

Can We Talk?

Is Productive Communication Possible at Your Club?

I was touring a golf course recently with a fellow superintendent and was overwhelmed by how perfect his grounds were.

The fairways were tight and weed-free, greens were uniform—even the rough was consistent. Then a funny thing happened. A group of members stopped to give him their comments on the conditioning: “Hey, did you f— up the 12th hole yet?” “What the hell are you doing on number seven?” “These fairways are horrible; I can’t hit my three-wood off them.”

These are actual quotes from respectable members of a prestigious club. Four or five more groups approached us on our tour, and not one had a positive comment. There wasn’t a single, “Hello! Good afternoon.” It may not be this bad at all clubs, but a pervasively negative tone seems to be prevalent at many clubs today. What’s going on?

In the last few years, it appears that the playing surfaces at our clubs have gotten better and the appreciation of a job well done has diminished. Has this raised the stress level for you and your turf? Has the recent rash of job openings in the region made you more—or less—secure in your job position? I’m getting a stress headache just thinking about it. The stress on the average golf course superintendent is greater now than ever, and it’s not going to subside in the near future.

Why is this? Have we promised our members more every year so that it’s difficult to live up to expectations? Has TV golf conditioned our members to expect indoor arena conditions every day regardless of weather, amount of play or budgets? How about our members’ personal lives? Have they become negative from all the downsizing in business and the uncertainty of their immediate future?

I think the answer is yes to all three questions. I think one problem many of us have is promising the moon, even when we know our booster rocket is short on fuel. During the good years, Mother Nature may help us reach our destination safely, but during the bad years, even with 14-hour work days and the miracle cures for diseases, the finished product just doesn’t meet expectations.

Often the amount of play is too much, the window of opportunity to do “meaningful” work is small, and the cultural practices, so needed to maintain fine turf, are frowned upon by committee members. And beyond all that, the cost of producing a hundred acres of immaculate turf is usually more than our clubs’ budgets can handle. Then our members go home and watch a perfect golf course host the best players in the world. What do they think during commercials—“Time for a cold one?” Well, maybe, but more likely it’s “I hit a putt just like that today and my ball didn’t come close to the hole! Our greens are horrible.”

Television, which during the sixties was responsible for the upgrading and increased popularity of the game, has gone beyond that and dissects every aspect of the playing surface and the player’s golf swing. It is no longer a game

played on unique and different golf courses, which offer a multitude of diverse conditions. There are now written and unwritten uniformity standards which the announcers live by in the commentary of the action. On TV, golf greens all must putt the same. It doesn’t matter if one green is surrounded by trees and built of clay, and the next green is open and built of sand. Uniformity rules and “knowing the greens” doesn’t enter the commentary. Funny thing is that the turf management professionals have gotten so good that uniformity is usually achieved.

Television has increased our paychecks and decreased our job security. The average member, even at wealthier clubs, has seen his or her standard of living remain stagnant, or even decrease, in the last ten years. The profit margins are squeezed ever tighter. Downsizing has been the operative word since the mid-eighties in most larger corporations. Most people’s personal budgets aren’t so large that they can spend lavishly on non-essential items. Golf and club life may be essential to one’s mental health, but it usually falls after the house, car and schooling for the children.

How about the chaotic world around us? Just turn on the six o’clock news. Many of us have become desensitized to

(Continued on Page 22)

Par Ex®
introduces a
family of
mid-sized
fertilizer
grades
designed
to meet
the needs of
today's
closely-
mowed
turf.



WHY MID-SIZE GRADES FOR CLOSELY - MOWED TURF?

BECAUSE fairway-sized particles are too large to apply to closely-mowed turf.

BECAUSE greens-sized products can be difficult to spread.

BECAUSE IBDU is the most reliable, most consistent source of slow-release nitrogen.

For more information contact:

Precision Turf & Chemicals
3145 Sycamore Lane
Plymouth, MN 55441
612/559-5293

Ken Quandt
Territory Manager
West Allis, WI
414/327-3993

Can We Talk?—

(Continued from Page 20)

the killing and corruption broadcast on the evening news. But it does affect our psyche. After a tough week at work worrying about the Acme balloon account not producing as expected, and hearing rumors of a lay-off because of a poor quarter, and hearing from your wife that the car has died, and your kid is taking a school field trip into the city (right where a killing occurred last week), Joe Member is going to play a round of golf at the club. On the first tee he has high blood pressure, only two hours to play because he has to get home, and no practice since his last round. How is he ever going to shoot a good number? How is he going to complete his round calmly and full of praise for a job well done?

The job at hand isn't as simple as showing up for work and getting maximum efficiency out of the staff and yourself. That doesn't work at many clubs. We have to do more—not with our hands, but with our leadership—in several areas.

First, we need to put the game back into golf. How do we do this? Every club will be different. Maybe talk with

the pro or the club president or the golf chairman, whomever you have a good rapport with. Get the conversation around to recognizing any problems that may exist. Then you can take it in any positive direction you want. It will take many discussions before any tangible results are made.

Secondly, get the club to write a mission statement. If the club can express in writing what it wants and stands for, then it will be easier for you to communicate what needs to be done to achieve those goals. With a mission statement, you can go to any of the golfing industry consultants (USGA, NGF, state agronomists, fellow superintendents) and get supporting documentation on what is needed to do the job.

Thirdly, communicate to your golfers that when they play golf they should leave the negative trappings in the parking lot. This is a great game, and it is being hurt by people taking the sport out of it.

We cannot change the way society puts pressure on all of us. We can, by using a little imagination and foresight, change the way our members view us and our golf courses. We need to convince them that our few acres of turf are there for their enjoyment. Anything less, and they're not getting their money's worth. So during these winter months, think of ways to put a positive spin on what you do for your club and what your club does for its members. Our jobs and our mental health will only be made better with a little positive communication.

—Pat Kriksceonaltis
New Hampshire GCSA



AMERICAN

Irrigation & Turf Supply Inc.

Distributors of:

Legacy Series Irrigation

Buckner

*A Professional Partnership
of*

Hunter

- ★ *Sprinklers*
- ★ *Valve In Head Sprinklers*
Impact & Gear Drive
- ★ *Control Systems*
Stand Alone & Computer
- ★ *Valves - Plastic & Brass*

- ★ *Spears*
Fittings & Swing Joints
- ★ *Eagle Plastics*
PVC & Poly Pipe
- ★ *American Drainage Products*
- ★ *Rain-Jet - Fountains & Aerators*

2582 White Bear Ave., Maplewood, MN 55109 (612) 770-4066 (800) 238-5819
2080 East Center Circle, Plymouth, MN 55447 (612) 551-3662