

# Viewpoint

## What a golf club executive expects from a superintendent

by Dr. Doug Brewer

From my perspective of over 15 years of involvement as a golf executive at various levels, I am convinced of the importance of a good working relationship between the executive and the superintendent. This is sometimes an impossible thing to develop for a variety of reasons, most of which result from a different perspective on the relationship from either end.

I hope I can convince you that this barrier is readily surmounted with fact, perseverance, and understanding on both sides. You must surely realize that most golf executives know nothing of the "science" of growing grass — but they think they do! They all have lawns, and they know all that is required is seed, soil, water, fertilizer, and occasionally weed killer. On the other hand, the superintendent is rarely a sufficiently skilled player of the game to understand the web of competitive zeal that entangles a golfer once he or she gets beyond the introductory level.

In theory, the game of golf is very simple; in practice, as we all know, it's not so simple; it's damn frustrating most of the time

The point is, the golfer, and to a large extent therefore, the golf executive has a very narrow focus on his involvement in the total picture. Because of this narrow outlook, you the superintendent have an almost impossible responsibility — you must ensure that every square foot of your course is perfectly groomed so as not to cause problems (lost strokes) to any of your golfers, because if you don't, you'll surely hear about it.

Not only that, you must maintain this "Augusta National" condition with minimal dollars. Of course, there is a very easy way to accomplish this — make the holes three times as big, fill in the bunkers, eliminate roughs, cut down all the trees, etc. But we all know that most of the excitement of the game of golf would be gone without the "hazards" that we have come to know and love.

Now let's turn to the specific expectations that I as a golf executive have of my superintendents: Firstly, in the area of planning, the executive expects detailed analysis of requirements for:

- 1) Manpower — integrated manhours required, peak period problems (spring, fall), efficiency and quality of individuals.
- 2) Equipment — lifetime expectations (financing), manpower savings, efficiency and quality, technology and maintenance.
- 3) Seed and fertilizer — specifications dependent upon soil conditions, physical and chemical soils analysis, turf research awareness.
- 4) Chemicals — environmental hazards, mass application vs. spot treatment.

5) Local problems.

Superintendents must translate these details into understandable language for the "lay" executive. This requires patience and diplomacy as well as knowledge. Moreover, the superintendent must also be a combination purchasing agent, accountant, personnel manager, etc.

Secondly, the executive expects the superintendent to keep adequate statistics and records as a background to good planning, e.g.:

- Manpower log — time spent each day.
- Machinery inventory — time spent on maintenance, priority for replacement, etc.
- Soil analysis results for last 5 years — to show whether improvement is occurring, etc.

One word of caution here: most of the time these will be for reference only; there can be a problem of overkill with too much data.

Thirdly, the executive expects any plans for the year to be implemented totally come hell or high water.

That is, he expects results, not excuses. Tips and suggestions:

1) Ask to report periodically directly to the board and not through the greens chairman. Also go to the annual general meeting and be available to answer questions.

2) Get to know your board members and as many of the more important members as possible — preferably on a first-name basis — e.g., "How'd it go today? See anything wrong?" Make notes and fix it, then report back.

3) Manage your operation — be aggressive, not passive. Show by example — move around. Understand the psychology of personnel management — take an interest in the individual, give compliments, and so on.

4) Communicate with members on specifics of program — e.g., ladies' day and topdressing.

5) Keep your knowledge up-to-date — reading, short courses, etc. — and demand funds for this. Another word of caution — test new chemicals first and talk to other superintendents about chemicals, fertilizer, equipment.

6) Do something obvious each year.

In summary — with good records, good planning, and good execution you'll be around a lot longer than a temporary board member.

*Dean of Science at the University of New Brunswick, Dr. Doug Brewer has been greens chairman and president of the Fredericton, N.B., golf club, president of two provincial golf associations, and chairman of a golf course advisory board for his province's board of tourism. His comments appear here courtesy of the Canadian Golf Superintendents Association.*

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