

GOLF FACILITY MANAGEMENT AND THE SUPERINTENDENT

Golf course superintendents today are concerned with management at the golf facility primarily as it affects their position as professional career people. Superintendents generally are technically and scientifically oriented people. More than ever they come to the field with formal education, coupled with background and experience in turfgrass management.

They are professionals — as opposed to maintenance foremen. They carry a major responsibility in keeping the golf facility playable and at the same time in putting together an efficient labor force and equipment package. Maintenance inputs today also consist of chemicals and fertilizers, among others, that require a high degree of technical knowledge and experience.

As professionals, golf course superintendents seek career advancement, which may well be limited with the general manager concept. More important, it may limit the superintendent's participation in committee and board meetings. Superintendents need a liaison with the membership, as well as with the green committee members and the board of directors. It is this contact with members where the superintendents may sell their plans, their promotions and themselves as professionals. Their success or failure often hinges on ability to first interpret what levels of excellence the membership desires and then to turn these desires into

This Midwest superintendent is against the general manager concept of country club management — and tells why

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reality on the course.

The general manager concept which superintendents most often fail to support is that at the private country club. Here the overall manager type of administration tends to damage the identity, the stability, the welfare and finally the professionalism of the golf course superintendent. His potential salary level will likely be decreased. He is more likely to be isolated from official contact with the membership.

Superintendents take exception to the common idea that a general manager reduces the demand in personal time and effort among club officials in attending club affairs. The contrary is more likely to be true. Much time can be, and often is, wasted at committee and board meetings when the technical experts such as the pros and the superintendents are not in attendance. Even more time can be wasted when the committees have not reviewed the subject matter with the technical experts and presented consensus recommendations.

There is another factor which is unique to the administration of a country club. Club operation is quite different from the industrial corporation where profit-making is all-important. In the country club operation, precise timing and coordination are secondary to the pleasure, service, comfort and the various levels of luxury associated with club membership. A country club is really an extension of the member's home and where he is mainly concerned with the pleasant rewards of social and recreational activity.

Such may not be the case with the privately owned public course or the large corporation golf complex. In case of the latter, operations may include two or more courses, a hotel, real estate sales and related activities. This is a profit-making operation and large enough to justify a general manager to coordinate all aspects of the total business. Privately owned courses are also profit-oriented operations. The owners are the general managers and history points to their success at the job. They are set up to make a profit and the customers have little to say about the standards of service or maintenance. The owners often entirely eliminate the golf pro and the owner takes the profit from the pro shop, car rentals, etc. Clubhouse activity under the one-man ownership usually centers around the bar operation. Food and locker services are kept to a

minimum if offered at all. Insofar as the golf course itself, private owners realize they must compete with the other fee courses and as a result, public course superintendents earn as good salaries as many private club superintendents.

In my opinion, the golf course superintendent carries a heavy load of responsibility as a member of the triumvirate of superintendent, pro and club manager. Decisions made by the course superintendent exert a major impact on the total club operation. For example, burn out a few greens with chemicals, lose 50 percent of the *Poa annua* fairways and the business of play declines rapidly.

Further, the superintendent is called upon to take regular calculated risks with the timing of fertilizer and chemical applications that often depend on the good or bad weather which will follow within the coming days and weeks. They can become "champions" or "bums" overnight. This is the art and science of turfgrass management and points up the need for trained professional superintendents.

Few superintendents are recognized for their contributions which have improved playing surfaces for the golfing public. Consider the resort areas such as Arizona, California and the Southeast. Today, they have beautiful, fine turf which make them focal points for the winter tourist golfer. Three decades ago, this was not the case.

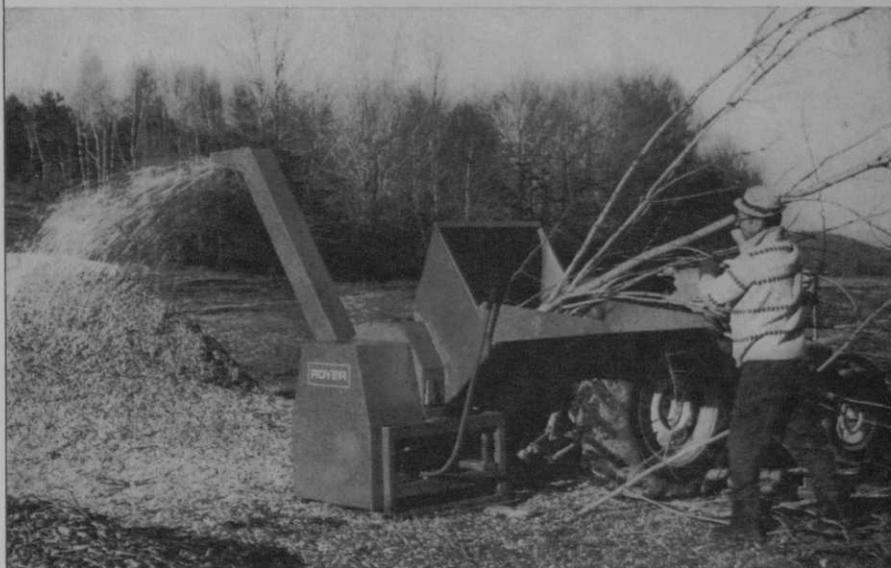
To sum up golf facility administration today, we could say that, generally speaking, the superintendents and golf pros support the triumvirate organization. The club managers as a group appear to favor the general manager concept. The trend indicates that 40 percent or more clubs have moved toward this general manager idea. Club managers seem to believe that general managership upgrades their profession, their position, their salary and their club operation.

Speaking from the superintendent's position, I have to oppose the general manager concept. My belief is that a triumvirate system of management can best serve the private club and the industry of golf as a whole. This is a worthy goal and one worth the best efforts of all professional technicians serving the field. □

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