

Duncan McGilvray introduces a new series on management tips for today's head greenkeeper

Managing a golf course

Having worked for 27 years as a greenkeeper, the one area which has always seemed to me to be very vague and never explained or covered properly was the remit, or more accurately the job description, given to a Head Greenkeeper or Course Manager.

Over a number of years, following experiences working on various golf courses, I have given this subject serious thought and decided to prepare my own remit/job description. What emerged was a defined list of duties which I believed was essential if golf courses (particularly private members' clubs) were to be managed efficiently and realistically.

These duties will therefore be the basis of four articles which will appear in the forthcoming months.

This list is based on basic management principles, both theoretical and practical, and it is my hope that it will help apprentice to assistant greenkeepers by giving them a clear indication of what they should be aiming for and, indeed, what will be expected of them by future employers.

I hope also that it will not only help Head Greenkeepers achieve Course Manager status, but also give present Course Managers the opportunity to re-evaluate what they do and question if they do enough in the very many different areas of management which is called for to be successful and effective.

These articles should not be used in isolation but in conjunction with GTC approved training being given within the profession, in the form of Management Workshops, as well as within GTC approved colleges around the country.

The series will really be a practicing Course Manager's guide to managing a golf course, based on my experiences, both ups and downs, in moving from apprentice greenkeeper in Scotland in 1968 to Course Manager in England today.

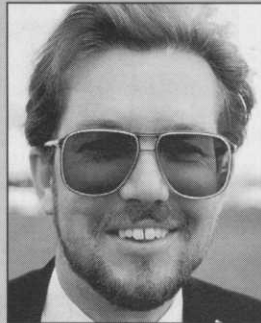
I believe that if we all manage our golf courses in a similar common sense manner our profession will move forward in a way which can only dreamed of at present.

Perhaps then we will not be perceived as mere grass cutters, but respectable, highly trained and efficient managers and be rewarded accordingly.

I also believe that working within a private members' golf club has its own problems, ie. working within a committee structure. This alone calls for tact and diplomacy, as well as a certain sense of humour and steely determination.

However I have found that if approached and presented in a professional way anything can be achieved (even through a committee) as long as what is being presented is justified.

I believe these articles will help particu-



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larly those who work in this type of management structure – probably the most difficult in any industry – and one which I am sure will change to a more efficient system in the future. That will only happen through our own determination to be recognised as efficient managers and decision makers. Only then will golf club committees, and the members who democratically elect them, allow us to be totally responsible for managing their golf courses.

Over the next few months I will cover:

1. Managing and taking control

1. Taking a major role in the formulation of Policy.
2. Overseeing the short, medium and long term maintenance of the Course which is dictated by that Policy.
3. Presenting and implementing work schedules.
4. Presenting and implementing machinery maintenance programmes.
5. Keeping accurate records.
6. Keeping up to date with modern methods, materials and equipment.

This will cover the basic structure in which we should work – setting agreed pol-

icy and working within it – showing your employer that you are in control, and therefore gaining their trust in making day to day as well as more important medium to long term decisions.

2. Controlling finances

1. Formulating, presenting and maintaining agreed budgets.
2. Observing tight cost control and ensuring cost effectiveness.
3. Reaching a reasoned final decision regarding the buying of materials and equipment.

This is the one area which many of my colleagues shy away from, believing that a committee or Treasurer will do this work for them thus making their workload easier. I believe, however, that there is no-one better than the Course Manager for calculating how much it costs to maintain a golf course. This will be covered in simple terms.

A few days spent at the right time of the year in setting budgets makes the remainder of that year so much easier.

3. Managing staff

1. Supervising and assisting in the training/development and recruitment of staff.
2. Endeavouring at all times to improve supervisor and staff relations.
3. Delegating effectively.

"You are only as good as your staff" someone once said – and how true that is.

This is an enormous subject but I will try to cover obvious areas of supervision, and give some ideas on how to overcome staff "friction", which can be so harmful in small staff set-ups, as is so often the case on golf courses.

4. Communication

1. Endeavouring at all times to continually improve staff and golf club member/employer communication.
2. Ensuring the safety of the staff and the environment.

Although this is the final subject area, it is by all accounts, the most important – the more the golfer knows about the work of the greenkeeper the easier the job will become.

I will cover many different areas of communication under this heading, the importance of which cannot be overstated.

In closing, it is important to point out that it is my wish to convey a common sense approach to managing a private members' golf course. I therefore do not propose to go into any subject area in any great detail (I am no expert anyway!), the general aim will be – in the words of Billy McMillan – to "keep it simple".