

There is nothing we cannot do

Duncan McGilvray looks at how best to ensure harmony between club and staff.

I believe we have now reached the point where the vast majority of golf club officials actually trust Course Managers to make decisions on greenkeeping matters i.e. select appropriate materials to apply and know how and when to apply them; are trusted to select/buy machinery and equipment as well as negotiating the best deals possible including after sales service.

This is very much thanks to the more professional way in which we have been working over the recent past and being more proactive in getting across tried and tested agronomic views as well as using experts to back us where necessary.

Another factor has also played its part. Short term decisions made by non-greenkeepers (well meaning amateurs) have resulted

in long term disasters on the golf course where time, money and professional greenkeeping expertise had to be found to put things right.

We should therefore be congratulated on our efforts so far. So why do we still hear the regular moans and groans from the vociferous playing membership particularly where a golf course manager has passed his "honeymoon period" of say three to five years.

I believe the simple answer is that we are still not doing enough, particularly in the important area of resource management, we are not trying hard enough.

We are more often than not thinking negatively instead of positively – which granted, is easy to do when criticised. In short the powers that be in our golf clubs i.e. Club Chairmen, General Managers, Secretaries and Committee Members have to be convinced

that we are competent, efficient, and seek continual improvement in all areas, that we are capable of managing.

Following recent personal experiences I would suggest that the following points be considered among others to those Course Managers who have had or are having similar experiences.

■ When Winter Programmes are questioned "It surely doesn't take four men two weeks to do that amount of work!" The statement should be met with a positive "Yes, it does" and be backed up with a detailed breakdown of the project i.e. Man days to cut turf, excavate area, level, consolidate, transport turf, lay turf, etc etc and would state if the time taken includes a contingency for weather, illness, holidays etc. Every manager in whatever

industry must justify staffing levels and time so why should we be any different in our industry? The natural negative reaction to the aforementioned statement is to look for another position because you think that they don't trust you but this reaction is very short sighted as the same situation will occur in your next position in a few years time and you will probably react in the same way again. A certain scepticism from your employer of how long a project takes is healthy so we must accept it and take the opportunity to prove that all greenstaff are gainfully employed at all times and that you have nothing to hide.

■ When asked for higher standards eg "Can we have nice stripes all over the fairways like Wentworth?" "Can we have all the tees cut on Sunday mornings", or "Can we have the approaches and aprons cut every day?" as long as there is no detrimental agronomic reason then the answer should always be "Yes" and add that "We, the Greenstaff, can do anything you want as long as we are given adequate resources". Then work out the cost for any request in Man Hours, machinery, fuel and any other resource and present the

true cost. It is then the golf club's decision if the suggestion is acted upon – it is their golf course after all and as long as there is sufficient funding any standard can be achieved.

■ Review your Summer cutting and maintenance regime with the golf club i.e. how often every area on the golf course is cut and maintained so that there is an agreement on standards and presentation. Most of us treat the approaches and aprons in the same way as greens these days (except height of cut) so why

don't we cut them every day as we do on greens? On project work (usually construction work within a Winter Programme)

itemised work-sheets must be kept on a monthly basis which individually codes man hours to projects and stands as an extremely accurate

record of labour use and performance.

■ An up-date of the Course Manager's job description should be undertaken (followed by all Greenstaff and would state in detail resource responsibility, overall job objective, key result areas and work standards to be judged in key result areas. This will ensure standards are measured, efficiency is increased and the workload is monitored using a staff assessment/appraisal system which would be in place. Only by acting positively to criticisms (unfortunately some of them are found to be justified) can we hope to advance to the stage when we are trusted to manage resources properly as well as keep the golf course in acceptable condition at all times.

Golf club management at the highest level will see just how efficiently the golf course is run, that all greenstaff are gainfully employed at all times and that you seek continual improvement in all areas.

It is unfortunately no longer enough just to have a well maintained and presented golf course.

■ Duncan McGilvray is Course Manager Letchworth Golf Club in Hertfordshire.

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