

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE GREEN

Mr Lidwell (not his real name) is the green chairman at a busy course in the Midlands. That he is a serious 'thinking man' became immediately apparent when he first told us of his involvement and of how he had committed his thoughts, words and deeds to paper. In our quest for greater understanding and harmony between club employee and club official, we shall be publishing his papers as a series of articles. In this, his first, we learn of his introduction to committee life.

Golf club members offer to serve on committees for several reasons. Some aspire to be captain for the social standing that they believe goes with the job. Some see themselves as avenging angels who, by their very presence and power of argument, will be able to transform greens, tees and fairways to such an immaculate standard that county players will trill with delight and demand that it becomes the focal point of the county representative games. Fortunately, by far the greatest majority offer to serve because they want to put something back into the game. Whilst most members offer a silent 'thank you' to those who volunteer to give time to serve on the committee few could name or identify their representatives.

Some years ago I was invited to make up a four ball by three senior members of my own club. We drew for partners and fixed a small wager on the result. It was after eight holes, when my partners and I were three up, that the more senior of the other team made his first tactical move. He claimed I was playing far too well for my handicap and he would have to report me to the chairman of handicaps. My partner smiled and went on the offensive by advising our venerable opponent that this young fellow (age is relative) was the very chairman that he would be looking for.

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Later, after serving on both house and handicapping committees the captain asked me if I would accept the job of green chairman. My jaw dropped a little and I stared at him. Although an honour, it was a surprise. 'Will I what, and why me?' These were the first questions that came to mind. He reminded me that I was a retired manager and had both skills and time in which to do the job. With a knowing look he went on to explain that the present chairman would not be standing again as he was required to devote more time with his wife and family. In my eagerness to please I failed to recognise the significance of this statement, although I did, many times, later on.

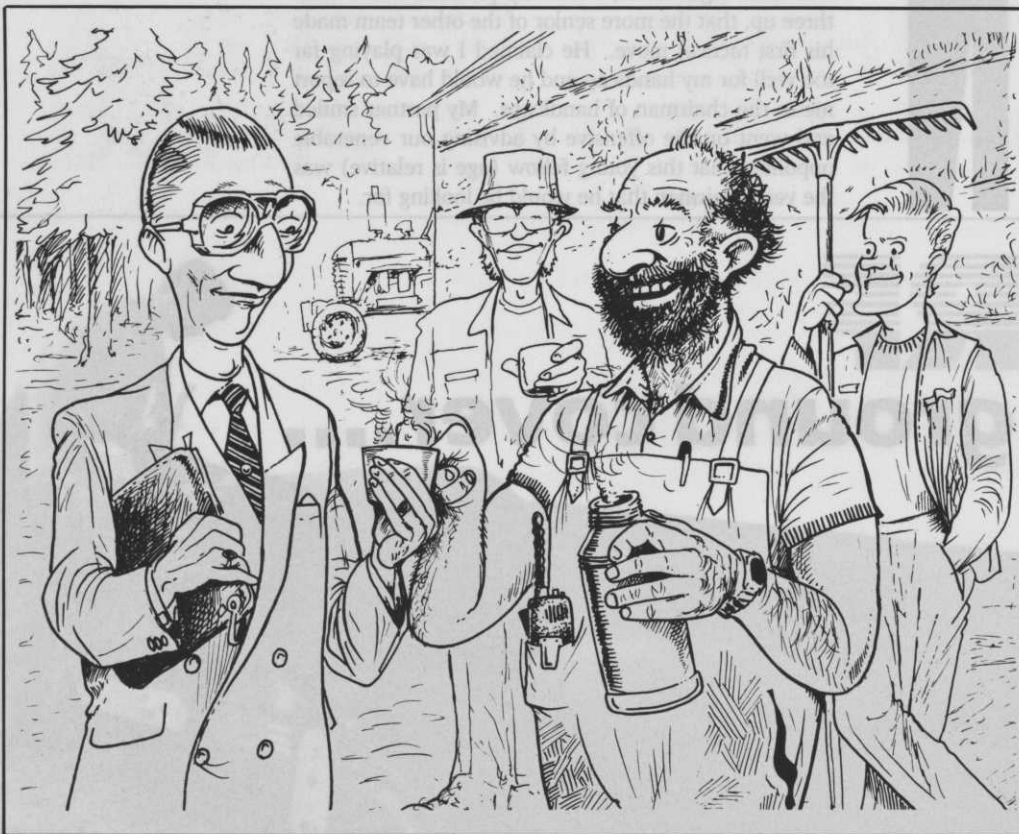
I prepared for my term of office by having a deep think about the two jobs. As I saw it, the green chairman was required to interpret the policies of the committee and pass them to the greenkeeper. He then would use his professional skills to put those interpretations into practice. I wondered how he saw it? In the hope of not proving to be a complete idiot, I read through my gardening books, including an old copy of 'Be Your Own Lawn Expert' by Dr D G Hessayan. While the reading helped I very soon realised that looking after a golf course was quite different from cultivating a small lawn at the back of a house.

Now I had to meet the greenkeeper. I had three main worries. Would we 'get on', would I be able to make a contribution to our discussions and how

der and produce a hooked shot. You do hook the ball don't you? I was about to ask for the remedy but he cut me short. 'Never mind about that now, what is important is, how are we going to get on?'

As our working relationship was obviously going to be important we discussed it at length. We agreed that because of my obvious interest I may from time to time make suggestions regarding work on the course and that if at any time he felt I was encroaching on his area of responsibility then he would tell me. We also discussed the chain of command from the greenstaff, through him, to me and eventually to the captain. We both agreed to use this method of communication at all times – it served us well.

'Right', he said, 'now that we have those problems sorted out what am I going to call you? Do you want me to call you by your Christian name or Mister? Years of management training flashed in front of me, the new thinking was for managers to get closer to the producers. Many times I had read 'call your staff by their Christian name and don't be afraid to take off your jacket and help out'. I suggested that he called me Charles. He pondered a moment and suggested that he use my christian name when we were together and Mister if his staff were in our company. He went on to suggest that it would give me an edge in case I ever had to tell them off. I didn't necessarily agree with that statement but I went along with his suggestion.



On a lighter rule we discussed our job titles. I commented that he was called a greenkeeper (singular) while I was called chairman of greens (plural)? He reached for his Association magazine, thumbed a few pages and found several references to the more enlightened title of chairman of green (singular). We agreed to use it. However we both realised it would be many years before some of the older members would accept this modern terminology. From his magazine we also discussed the various categories of BIGGA membership and he promised that if I did well in my new post he would consider allowing me to join as an Associate member.

By now I realised that I had been out manoeuvred. While I had chosen the time, Jim had chosen the place of our first meeting, poured me his own life-saving brew and had the first input to our working relationship. He had obviously put as much thought into our first meeting as I had.

would the members view the results of my efforts.

I left a message with the secretary to arrange a meeting with the greenkeeper for 11.30 am on the first day after the AGM. Although we had never actually met we knew of each other. He of course had been pointed out to me many years ago and I felt sure that his 'grapevine' would have informed him of the new chairman of green.

We eyed each other at close quarters and shook hands, he called me Mister and I called him Jim. He smiled and offered me tea from his flask. 'I've watched you playing', he said, 'your stance is too closed which will force you to drop your right shoul-

As we had a little time before the mid day break Jim gave me a tour of the mess room, equipment storage shed and workshop. We exchanged thoughts about the machinery and its use on the course. As we walked I remembered the words of the captain, 'You were a manager in industry, come and use your skills for us'. I took out my note book and realised that despite the good work in previous years there were a number of interesting projects waiting to be done, but first I needed to meet the greenstaff.

● Next month, meeting the staff and discussions on duties and responsibilities.