

Managing a Golf Course

Duncan McGilvray is Course Manager at Potters Bar Golf Club, a private members parkland golf course, in South Hertfordshire. His remit is not only to take responsibility for the management of the golf course but also to assist the club as a whole, in ensuring a high standard of customer service at reasonable cost, which he believes can only be achieved with an extremely professional approach in every area of management.



A greenkeeper now for 34 years in both Scotland and England on Links and Parkland golf courses.

He is a qualified NVQ D32/D33 and D36 Industry assessor/advisor and believes strongly in the NVQ system and the sterling work of the GTC under the guidance of their Education Director.

He is a strong supporter of BIGGA and demonstrates this by sitting on the new "Futures" Sub Committee formed in 2002 to assist the Association in ensuring a bright and prosperous future.

He is a strong believer in taking personal responsibility and control and therefore achieving high standards.

To those of my colleagues who remember my series of articles of seven years ago on just this subject I make no apologies for believing that there is a need to repeat the process.

The conversations, and correspondence in this magazine, I have had over the past 12 months or so have frustrated me sufficiently to feel the need to do it all again and I have therefore taken the opportunity to update my previous series of articles.

The message is, however, exactly the same - competent Course Managers of today and those of the future must be in control of their own destiny, and therefore that of their golf courses - or someone else will come along and do it for them - probably less successfully but they will do it all the same!

Much of my time which I allocate to the furtherance of our profession as a whole is taken up in trying to convince the powers within our golf clubs to allow their Course Managers to manage (within an agreed policy) and they will not regret it.

You can therefore imagine how upset I become when I am approached by such powers to inform me that they want their Course Manager to manage but they have chosen not to, in the mistaken/misguided belief that they will have an easier life!

This situation upsets me even more than the club that will not allow their Course Manager to manage - the reason being that the employee in place has made the choice of being controlled by someone who does not know the job and therefore the course will undoubtedly suffer.

These people are avoiding all responsibility and this cannot be right - they do no service to our profession in choosing this route.

I upset some of my colleagues in my last series of articles by stating categorically that the name of the person responsible for managing a golf course should be named a "Course Manager".

I hope sufficient time has now elapsed and my colleagues understand that I meant no snobbery or inflated ego in that person's character but merely that it best describes the job that the person does!

The name "Head Greenkeeper" describes at best a Foreman of greenkeepers and not a Manager - that may upset some of my colleagues but it is, and will remain, a fact!

Now that I have got that off my chest - down to the content of these proposed articles. I believe they will clearly indicate the skills required to manage a golf course competently and therefore successfully which will keep everyone happy - honestly!

Over the next four articles I will cover the basic responsibilities as I see it that modern day competent Course Managers must accept to be successful.

1. MANAGING AND TAKING CONTROL

- Taking a major role in the formulation of agreed policy.
- Overseeing the short, medium and long term maintenance of the course which is dictated by the agreed policy.
- Presenting and implementing work schedules.
- Presenting and implementing machinery maintenance programmes.
- Keeping accurate records.
- Keeping up to date with modern methods, materials and equipment.

This second article will cover the basic structure within which we work - setting agreed policy 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

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

The first of a series of five articles detailing duties of the modern day Course Manager

This is the one area which many of my colleagues continue to shy away from, believing that a sub-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 and this will be covered in simple terms.

A few days spent setting budgets at the right time of the year, in line with the club's financial year, makes the remainder of that year so much less problematic.

3. MANAGING STAFF

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

"You are only as good as your staff' someone once said - and how true that proves to be."

This fourth article subject area is an enormous one 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 restricting efficient working practices and is common in small staff set ups which is often the case on golf courses.

4. COMMUNICATION

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

Although this fifth article will be the final subject area it is by all accounts the most important - the more the golfer knows about the job of the greenkeeper and Course Manager the easier and more satisfying our jobs will become.

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

One particular area within this heading, which has become more and more important over the years, is personal presentation - I have believed for some time now that without the skills of being able to present ourselves appropriately and properly when the occasion arises, then we fail in what we are trying to achieve - I will therefore cover this more fully in this final article.

In closing this introductory article 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 - again in the immortal words of my esteemed colleague Billy McMillan - to "keep it simple".

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