

At some point in your career, someone is going to decide that he or she doesn't like your style. When you are lined up in the cross hairs of club politics, you'll find that some shooters are deadly accurate and others couldn't hit the broadside of a pump house. But they all have trigger fingers and the shots *are* going to come.

Know thine enemy

One of the best pieces of advice I ever received was to seek out possible assassins and share a meal with them. Maybe you don't have to do a formal lunch at your facility, but the reality is that the devil you know is better than the devil you don't. What gets said behind your back is hard to take, but giving your enemy an opportunity to tell you what he really thinks of you and answering his remarks while looking him in the eye will probably reduce the blind shots aimed at your head.

It's not easy to choke down your Chinese chicken salad while some codger reflects on how fast the greens were in 1930. It's harder yet to tell Dr. Super Surgeon that you still haven't figured out the latest disease outbreak, when he's saying, "It's only grass. What's the problem?" I'll bet you don't want to attend the ladies lunch and partake of tuna salad in a hollowed-out tomato while a golfer, who just carded 54 putts, claims her round was ruined when one of your crew members started a mower 500 yards away from her when she was putting on the No. 11 green. You don't want to eat the snack bar's half-cooked Hole-in-One Pancake with an egg in the middle on Sunday morning and listen to Mr. Well-Traveled tell you that every course he played on his last trip was better than yours.

It's not easy dealing with the hard cases. But if you do, you may find people's perceptions can be altered. You must face your enemies. You may even win them over.

Learn to write and speak effectively

I never knew that I could write well until one summer we had our turn in the barrel and "the greens weren't as good as they should have been." The rumors were flying around our club, and I had had enough. So I wrote a nice letter to

In the Cross Hairs of Club Politics

BY DAVE WILBER



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the members that was handed out in the golf shop and posted above the urinals and on bulletin boards. I explained what I knew and what I didn't know, and asserted that I'd like them to get behind me because it was the right thing to do. It worked. I keep a copy of that letter to remind me that communication is vital, and that doing it well helps you get through tough times.

Some Turfheads need work on their communication skills. Words, both written and spoken, are incredibly powerful tools that the modern superintendent must learn to use well. Plenty of help is available if you need it.

But remember: There's communication and there's blabbering. Superintendents who feel the need to tell everything they know or think they know may as well enclose themselves in a soundproof booth because nobody's listening.

Let them shoot each other

Club politics can get nasty. Old issues and old stories mix with a little Scotch and take on lives of their own. Veterans of politics know the players are easy to spot. They are the same people who disagree with the same people — no matter what the issues.

It's not just a private club thing, either. One of the bloodiest war stories I've ever heard was at a public golf course charity event. The superintendent walked into an argument between the event's organizers, tried to choose sides and managed to get canned for reasons having nothing to do with the golf course's condition.

The bottom line: They didn't teach us in turf school — but they should have — that politics happen no matter where you are. But accepting the fact that you must deal with political affairs is another turf-management strength.

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