

"The average greenkeeper in the UK is regarded as a bit of a soft touch"

Having now met hundreds of greenkeepers from golf courses all over the world I suspect and fear that on matters of real importance to greenkeepers – pay, conditions, facilities and the preservation of over-played greens – the average greenkeeper in the UK is regarded as a bit of a soft touch. At best, too many greenkeepers are seen as mere craftsmen who are given a say on how the club should manage its playing surfaces, but when it comes to the crunch, i.e. in matters where money is involved, they have little or no power or influence. Basically the problem is one of 'presentation', or to put it another way it is a matter of how the average greenkeeper 'comes across' to the decision makers in the club.

"Greenkeepers are too nice for their own good"

The majority of greenkeepers that I have met are sincere, practical people who care about their work but regard certain aspects of their job, such as relationships with green committees, with some apprehension. Of course, being fed on a diet of rejection every time you want some money spent is bound to make the most determined individual somewhat cautious, even when making the most reasonable requests. For me, though, the basic problem is that greenkeepers are too nice for their own good.

"Outside the peaceful and pleasing surroundings of the golf course the world is full of people who do not trust each other"

I suspect that an aspect of this sincerity and niceness extends to being, by and large, a trustworthy person. Trustworthy greenkeepers are themselves trusting people who I believe tend to give others the benefit of the doubt. Trust is in itself a very kind, almost noble thing for which, in a perfect world, we would reward people handsomely. However, outside the peaceful and pleasing surroundings of the golf course the world is full of people who do not trust each other, particularly with spending each other's money wisely. This results all too often in our trusting greenkeepers being left feeling somewhat embarrassed and not a little betrayed when, for example, the powerful case they thought they had for a new tractor is rejected out of hand.

"We can change or can appear to have changed fairly quickly"

It does not have to be this way. If we want to be a part of the decision making process, if we want to get what we really need to do a good job of work and to influence our own careers, then we have a choice of at least four options in all difficult work situations.

Option 1: Change the situation;
Option 2: Change myself;

You know what's wrong with greenkeepers? They haven't a clue!

FRANK NEWBERRY, a management consultant and since 1989 a regular at BTME in Harrogate and the Autumn Management Courses at Aldwark Manor, is angry about the way greenkeepers are treated by some people at their clubs. In this his first article for Greenkeeper International, he outlines the problem as he sees it and searches for a workable answer. If you want to hear more about this topic or would like to attend one of Frank's courses, contact BIGGA's education officer, Debbie Savage, at BIGGA HQ.



Option 3: Live with it creatively, or
Option 4: Leave!

Given my contention that it is the perceptions some people have of greenkeepers that lie somewhere near the root of the problem, I intend to confine my thoughts to Option 2: *Change Myself*: I want to focus on three things that we can change or can appear to have changed fairly quickly. The three categories are:

- 1 – My appearance, or the image of myself that I project.
- 2 – My agenda, or the things I want to get done.
- 3 – My paradigm, or my view of the world.

My appearance:

Oscar Wilde once outraged Victorian London when he asserted, amongst other things, that 'only shallow people do not judge people by appearances'. I am not sure if he was being sincere, but I know I am influenced significantly by the way people present themselves to the world. An old friend of mine who worked in the construction industry and had no formal qualifications always seemed to be able to get supervisory jobs on building sites very quickly. He put it down in no small part to the clothes he wore. He told me that he always wore a clean shirt and tie under his overalls. It would seem that he looked clearly like he was part of the management team!

In an increasingly sophisticated world we need also to consider more personal aspects of appearance such as grooming, cleanliness and the condition of our apparel. If we can project a serious image with

our appearance we are much more likely to be taken seriously. Most people tend to view a person's choice of clothing and personal grooming as an extension of their personality, attitudes and values. Changing our appearance for the better is in turn viewed positively by others. Most seem to feel that people who take their appearance more seriously have (increased) self respect. We tend to feel more confident in smart clothes, so upgrading our appearance is truly a win/win opportunity worth considering.

"People tend to resist a single option solution for problems."

My agenda: I have all too often seen excellent arguments for genuinely needed resources fall quickly because the committee typically suspected they were on the wrong end of a high pressure sales job, fairly convinced that the individual making the case had been fully briefed by the salesman of the product being requested. People tend to resist a single option solution for problems. It seems to make them feel that only one solution (the most expensive) has been considered, that they have not been given a real choice, that the person proposing the solution has *not considered their needs*, that the person only wants what is *best for him/her*, that he/she is working only from his/her agenda and not the real one, i.e. their agenda.

Choice is a powerful motivator and an element of choice needs to be present in most things if we are to accept an argument to be true. Over a number of years I have learned the powerful lesson that if I

want something, I stand the maximum chance of getting it if:

- a) I can argue powerfully for more than one option, and
- b) the other person feels he/she has a genuine choice.

I have had success when options are limited by remembering that: *one option* will get a lot of scrutiny and criticism; *two options* will give people a confusing dilemma – which to choose? (no-one wants to be wrong); *three options* could be a genuine choice and a fourth option – if there are three options, there is always a fourth – is the 'carry on as we are' option, fully costed like the other three options.

By making the case for three or more options we have to argue fairly strongly for all three. In doing this we can see the best option as it appears to the people who have to decide. We should not forget, in giving a choice of options, to carefully imply what, in our professional judgement, is a sound choice in the circumstances. By tackling the problem in this way we show committee members that we can:

- adopt a managerial approach to work problems;
- demonstrate our professional standards;
- prove our trustworthiness by working effectively on other people's agendas as well as our own.

"Circumstances do not make the man; they only reveal him to himself"

My paradigm or view of the world could ultimately determine whether I succeed in any endeavour. If our view of the world suggests that greenkeepers are nice people but others sometimes take advantage of this – then as we go through life it is a fair bet that some people probably will take advantage! If we are convinced that we cannot get through to some people – we will probably try for a while and then give up. If we believe that because of our lack of opportunities in life and limited qualifications (I have just the one 'O' level) that we will not get on in the world – then we probably will not have much of a career.

In conclusion, and to reinforce what I have said, we could do worse than be quite clear about two things. First, no-one is going to do it for us – and why should they? Second, as we seek to change people's perceptions of greenkeepers we might remember the words of James Allen, who said that 'circumstances do not make the man – they only reveal him to himself'.

We will start to get the professional respect we deserve and the resources we need to do the job well when we are personally ready and not before. It may mean changing our appearance slightly, facing up to some of our harsher realities and altering our perceptions somewhat, but for the people I have had the pleasure of seeing pull it off already the effort was well worth it. Good luck!