

Address your letters to the Editor, Greenkeeper International, Aldwark Manor, Aldwark, Aine, York YO61 1UF. You can also fax them to 01347 838864, or e-mail them to general@bigga.co.uk

Dear Sir,
 I reply to Sandy McDivot's article "Field of Experience" Greenkeeper International - May 1998 which I read with interest - twice.

Before addressing the issues raised I would like to be up front and open about my own identity and assure you that I have no hidden agendas, just a desire to challenge and give balance to the content of the article.

I have been employed in the turf grass industry for some 25 years, have received education both in the UK and USA, worked with a number of consultants at the various golf courses where I was employed and since February this year have formed my own independent consultancy service - I also do not believe I fall into any of the four categories as described in the article.

Firstly, there are some points raised in the piece with which I wholeheartedly agree: Education is better now than ever before and there are some good and some not so good consultants currently working in our industry. I suppose it would also be fair to add that there are a good many clubs out there who have yet to really embrace and encourage training and development for their

staff who are, therefore, not accessing the education and also some Head Greenkeepers who feel that training and development no longer applies to them as they have been there, done that and got the certificate.

However, I would think there are few industries which have experienced so many changes both in terms of new products and work practices over the last decade which means the learning never really stops - something which the Chairman also referred to in his article - May issue.

May I also be bold enough to suggest that there are some good and not so good Head Greenkeepers out there who could really benefit from working with an experienced consultant and, given the right pairing, might even welcome the opportunity.

Just by changing the focus and being positive and optimistic rather than suspicious and somewhat defensive we can also change the perception of the role of the consultant from agitator to partner for, I believe, it is only through open and honest partnerships that progress can be made. There is little or nothing for

anyone to gain from an "us and them" scenario and I do not believe that any consultant would wish to work in such an atmosphere.

I make no excuses for the fact that, as a consultant, I question and challenge work methods, look over machinery and equipment, review staff training and request copies of budgets, records and reports in order to gain a better understanding of each organisation I work with. In return, I will offer independent advice, guidance, support, suggestions and recommendations which will all be given without prejudice and within a no blame framework - for it is all too easy to point the finger and neither party should fall into this trap.

A well chosen consultant will increase confidence and motivation just by reinforcing what is already known and by offering guidance and support through times of change and development if, or when, this is required to achieve higher standards and better quality for this would be the only reason to suggest change.

There will, undoubtedly, be the occasions when the not so good consultant gets it wrong and Sandy McDivot gave examples of this.

However, is this reason enough to alienate an outside influence and risking a missed opportunity for the times when the consultant gets it right!

All clubs should spend time in researching and selecting the right consultant for their course and have some way of measuring the impact of that consultant on the goals which have been set. However, I do not agree with the suggestion that the best consultant is one who will not question the Head Greenkeeper's actions, as this assumes that, in all instances, there is no room for change, progress or improvement - this shows no respect for the integrity or intellect of either parties.

As an individual I believe I have much to offer today's progressive Head Greenkeepers, both in terms of knowledge and experience, but also support and I have yet to work with any fellow professionals where this has been rejected.

Perhaps, therefore, the challenge is to try to establish a network of tried, tested and trusted consultants who really can offer a service to the industry.

Ken Barber
 On Course Consultants

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