



John Walsh
Editor

Golfer relations

While talking with many golf course superintendents for a story about burnout (page 50), it was hammered home again that you love the technical aspect of your jobs. It's why most of you entered the business in the first place. Simply put, you like to work outside and grow and maintain turfgrass so golfers can enjoy it. That technical expertise translates into compliments from golfers, right? Well maybe sometimes, but unfortunately the more ignorant, negative and demanding comments from golfers are the ones that cause consternation among you guys (and gals) and stress you out. That's the part of the job many of you dislike – dealing with golfers.

At the average club, how many members understand your job and what it takes to maintain the course they play? That could be evident by the amount of complaining you hear. There's always a vocal minority (maybe it's bigger) who rub you the wrong way.

The superintendent position has evolved from strictly working on the course, with little interaction with club management and members, to one in which a larger part of the job involves dealing with management and golfers. Obviously, this varies from job to job, depending on the responsibilities.

Many of you are climbing the golf management ladder and thinking about becoming general managers. Dealing with golfers becomes more prevalent with that job. Jim Singerling, chief executive officer of the Club Managers Association of America, sheds light on what a typical general manager deals with (page 24). It sounds like many of you stress about the very thing you would be spending most of your time doing as general managers.

More communication between golfers and superintendents is needed and could help alleviate some of that stress. To deal with golfers more effectively, you should be getting pointers from general managers, especially those who used to be superintendents, as well as your peers. Sharing ideas usually helps.

Veteran superintendents have said that when they were younger they didn't want many golfers on the course because they were trying to maintain certain conditions and golfers didn't help that. But in their wisdom, they now realize, because

this industry is a business, the more golfers the better. However, it can be a double-edged sword. The more golfers there are, the more money in the budget, but the more wear the course endures.

If dealing with golfers is getting you down, something needs to be done about it because golfer/superintendent interaction is likely to become more involved in the future. Young golfers in their preteens and early teens are more sophisticated than their counterparts a generation ago. Their expectations are high and could add to the strain of the golfer/superintendent relationship.

You need to develop a clear, open line of communication with golfers – one that's not a one-way street in which golfers just unload on you, but one in which you can explain your side of the story. "The customer is always right" mentality is acceptable to a point, but you need to respond to golfers to help them understand why things are the way they are. Golfers need to listen. There are too many golfers who don't respect you enough.

This is a tough situation because you can't expect golfers to study or learn more about course maintenance. Many golfers have the mentality that they're on the golf course to have fun, not learn. So, unfortunately, the onus is on you to do more to improve communication and the relationship.

You could pick out the golfers or members who want to learn more about course maintenance and impart wisdom on them with the hopes that they will, in turn, tell others. Maybe the knowledge will spread.

I'd like to hear from those superintendents who have managed that line of communication with golfers successfully. I'd like to hear success stories in which golfers became enlightened because they actually listened to you. E-mail me at jwalsh@gie.net or visit the message board on the *Golf Course News* Web site to share these golfer-relation stories.

And here's to improving the golfer/superintendent relationship and hoping the worst part of your job gets better. GCN

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