

Relationship Between Golf Course Superintendent and Green Committee Chairman

DIVOTS NEWSLETTER, Miami Valley, GCSA

*Midwest Association of Golf Course Superintendents
23rd Annual Turf Clinic - December 3, 1975*

"This subject matter has to do with the relationship between the Golf Course Superintendent and the Club's Green Committee Chairman. Another way of saying this is their responsibilities to each other. I suppose I was chosen to discuss this because I have been Green Committee Chairman at Medinah since 1964, and if proper relationships haven't been established in that time — it's a hopeless case!

"One thing about those 12 years is that it certainly provided continuity which is so important in long range programs. There is, of course, with this long tenure, the danger of becoming complacent, a possible lack of new ideas, a sameness of emphasis, and so forth.

"I hope there is no evidence of that out on our Golf Courses!

"I must say, too, that there have been times when I wonder if things wouldn't go along just as well without a Greens Committee. I'll bet there are quite a few of you out there cheering that little idea!

"Seriously, however, overall, I do believe a Green Committee and its chairman can perform a valuable service to a club and be of use to the Golf Course Superintendent.

"The relationship between the Golf Course Superintendent and the Green Committee Chairman is dependent on many factors, including such basic things as the club's by-laws and organizational structure. It depends, too, on how much time the chairman has or will devote to his committee work. In my case, I see John Jackman quite often and we talk on the phone once or twice and often three times a week. I would like it better if I could get out on the grounds more often.

"The most important ingredients of a meaningful relationship, in my opinion, is to make sure there is understanding on common problems and goals, the establishment of trust in each other and good two-way communications on current conditions, problems and actions being taken.

"If the Green Committee and Chairman function properly, they provide a means of communication between superintendent and membership, which can be anywhere from 200 to 1,000 people. Without liaison, the Golf Course Superintendent conceivably could have these 200 to 1,000 individuals as bosses—a horrible thought—and a fate possibly worse than death. The Golf Course Superintendent should ideally answer only to one club member—the Green Committee Chairman. To me, this is one of the Chairman's prime responsibilities—to act as a 'buffer' between club members and the superintendent. Except as casual conversation, I see no reason why a superintendent needs to explain to a member why certain things were or were not done, or why conditions are one way or another. Now, I'm not

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so naive as to think that the superintendent will clam up or not respond to the club president of other members on occasion, but those are the exceptions we must accept. Explaining to the general membership is the duty of the Green Committee and its chairman; although the Golf Course Superintendent should be provided a means of communication directly to the membership if he so desires. This can be in the form of letters, articles in the club periodical, bulletin board notices, etc.

"The chairman and superintendent should make every effort to inform the membership of construction plans or work that may interfere with play ahead of time. It's best to avoid surprises.

"The Green Committee Chairman can be of help to the Golf Course superintendent by being alert to the comments of members relative to golf course maintenance. He can be observant himself as he plays his course and other courses and inform the superintendent of things he has noted or heard. These observances can then be evaluated by the superintendent. This type of communication by the chairman must be done in a constructive manner—not nit-picking or in the form of complaints.

"The Green Committee has the great responsibility of serving fellow members, by seeing to it that the type of golf course and grounds the members want, is maintained. This is often difficult to ascertain. The big pit-fall here is that too many green chairmen try to rebuild the course the way they want it. As a member, I would hardly appreciate the idea of some 18 handicapper using my dues to change a 40 year old golf course to suit his game. The ideas of a 2 handicapper might be just as

bad. I believe this is an area where the superintendents can and should help the club membership by stopping members and committeemen from doing anything silly, which could spoil a good golf course.

"Golf course alterations should be planned and done by experts, with the best interests of the total membership in mind. The gold committee, green committee, golf course superintendent, golf professional and, most important, a competent golf course architect should be involved when a course design change is being considered. The golf course superintendent should welcome this help and support since he can always have a shot at altering the plan to accommodate maintenance or changes based on his local knowledge of conditions. One thing I can guarantee - no alteration is accepted by 100% of the membership!

"Another pertinent duty of the chairman in establishing a proper relationship, is to see to it that the golf course superintendent, and only the superintendent, runs the grass-growing operation and everything related to it. This must be done in both a business-like way and a friendly, firm fashion. However, the green committee chairman has the right to be informed so that he can

(Continued on Page 6)

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Relationship

(Continued from Page 2)

again effectively act as liaison between the superintendent and the membership.

"Here at Medinah, John Jackman attends all our monthly green committee meetings, and is invited to participate occasionally at financial committee and building committee meetings as well as at board of directors meetings. His input is valued highly and is an example of good communications.

"The golf course superintendent must be supported fully by the green committee chairman and his committee. The green committee chairman should see to it that the superintendent has the support of all officers and directors of the club. This support is needed, for example, when it is necessary, in the judgement of the superintendent, to close the course, establish temporary greens or tees, restrict the use of golf cars, or any other action that affects normal play. To place this authority in hands other than the man directly responsible destroys the proper line of authority and may cause costly damage. This does not mean that the superintendent does not consult the golf professional and club manager or committee members, but the final decision must be his.

"In still another area, the green committee chairman must thoroughly understand the equipment and supply needs of the superintendent. Normally, the only way a

superintendent can get the things he needs to properly do his job is through the green committee chairman. This includes the securing of money, ideally through establishment of sound and reasonable budgets.

"It must be the responsibility of the golf course superintendent to develop and propose the course maintenance and capital budget.

"Budgeting must be a mutual effort, with equal consideration given to the superintendent's problems and desires of the membership. I suppose a superintendent can produce almost any grade of golf course quality dependent on the amount of money available. We'll have to allow some leeway for weather conditions.

"Working closely with the green committee chairman, a logical reason or argument must be formulated for each expenditure or cost center. This is necessary to defend the proposed budget to the finance committee, the board of directors and finally to the membership. Here is where you determine the quality golf course the membership is going to get. Here, too, is one of the real tests a golf course superintendent must undergo. To me, budget preparation, and then the big ask of living within that budget, is the name of the game.

"The green committee chairman must recognize the golf course superintendent as a real professional. Not only is he a turf-grower, but an agronomist, mechanical engineer, chemist, supervisor and business manager. We must do all we can to increase his skills in each of these areas.

"The chairman must insist that the superintendent be allowed and encouraged to attend, at club expense, seminars and meetings of various associations to which golf course superintendents and country clubs belong. The superintendent should take advantage of the U.S.G.A. services and the beneficial programs of universities and demonstrations by suppliers.

"The green committee should be alert to golf course news found in golf magazines, trade journals and publications. Contact with instructive and informative agencies is an essential adjunct to successful planning.

"The green committee chairman has other responsibilities in maintaining a good relationship with his golf course superintendent. For instance: the chairman, in



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my opinion, should not ask other golf course superintendents opinions or advise on correcting problems at the chairman's golf course. This obviously creates an awkward situation for everyone and probably should be met with stony silence!

"The same goes for calling in consultants. This must only be done with the approval of the superintendent, or better yet, at the superintendent's recommendation.

"Oddly enough, many club members are impressed with the use of consultants or experts in various fields.

"It might be a political gambit, but maybe golf course superintendents should consider using such services more often. I wonder how many club members know that golf course superintendents get together and discuss common problems! They should be told this. They should know about this very Clinic here today.

"Another policy the green committee chairman must observe is to deal only with the golf course superintendent. He must avoid the pitfall of ordering anyone in the grounds crew to do anything. This is an organizational no-no, since it dilutes the authority of the superintendent and lowers morale.

"Finally, the chairman should make every possible effort to see to it that the superintendent is fairly compensated and recognized for his work.

"I've talked quite a bit about the green committee chairman's responsibilities to the superintendent. Let's go the other way a bit.

"Aside from the normal turf growing function, a good relationship should foster a condition where the superintendent readily accepts the responsibility for attaining certain goals. I'm referring to such things as constant cost reduction through mechanization, better equipment, use of his own turf and tree nurseries, his own small scale experimentation on turf, chemicals, seeds, fertilizers, etc. I'd expect him to surround himself with competent workmen with high morale and capable of withstanding unionization.

"The individual crew member should be trained to do several jobs so that there is back-up available at all times. The superintendent and the green committee chairman must be concerned about the safety and general well-being of the crew including such items as lodging, wash-up facilities, food, hours of work, rates of pay, vacations, and every other working condition and fringe benefit.

"Later today, you're going to hear John Jackman give an interesting talk on his experiences relative to Medinah's hosting of the U.S. Open, so I will say very little about that event.

"From my point of view, however, the holding of this tournament strengthens the case for everything I've said about our relationship. It was a very busy and interesting period, what with two years of preparation and tending to hundreds of little details and several large projects. I wouldn't trade that experience for the world.

"At the beginning I mentioned that good relationships mean a sense of responsibility to each other, trust

in each other, an understanding of common goals and problems and good communication. In closing I'd just like to add one more and that is — that both parties use good old-fashioned horse-sense."

— D.F. Johnson

Ed. Note—Donald Johnson has been Green Chairman at Medinah C.C. for the past twelve years. Really a remarkable record.

Tournament (Continued from Page 1)

regular July golf outing.

In order to participate in this event, you must be Class A or B six months prior to the day the Tournament starts.

A & B members seeking to qualify for this event must do so on the days that were designated. If either round gets rained out it will be rescheduled with our August meeting.

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