

A question of standards

Amongst the dictionary definitions of standards are a measure to which others (should) conform or against which others are judged and a required degree of excellence. Where therefore stands the profession of greenkeeping and indeed our Association in this regard? As a positive statement, the lead from your Board of Management and Headquarters staff is one aimed at professionalism in all we do and in those instances where we are found wanting every effort is made to remedy situations with a degree of urgency. That having been said I suspect that within the profession we are daily surrounded by much complacency and at times a lackadaisical approach.

A recent letter of complaint I received from a golf club concerned interviews conducted for a new head greenkeeper following advertisement in *Greenkeeper International*. The letter informed me of the discourteous manner in which two applicants invited to attend failed to advise that they were not going to attend the interview. Both had been given adequate time to advise the club of a change of heart.

The letter went on to say that the two applicants had completely failed to extend to the club and a panel of five the common courtesy of a telephone call and that consequently five very busy persons wasted their time through the thoughtlessness of our members. The letter concluded that it does not put greenkeepers in a very good light. I would find it difficult to argue with that conclusion although I did point out to the club that the individuals concerned had not in fact renewed their membership for 1995 – perhaps a comment in itself. In fairness it must be said that golf clubs as potential employers often leave much to be desired as far as standards are concerned and many are the complaints I receive of the lack of courtesy extended to our members in terms of acknowledgement of their applications for posts or in the sending of formal letters of rejection.

The incident related above would seem to immediately render the two individuals concerned, should they wish to renew their membership, culpable in



BIGGA in focus

BY NEIL THOMAS

terms of the first stipulation of our Code of Ethics. What Code of Ethics I hear many of you say for often there seems a lack of awareness that we operate under such a code? As a first consideration a member pledges himself to 'Set standards of personal conduct which will enhance the stature of the profession of golf course management'. I make no apologies therefore for republishing the Code on this page for in this day and age it becomes ever more important that our members abide by a Code to which they pledge themselves on joining the Association. Look carefully at the ten points for the standards set

are high ones and be self-critical in your own assessment of where you as an individual fall short of those standards.

Certain standards are set in the use of the membership card by our greenkeeper members to enjoy courtesy of the course. How many abide by the criteria set out on the reverse side of the card? Permission to visit a course should be sought in advance, correct dress should be observed on and off the course and the club should be thanked for their courtesy. Unfortunately not all members treat courtesy of the course as a privilege and I worry about the seeming increase in the number of clubs no longer prepared to extend the courtesy to our members. The warning signs are there and any known instances of abuse of the privilege should be reported to Headquarters in an effort to ensure that the failings of a few do not penalise the majority who recognise and implement their obligations in this regard.

One other area for consideration. Working out on the golf course in all sorts of weather means that workwear must be practical. That may be stating the obvious but again are standards important?

I think so. The inclusion in budgets of appropriate workwear for greenkeeping staff is important – workwear which will be smart and suitable for the tasks in hand whilst remaining essentially practical. Importantly it assists club members in their identification of the greenkeeping crew and helps create the right image. The 'any old thing will do' syndrome will not help the profession's cause and this is an area where, in many instances, an immediate improvement at low cost can be implemented.

What of personal presentation whether it be in terms of arguing a case at the green committee meeting or appearing at an event appropriately dressed. As an individual are you always setting the highest of standards? Now there is a view within the Association that BIGGA members project an image above their station and that ultimately this may not achieve job satisfaction or even the respect of others. It is not a view with which I agree but it is pertinent to the issues on which I have touched in this article. I know the way in which your Board wishes to take the Association in this regard in terms of setting the highest of standards and I believe that this is the prevalent view amongst the membership. What really is the alternative – an acceptance that greenkeepers should know their place with all the implications that will hold for wages, conditions of service, training and indeed job satisfaction?

By and large since the advent of BIGGA in 1987, huge steps forward have been taken in the professional development of greenkeepers and consequently in the game's perception of the profession and the esteem in which the practitioners of greenkeeping are now held. Yet it will only take a minority to undo much of the achievement and here I have outlined some worrying trends. If golf as a game has a great deal to do to put its house in order, we as a profession and an Association must strive to ensure that we do not leave ourselves open to unnecessary criticism by an acceptance of standards that may have prevailed a decade ago but are outmoded and unacceptable in 1995.

BIGGA Code of Ethics

This Code is established to promote and maintain the highest professional standards of service and conduct among the membership of BIGGA. Through adherence to this Code, members will gain for themselves recognition of individual integrity, responsibility and professionalism whilst enhancing generally the respect and good will for both their profession and Association. As a member of the British and International Golf Greenkeepers Association, I accept this Code and pledge myself to:

1. Set standards of personal conduct which will enhance the stature of the profession of golf course management.
2. At all times carry out my duties and responsibilities in such a manner as to reflect favourably on the profession and Association.
3. Seek to use every opportunity to broaden my professional expertise for both self-improvement and the good of the profession.
4. Follow, as a basic tenet, sound business and turf management principles in exercising the responsibilities of my post.
5. Observe the highest standards of personal integrity in my relationship with

6. fellow greenkeepers as well as other associated individuals and at all times, as far as I am able, assist my fellow greenkeepers as required of me.
6. Pursue job advancement only where vacancies arise and not at the expense of a fellow greenkeeper and abstain from any action, comment or communication not founded on truth which is likely to harm the professional reputation or practice of another greenkeeper.
7. Give endorsements of any kind only upon satisfactory personal experiences of the item identified.
8. Refrain from encouraging or accepting considerations of any value which might be deemed an inducement to find favour for a particular party or influence decisions in relation to that party and at all times avoid any exploitation of my Association, Industry or Profession.
9. Support at every opportunity the Association, its Regions and Sections in seeking to improve the public understanding and recognition of the profession of golf course management.
10. Report to the Association any evidence likely to be in violation of this Code of Ethics.