

Golf course management

- a green committee view -

by John Harris
Green Committee Chairman
at Hankley Common Golf Club

HANKLEY COMMON Golf Club over the last few years has seen firm, all the round greens; (a vast improvement on the wet thatch ridden greens that greeted the arrival of Kevin Munt in April 1984) a heather conservation programme; a tree management programme; and a visible improvement in the skills of staff and the equipment with which they are provided to carry out their work.

These changes have been brought about through the foundation of a clear management philosophy which created the environment to allow greenstaff to make rapid progress since 1984, first under Kevin Munt and since April 1986 under the dedicated and skilled custody of Ian McMillan, supported by his highly motivated and well trained team.

The extent to which greenstaff can carry out their profession to the benefit of golfers is limited largely by the management environment they are working within. This article attempts to look at a management strategy for golf clubs and examines the implementation of this in the context of Hankley Common Golf Club. It will not provide all of the answers but my intention is to stimulate thought and discussion on a subject that has been largely neglected by the golfing press - a press that has historically concentrated a high percentage of its content on greenkeeping, greenkeeper training and trade information

Role of management.

The role of management in relation to greenkeeping in the golf club can be analysed under the following headings:

- Setting objectives
- Planning
- Budgeting
- Communicating
- Motivating
- Controlling

Objectives.

The setting of objectives can be viewed as producing a 'mission statement' that clarifies simply a club's policy in relation to the upkeep and development of the golf course. The mission statement will vary from golf club to golf club and indeed may vary during the lifetime of a golf club. At Hankley our mission statement relating to the golf course is:

"To present the golf course in the best possible condition for members all the year round; to preserve the heathland nature of the course for future generations; and to do this within an agreed budget plan".

The objective that is set for each golf club may vary according to the type of course or club management philosophy i.e. heathland, parkland, downland, or links - members owned, business owned, public or whatever. The important point is to have an objective that is easily understood by management, staff and members alike.

Planning.

Planning can be defined as *"the setting of achievable goals and deciding the means by which these will be achieved"*.

Plans fall into two categories:-
1) Long term or strategic plans
2) Short term or tactical plans

Good planning should always start at the higher level plan, be long term and flexible. This plan can be viewed as the strategic plan. At Hankley Common this is a five year rolling plan, i.e. as the fifth year becomes the fourth year a new fifth year is added.

Examples of long term plans are:-

- The five year plan
- Machinery replacement programme
- Conservation programme
- Tree management

Lower level or 'tactical' plans should support the strategic plan.

Examples of tactical plans are:-

- The winter programme
- Replacement of the greensheds
- Construction of a new practice ground
- An upgrade to the irrigation system
- Building a new green

Budgeting.

A budget can be defined as:-
"A statement in financial terms of what is planned and of what is expected to happen. In golf club terms it should reflect the summation of all the tactical plans plus the normal programme of course preparation and maintenance."

A budget is normally divided into a revenue budget and a capital budget (i.e. machinery, new buildings, etc).

Budgeting requires careful record keeping. If this has not been done in the past, the preparation of the first budget is somewhat difficult. A budget should be phased - that is broken down on a monthly basis in order that expenditure can be monitored against it. In my experience the time spent on producing a good budget is well worthwhile. A well written budget acts as a major selling document to the



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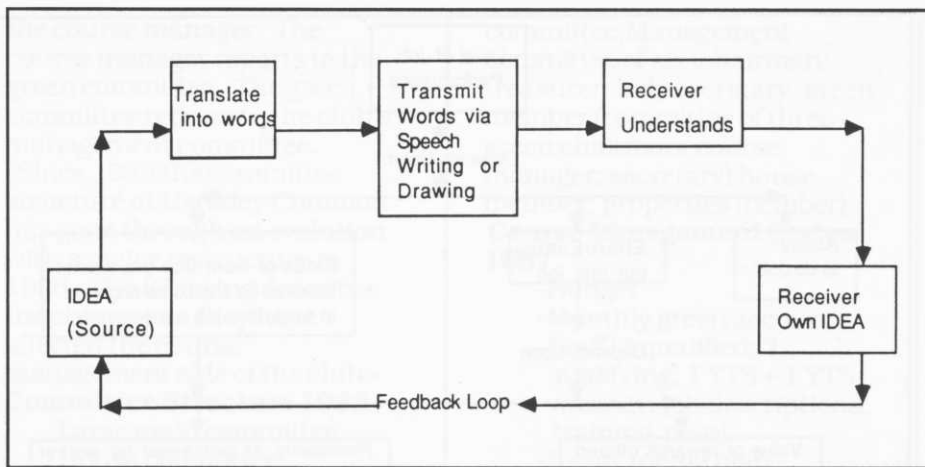


Figure 1

treasurer and the rest of the committee, particularly when it is necessary to persuade them to allocate funds for golf course development and upkeep in preference to other golf club projects.

I would recommend budgets to be prepared under the following format:-
Revenue (phased on a monthly basis): Phasing enables the club to plan its cash flow in and out of the club's funds.

Capital: This should reflect the programme for machinery upgrade and replacement and should also be phased.

Notes of explanation: These are a very important aspect when communicating the justification for expenditure.

Comparison to previous year's performance: This is an extremely important aspect of the budget. It always provides a persuasive argument if you have performed within the previous year's budget and it is even better if you are able to demonstrate that you have kept within budget for a number of years.

Examples of revenue budget headings are:-

- Salaries & wages
- Training & education
- Publications/manuals
- Subscriptions
- Tax & insurance
- Clothing
- Materials
(Top dressings, soil & sand; bunker sand; turf; path scalplings; grass seed; fertilisers; chemicals; fungicides)
- Fuel; (petrol; diesel; oil).

- Watering system
- Sundries
- Plant repair & maintenance
- Hire of equipment

A phased revenue budget allows a monthly account to be produced showing the expenditure against each item of the budget. Corrective action can then be taken if any overspends occur. Underspends will be detected before the end of the year and in this case you may well be able to convince your committee to permit expenditure on an unbudgeted but worthwhile item.

Communicating.

Communicating is the most difficult of the functions to review because this article is using the very function to define itself.

Communicating can be defined as:- *"The transfer of ideas so that they may be understood by others. Good communicating occurs when a useful or appropriate idea is transferred efficiently. Bad communication has many causes, but simplified it entails the non-arrival of a message or the arrival of a distorted message".*

This is illustrated by the analogy of the message "Send us re-inforcements we are going to advance" which gets translated into "Lend us three and fourpence we are going to the dance".

I cannot overstress the importance of good communications within the golf club. In my experience poor communications are generally at the root of most complaints, controversy,

politics and staff relation problems.

Golfers become more reasonable individuals when they understand when and why you need to put several tonnes of topdressing on their greens at least once and sometimes twice a month; and when and why you insist upon putting 14" deep holes through their beloved putting surfaces. Do not forget societies either - they are likely to spend a much happier day at your course if they are made aware of any major greenkeeping activity in advance of their visit.

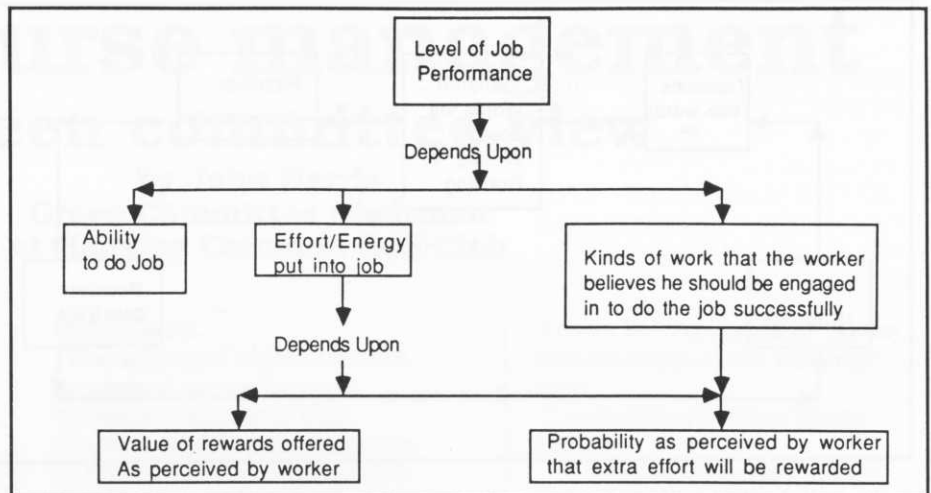
At Hankley Common we have a policy of open government and we communicate by publishing information to both the membership and the staff.

The methods used are:-

- An annual course status report
- Minutes of green committee meetings
- The winter programme
- Special notices
- Reports on special topics
- Chairman of green & course manager (available to members)

Another important aspect of good communications is that it provides a very important feedback. In management terms this is described as the feedback loop. This provides the means to verify that communications have been fully understood and to obtain the point of view of others on a given topic. You will soon know whether or not you are developing your golf course to meet the membership's or owner's aspirations. Figure 1 illustrates the feedback loop principle. This

Figure 2



This principle is practically employed when you attend a seminar and take part at the end of the day in the question and answer session with the panel of speakers.

Motivating.

Motivating is important because:-

Staff must be induced to stay within your employ. Labour turnover and absenteeism can be costly and dysfunctional if allowed to get out of control, but attendance is not enough.

Staff must do their appointed jobs in a dependable fashion. If our greenstaff are to function well as a team, we need to rely on a continuous and fairly stable pattern of relationships over time.

Staff must be innovative and exhibit spontaneous activity. That is, to act on their own initiative and carry out tasks beyond those that are laid down for them to do.

Motivation is important if you expect a consistently high level of job performance.

Figure 2 attempts to describe the various aspects of job performance. In the first place the worker must have the ability to do the job and secondly he must have a clear understanding of the job (job description) or the task that he is being asked to perform (good communication). The effort and energy put into a job will depend upon the rewards for doing the job as perceived by the worker and the probability as perceived by the worker that extra effort will be rewarded. In other words, effort and energy put into a job will depend upon motivation. Rewards should not only be viewed as financial. Financial rewards tend to have a short term motivational effect. Overall job satisfaction is what we should be aiming for.

There are many other motivational factors such as:-

- Training
- Promotion prospects
- Grading structure
- Good staff communication
- Sense of involvement
- Praise
- Discipline
- Appraisal
- Company car
- Pension
- And many others

The methods used to motivate the staff at Hankley Common include:-

Information: We publish the same information to them that is published to the members. Downward communication is as important as upward and outward communication.

Involvement: The course manager has access to the clubhouse and members. Staff with a handicap play in monthly medals Stablefords and non-boarded competitions. Informal contact between the staff and committee members is actively encouraged and pursued.

Training: The course manager is encouraged to develop his subordinates by on-the-job training. Subordinates themselves are encouraged to participate in training their subordinates. Appropriate external courses and seminars are identified. Apprentices attend Sparsholt College, Winchester and their expenses and course fees are paid for by the club. Our YTS trainees attend Merrist Wood College, near Guildford.

Praise: When staff have done a particularly good job, we tell them and tell anyone else who will listen.

Remuneration Policy: Annual pay awards are paid on fixed percentage plus merit percentage. Apprentices are reviewed six monthly. There is an annual Christmas bonus which is based on individual performance, attendance records and timekeeping during the year.

Grading Structure: We have a grading structure of course manager, assistant course manager, senior greenkeeper, greenkeeper, apprentice greenkeeper and trainee greenkeeper

Discipline: This in itself is a motivator when administered fairly. When you are not satisfied with performance do not let it fester - take urgent appropriate action. The person being disciplined and his colleagues respect a firm but fair style of management.

BIGGA Membership : All staff are encouraged to join BIGGA and their subscriptions are paid for by the club.

Appraisal: In the coming year consideration will given to introducing a formal appraisal scheme linked to the annual pay review.

Controlling.

Controlling can be defined as:- *"The essential process of seeing that what is planned to happen actually happens"*. At Hankley Common day to day control is carried out by

the course manager. The course manager reports to the green committee. The green committee reports to the club's management committee.

Since 1983 the committee structure at Hankley Common has gone through an evolution with a major restructure in 1986. The following describes the changes as they have affected the course management side of the club:-

Committee Structure 1983

- Large main committee
- House committee
- Finance committee
- Large green committee (with no continuity)
- Irregular meetings
- No greenstaff representation
- No budget
- No plans
- Four un-qualified staff
- Annual visit from agronomist
- No planned machinery replacement
- No Health & Safety procedures

Committee Structure 1987

Two tier committee structure: Captain's

committee; Management committee of six (chairman; treasurer; lady secretary; green member (committee of three - green chairman; course manager; secretary) house member; properties member).

Course Management Status 1987

- Budget
- Monthly green account
- Staff (3 qualified; 2 qualifying; 1 YTS + 1 YTS vacancy; job descriptions; training plan).
- 5 year rolling plan
- STRI subscription
- Published machinery replacement / upgrade programme
- Published winter programme
- Published monthly green minutes
- Conservation programme
- Planning approval for greenhouses & workshop
- Planning approval for new staff facilities
- Health & Safety procedures
- Annual status report to members

To conclude, I would like to

return to the main theme of management. Managing is getting things done, with and through people. The function can be categorised as a series of roles.

Relating roles to superiors; peers; subordinates.
 Information roles - clarifying goals; informing; planning.
 Decision roles - allocating resources; resolving conflicts.
 Just as it is possible to categorise the roles that a manager plays it is also possible to identify his skills.
 Human - interpersonal skills.
 Technical - decision making skills; knowledge skills;
 Conceptual - planning skills; visionary skills.

Management is *not* a gift - it is a skill and a science.

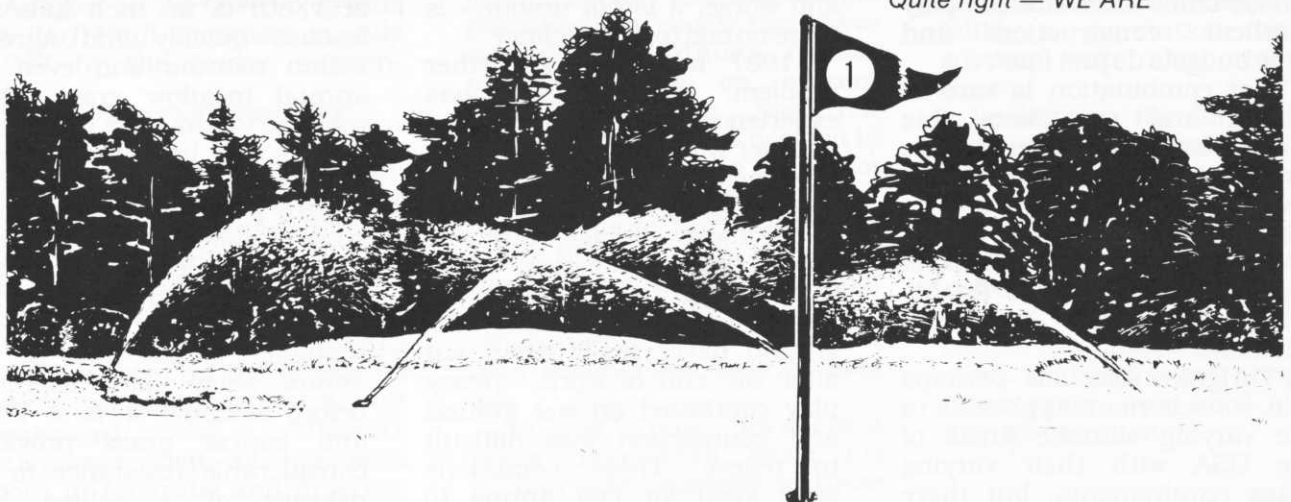
When BIGGA puts together proposals for greenkeeper education and training, I would suggest that management training will need careful consideration.

You do not create a manager by changing his job title from head greenkeeper to course manager.

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