

TALKING

Six of the country's top men give their views on communication within their working environments

Communication

Compiled by Malcolm Huntington MBE



Name: Marc Haring
Course: Cumberwell Park GC, Bradford-on-Avon
Region: South West and South Wales
Course Type: Parkland (27 holes)
Staff: Course Manager plus six



Name: Martin Gunn
Course: Temple GC, Maidenhead
Region: Midland
Course Type: Downland
Staff: Course Manager plus six



Name: Ronnie Bunting
Course: Kilmacolm GC, Paisley
Region: Scotland
Course Type: Heathland
Staff: Course Manager plus four



Name: Steve Cram
Course: Slaley Hall G&CC, Hexham
Region: Northern
Course Type: Mixture of parkland, woodland and heathland (36 holes)
Staff: Head Greenkeeper, plus 12, plus six casuals in summer



Name: Tom Smith
Course: Merrist Wood GC, Guildford
Region: South East
Course Type: Parkland
Staff: Head Greenkeeper, plus six, plus one mechanic



Name: Graham Wylie
Course: Malone GC, Dunmurry
Region: Northern Ireland
Course Type: Parkland (27 holes)
Staff: Course Manager plus 11 greenkeepers, plus 1 mechanic

1

1. How much importance do you give to communicating with your membership?

1. Very important, but being a proprietary owned club where the members have no actual control in decision making it is perhaps less critical than members' clubs.

1. Without communication you are not going to achieve anything. It is of paramount importance in everything you do.

1. Absolutely essential. We have monthly walks of the course and also nature walks in addition to e-mail. I explain reasons for heights of cut, for example, and point out the large number of bird boxes on the course etc etc.

1. Very important. The course is attached to a hotel so there is communication between competition secretaries and the management as to their needs and then we discuss the issues.

1. Very important. We don't have a greens committee so what I have to do is be around and to talk to members. All our greenkeepers are members of the club and play in competitions so that there is plenty of opportunity for discussion. I also have a computer set up with e-mail

1. Great importance. We need to enlighten members as to what is going on on the course and we have a noticeboard which is constantly updated by the Club Manager

HEADS

2

2. Would you say you were recognised and known by the majority of the membership?

2. Absolutely. I would consider it essential that every Course Manager is recognised as a senior member of staff. Gone are the days when greenkeepers were considered to be a lower form of life that would hibernate in their sheds throughout the winter.

2. Yes, definitely. Infamous rather than notable you might say!

2. Very much so. I play a full, active part in the club and am very involved so I get to know a large number of members.

2. Very much so. All our greenkeepers are full members of the club and some of us play in the competitions regularly so we quickly become known to a lot of members.

2. Yes, very definitely. I have a slot at the annual meeting to give a talk to members and I also play a lot of golf with them.

2. I wouldn't say the majority, but by a good proportion of members, particularly those who are involved on the council or committees. I have an assistant called Bobby and we have similar looks, so quite often we are mistaken for each other and I get players saying "How are you, Bobby?".

3

3. How do you pass on information about forthcoming potentially disruptive course maintenance work?

3. We rarely, if ever, carry out such work. It's not so much the members but visitors and societies who have to be kept happy. We do all we can to stop problems building up to the stage where disruptive work is required. It is a case of keeping the greens in good all year round condition rather than great one day and diabolical the next.

3. We communicate in all sorts of ways. We have a bulletin board, a quarterly news letter, small group forums, open forums, via the parish council and the pro shop, where members and visitors are informed about what is going on.

3. We have a noticeboard and an eco-table and so can inform anyone and everyone of matters pertaining to the course. For example, I would tell them that at some time in the coming weeks, when conditions allow, such and such will take place. Burning heather was one aspect they were told about in recent weeks.

3. Through management meetings, via a noticeboard and through the pro shop where people are told whether hollow coring or other maintenance work is being carried out.

3. We have a fortnight in March and a fortnight in September when we do course maintenance and these dates are decided in November and put on the fixture list. On these dates greenkeepers have priority on the course.

3. Via the noticeboard and we also inform the pro shop. They then tell members and guests what is going on, if there is work on the course or the greens for example.

4

4. Do you hold regular Open Nights to inform members of what you and your team do on the course and if so how well attended are they?

4. No. However, I consider it essential that I maintain a good relationship with the members by communicating with them individually on an informal basis. The best thing you can do is to ask how their golf is going. If you can sit there and appear interested you will instantly become their best friend.

4. Not regular, but we have an annual meeting. I feel it is more important to have small group meetings to target specific items and then get a feedback.

4. These are taken care of in our regular walks of the course, dealing with environmental aspects of the club and we usually have good attendances.

4. No, we don't and it has never been suggested but I do think it would be a good idea to have them from time to time.

4. We have open nights every six months or so and these are well attended, but because we are in touch with members all the time there is less need for them than there might be at some clubs.

4. No, and it has never been mooted. We have an unusual set up in that everything works through a very large greens committee of 12, who have summer meetings on the course. They are active and pass information on.

5

5. In general terms how do you feel, greenkeeper-membership relationships could be improved upon?

5. We could improve by remembering they are not the enemy. They could improve by allowing the Course Manager to be on first name terms with all the membership. There are still many clubs where the membership expect to be addressed as Mr, Mrs or whatever by the Course Manager. Such archaic policy makes constructive dialogue all but impossible.

5. I feel it is most important that golf as an industry communicates with other sections on a realistic level of expectation. This could only come with golf as a lead body giving information to the end user.

5. We always encourage constructive feedback and there are always open information lines so I feel relationships are very good. Our greens staff are all in distinctive uniforms with the club logo on them which I feel is important.

5. Overall I believe it is a good idea for greenkeepers to play with the members because then members would more readily appreciate what is happening and why.

5. I believe we need to change our image and be a lot more professional in certain matters. We don't have a problem because our course is part of the college which trains greenkeepers but, in general terms, perhaps clubs could allow more dialogue between the greenkeeping staff and the membership.

5. I feel we could do more to educate members via BIGGA seminars. At some clubs you feel that members believe greenkeepers are just the people who cut the grass. It would be good if greens committee members attended a seminar on the issues. We have one at Greenmount College, Antrim, on October 25 and there is room for 200 so I hope clubs will send representatives.