Golf said to lag behind in management innovation

By Andrew Cornesky

Despite the need to prepare for the new customer by becoming more flexible and responsive to change, managers of many golf and country clubs still live in the past. They resist innovation. In fact, most industries adopt new management practices at least twice as fast as golf.

Golf and country clubs are probably in the same position as our automobile industry in the 1950s: They believe they are the only supplier of the desired product, so they do not have to be so concerned about change.

In our travels we had the chance to study many golf clubs. We made a list of 77 Total Quality Management (TQM) items that have been adopted by our best industries, i.e., Ford Motor Co., Xerox, Proctor & Gamble, IBM, Apple, etc., and compared them to 136 golf and/or country clubs. For example, the list included:

1. Your facility has posted a clear mission statement for all to see.
2. Your facility has a quality manual that encourages employee initiative, self-directed responsibility, quality teams, and continuous improvement.
3. Your standard operating procedure includes methods to communicate clearly and regularly the expectation that all processes and procedures exist to help all stakeholders (employees and customers) develop to their full potential.
4. The manager conducts research and gathers data to do systematic planning to anticipate problems associated with meeting the club’s objectives and to correct the problems before they occur.
5. You compare your performance to the club’s where the performance of employees is

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than clubs that had virtually no competition. One might think the stress in clubs with declining memberships or small revenue reserves would induce innovation quicker. This was not true.

One might think innovations that required significant capital would be adopted more slowly than those that did not. Again, this was untrue. We could not find any correlation, but then again, our sample size is rather small.

One might think that clubs where either the managers had a higher education, or the members had advanced degrees would be most likely to implement TQM procedures. Again, no correlation.

Why is the pace of innovation in golf so slow? Perhaps they are insulated from competitive pressures that would force them to stay on the cutting edge of good management in attempts to please the stakeholders. Each facility differs from all others. Some are more convenient for a certain group of stakeholders. Others have a more prestigious atmosphere and some degree of market power that enable them to resist the competition. They can draw from a larger market area. Some have their markets assured, so they are not particularly responsive to innovation.

It appears, therefore, that golf and country clubs are indeed insulated from many competitive pressures. But when either the supply of clubs begins to meet and exceed the demand — and this will happen within the next five years — or when the facility area begins to take a TQM approach like the Japanese automobile industry did in the 1960s, the playing field will be changed.

No longer will facility managers operate reactively. Their agendas will not be molded by who screams the loudest. Short-term problems will not be as important as the large picture.

A TV ad for an oil filter says, "Pay me now, or pay me later." I say, "Innovate and use TQM principles now, or suffer later."

**OB Sports**

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Pursuing several possibilities in Seattle and other prominent Western markets, we both knew it was the right time for him to rejoin the company.

Green, who has managed OB’s Angel Park Golf Club in Las Vegas for the past 18 months, is a former president of the Southwest Section PGA. In 1994, he was named the section’s Golf Professional of the Year while serving as director of golf at Club Terravita in Scottsdale, Ariz.

In other OB Sports Golf Management news, Bill Campbell has been named vice president of construction and agronomy, and Stacey Little has been promoted to director of merchandise.

Campbell was instrumental in the redesign and construction of Edgewood Tahoe along with Vincent back in the late 1970s and has worked in various capacities for OB Sports since that time. He also served as superintendent for Sahalee Country Club, host of next year’s PGA Championship, from 1979-1988.

Little has coordinated the buying and golf shop presentation for The Legacy Golf Club since 1990 and now oversees the long-term direction and philosophy for all OB golf shops.

At John Fought Design, the golf course design division of OB Sports, Todd Schroeder has been hired as a design associate. Schroeder’s background includes three years of experience with Wadsworth Golf Construction, where he supervised key areas of construction including Rush Creek Golf Club in Maple Grove, Minn., a course Fought co-designed along with Bob Cupp.