

A stress reducing equation

It's a simple law of economics taught to every GCSE student in the country. What's all this about I here you ask!

Well over the last few months there have been several letters and articles written about the poor state of the greenkeeping profession. It seems to me that, apparently, this poor state is due to interfering committees and lack of respect from the golfing public.

All the letters go on about wanting to produce wonderful courses and how committees change too often and don't have the right credentials for the work they put themselves up for and several more comments of the same nature.

I believe it is the attitude of these greenkeepers that brings problems on themselves and not the fault of the whole industry. As Duncan McGilvary pointed out in his article in the November issue of Greenkeeper international 90% of golf in Britain is played on private members golf courses. The very nature of these clubs is a committee structure, and golf clubs have been run like these for over 100 years. Part of being a Greenkeeper is working with committees and Chairmen of the Greens Committee. All greenkeepers should realise this is part of the job just the same as top-dressing or applying fertiliser. Once this has been accepted a more harmonious relationship can be formed.

The committee structure is used widely in life, often known by another name, the government is a large structure of committees and sub committees, BIGGA is run by a committee structure, as are many golf clubs. The committees are the voice of the people, trying to run to the best of their ability whatever club, association or even country they are in charge of. As you will all know, committees never please all of the people all of the time

as different people have different ideas and views on everything in life. Golf club committees try to provide what they feel the members want from their course and they have to pass on or communicate these wants on to us the greenkeepers.

Is this the interference we hear so much about? I don't consider committee views, activities or even orders as interference. It is part of the communication process, which is set up within committee run golf clubs. This is where I get back to supply and demand. We, as greenkeepers, are the suppliers of a product (the golf course) and as suppliers we should produce the product that is demanded by the golf club members.

If they want slow, bumpy greens that they can stop the ball on with a driver, never wanting them aerated because of those blasted holes that makes them miss so many puts, if they want fairways cut so short the grass dies at the first sign of the illusive British sun, if they want rough so short they can rip a 3-wood 120 yards and never lose the golf ball they bought in 1985 who are we to argue.

We are not all producing top class championship courses for Tiger Woods and Co with long thick rough, narrow fairways and greens so fast the average club golfer would wet themselves! In this day and age where competition is tough for new members at golf clubs it is the role of the greenkeepers to provide what the golfers want and ensure the future success of your employer. Supplying the desired product is where we use all the skills, knowledge and experience that we have, even if it is not what we consider to be a good course or aesthetically pleasing. The finished product should be made to the highest standard within the parameters

set out by the clubs committees.

We cannot change the establishment and golf club structure so we need to be more adaptable to our surroundings and the clubs needs and the golfers ever changing desires. Other members of the clubs management team e.g. the pro and secretary should be used by us to get information to and from the members. These people should be classed as colleagues, not the enemy as some believe them to be. A pro or secretary with a little knowledge of greenkeeping can be a very handy partner on occasions such as hollow tining or course closure in the winter. These people are more on the front line of customer relations if they understand why, they can pass on the reasons to the golfers. Golf pros don't want to be greenkeepers any more than we want to sit in a shop selling sweets and tee pegs all day, so we should not feel threatened if we are, as I'm sure we all are, competent at our jobs.

Most golfers know what they want from a golf course and they don't want to know how to achieve it. That's our job to educate and enlighten them as to the needs of the grass plants they can see and the soils they can't. There are many ways to educate golfers. Open evenings, greens forums, a chat with Joe Smith on the 12 fairway. Use your imagination. The one thing we are all guilty of is poor or non existent communication. So come on greenkeepers, stop moaning about what a bad lot we have, and use all your skills to make the golfers happy. Remember ...

**Happy Golfers = Less Moans
= Happy Greenkeepers**

Leslie Howkins, Happy Head Greenkeeper,
Cleethorpes Golf Club, N.E.Lincs

Help with lawn sand?

Has anybody experienced problems with turf damage to their greens following an application of lawn sand? We have unfortunately used lawn sand, as usual, only for it later to be found to be contaminated with herbicides and over a period of 1-8 weeks thereafter suffered severe decline and ultimately death of significant areas on our greens. We were able to prove that the lawn sand was the cause due to the fact that the **one** green that was not treated was the **only one** that remained undamaged. More importantly we had left over sealed unused bags which we have had tested at two independent laboratories for herbicide contaminants. If we had not had any left over, nor had the one green untreated, we are unlikely to have been able to establish the cause, and certainly been unable to prove it.

Should you have cause to now suspect that a routine application of lawn sand may have led to damage on your greens, contact the magazine with details of your supplier and manufacturer and the batch number printed on the bag. Should it be the same as that used by ourselves it may be of great help to you.

Please respond through the pages of this magazine

Enviro thanks

Thank you for the excellent coverage (again) of this year's 2001 environmental competition and again we see the total commitment from numerous courses throughout the UK in promoting and enhancing environmental aspects. I would just like to point out a discrepancy in the article concerning my course, Bradley Park Golf Club. We have 300 members and not 200, plus the pay and play customers with being municipal. The number of rounds per annum is between 55,000 and 60,000. Thank you again and here's to the future promotion of environmental concern on our courses.

D. W. Brierley, Head Greenkeeper,
Bradley Park Golf Club

In defence of National Vocational Qualifications

I recently read with dismay a letter in the Greenkeeper International from John Ross. His views are that the NVQ system was failing and yet another qualification should be produced to test our greenkeepers. Having worked my way through the City & Guild to stage four, NVQ level four and beyond that, I believe that there is and always will be room for improvement and this should come in part from the Head Greenkeepers and not just the governing bodies.

The GTC have established working groups that already review the training. The groups have representatives from colleges, STRI and BIGGA. It is through this partnership that the employers and greenkeepers now have an excellent range of qualifications to choose from that they feel most appropriate to the trainee and the club.

As I understand it, the NVQ system is all about making sure the person being trained can actually do the job on the ground as well as holding their own in a committee room when necessary.

I have living proof at the course where I am that NVQ's do work. I have only been here for 16 months and already have

one of my staff well on the way to completing NVQ level two. This is a 37 year old man who had no ambition in the trade, he just used to come to work do the job and then go home. He now knows botanical names for trees, grass and plants and can identify them as well. He now uses many other skills that he had but was not encouraged to employ.

For the critics that say it's all so easy, what would you expect if a person has been doing the job for 11 years. He should know how to operate the machinery used to maintain the course. There are parts of the NVQ that need hard work and lots of it. What the NVQ system does is give them a chance to go forward, learn more and gain a recognised qualification on the way.

The other very important factor is that the Head Greenkeeper must put himself on the line and encourage the staff to ask questions. When a staff member goes through the NVQ system it will act as a refresher for all the staff (including the Head Greenkeeper). Questions that are asked in the tea room can be thrown open to everyone. It is up to the Head Greenkeeper not to be frightened that he

may not know the answer. There have been occasions when I have either forgotten the answer or have not known it. Nobody knows everything and we are all trying to improve are own lot in one way or another so let's share the real knowledge with each other that we get from our experience. I am not knocking the old system, but it is the real hands on knowledge that needs to be handed down along with the technical information from the text books and college.

As for the fact that John Ross seemed to find the NVQ 3 easy, as I have already stated a person doing the job should be able to do this. Level three is a stepping stone to level four and lack of theory, if any, should be dealt with at the appropriate levels. The governing bodies have put into place many other qualifications and perhaps he should have a go at one of them. At least then if any of his staff need his help he will be able to offer it.

Some of the other points about the need for support for the lonely greenkeepers is in my opinion justified. However I believe that too much information is being given back to the club members on how the course is maintained. Greenkeepers all

over the UK are measuring rain water and thatch levels etc. writing reports and putting them selves under unnecessary pressure. It is time to get back to work, if they don't ask, then don't tell them. No where else is it more true that a little information in the wrong hands can be most dangerous. A quick example is if you go for an operation the surgeon will tell you in the simplest way what he is going to do, he will not mention how many yards of cotton he will use or how sharp the blade will be, because you do not need or want to know.

Use the report writing time to work on the course or to help your staff and remember stop talking before you run out of things to say. Let the quality of your course do the talking for you. My final message is to those Greenkeepers who have no yet received the training to become a work-based trainer or even carried out an appraisal on their staff to identify training needs and in turn motivate that member of staff like my 37 year old! Get involved now, if you need help, it is out there for you, just ask.

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