Plus you tell him that if a member happens to ask what is going on with that green, he can now provide a knowledgeable answer. Now, you've not only been selling valuable information to him but now you have a sales partner with the members.

When you analyze your day you will find many examples of your "salesmanship." Within your club's operation you will have to sell and several are listed in the box on page 42.

You could spend days explaining how to sell these ideas and concepts. Numerous seminars are available on how to sell. There are speakers and book writers who have made fortunes teaching people how to sell. In fact, I encourage everyone to attend a seminar or read about these selling ideas. What sales technique you use will probably be a combination of these ideas.

I'd like to share a few ideas that have worked well for me:

- Be prepared to back up your ideas and concepts with sound reasoning, university research, consultant recommendations, statistics, reports, quotations, etc.

- Communicate. Communicate. Communicate. If you work in a vacuum and don't talk to anyone then you open yourself up to letting others talk about you. Use all your resources to let everyone know what is going on. Use bulletin boards, club newsletters, memos, photos, faxes and e-mails. Hang out on the first tee on Mens' and Ladies' Days. Eat lunch in the clubhouse. Seek out and inform influential golfers.

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- Take the time to explain to your supervisor the pros and cons of an issue. Let them become part of the decision making process.

- Listen to what others have to say. Don't always dominate a conversation.

- Be proactive when problems occur. Let people know what occurred, why and what you are doing about it.

- Present yourself in a positive and confident manner. Speak clearly and practice your presentations in front of a mirror or in front of your wife. This is especially helpful if you have a problem with public speaking.

- Dress appropriately for the situation. Coat and tie for board meetings or formal presentations. Clean and conservative apparel for most other situations.

- Prepare typed documents or reports detailing budgets and expense line items. Be specific but brief and to the point. Be accurate. If you can't type, find someone who can. Learn how to use computer word processing programs. Gone are the days of handwritten material.

- Work to improve yourself and your staff. Have training sessions for them and attend seminars or meetings to learn what is going on around you. Keep updated on trends in the industry.

- Ask others for help. Our own egos can get in the way of solving problems. There are others who can help you learn. Call upon your peers, consultants, university personnel or technical representatives to help solve problems. Learn to share ideas, concepts, solutions and problems at chapter meetings and in trade publications.

- Read educational journals and browse the Internet. There are a lot of sources out there to get information. Look and Inquire.

Your "salesmanship" skills result in an image you will project to those you work for and work with. Fine tune your style and technique constantly. And finally, keep yourself approachable and visible.

STEVE PEARSON, CGCS
The Falls C.C.

Resorting to Your Image and Your Visibility

It is a hard thing to promote the superintendent position at a resort course

that doesn't have a membership. When you turn approximately 65,000 rounds per year, you rarely see the same person twice.

So you have to focus on the areas where you can make an impact: dress code, on-course contact with guests, and visibility to the golf operations people, which include the head professional, the area manager, and the staff of rangers, starters, and pro shop.

Superintendent dress code is a fairly simple subject here at Disney because a union contract prohibits us from doing any work that could be done by an hourly employee. So management will generally dress in a nice golf shirt, slacks, and dressy work or smooth-soled golf shoes. The maintenance crew is required to wear a costume that is provided and cleaned by the company. The new hires are also provided with temporary costumes until they receive their permanent sets. Name tags are a must for everyone.

Grooming is a big issue at Disney and everyone is expected to be clean-shaven and meet Disney standards for hair length. Tattoos and earrings are not allowed. Having everyone looking neat and in proper uniform, provides a statement of professionalism that is becoming more and more important in our industry.

Contact with guests is minimal for the maintenance crew. We begin our day between 4 and 5 a.m., depending on what is scheduled for maintenance and if there are any events that day. The first golfers will normally be on the course at 7. The crew usually will not see any golfers during their first assignments but may during their second jobs.

Golf course etiquette is highly stressed. The crew is instructed not to bother the golfers in any way. Obviously, some work goes on during play, such as rough mowing, weed eating, and edging paths. So the crew is trained to read the situation and to respond properly to "the look" that we have all received from time to time. Any complaints that we receive are brought to the attention of the responsible crew member and documented.

Guest contact by the superintendent is what Disney calls a "guest satisfier." It

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shows the golfer that you care how their round is going and that you are available if there are any problems. As you go about your business on the course, it is very easy to approach golfers and make yourself accessible to them.

Once the crew is gone for the day, I will usually make an "afternoon run" and check on the condition of the course. Moisture levels are always a big concern in the afternoon and it is amazing the amount of conversation that a simple soil probe can generate. It is a great way to break the ice, talk a little about conditions, the weather, or even give a basic soil profile lesson.

Golfers will take an interest in what you are doing and what a great opportunity for some basic education. A word of caution, however: It is wise to work backward from 18 and not to follow the same group around; otherwise you will be the one receiving the education, and I think we've all been there before.

Communication with the golf operations staff is critical at any facility. This is where everyone must be working together to make things run smoothly. We have all been caught by surprise when that 8:30 shotgun goes out at 8:00, or when you thought you had arranged for a No. 10 start and instead play went out on No. 1.