

# Managing a Golf Course

## Duncan McGilvray concludes his five part series detailing duties of the modern day Course Manager Communication

To communicate effectively at every level will ensure you succeed in all aspects of golf course management. A bold statement, but one I believe, as in all my discussions with colleagues with perceived serious professional problems, the reason for those problems can be attributed to poor communication, whether at basic level - ensuring staff know what to do and when to do it, to the highest level - ensuring officials and members of the club, who ultimately decide whether to allow us to manage their golf course, understand what we are trying to achieve.

In the preceding four articles I stated how extremely important each area of management is - this area should be regarded as the link between all the other areas and therefore by far the most important.

Some employers may omit to state communication skills in advertisements for Course Managers but we, as Course Managers, should accept its importance and work extremely hard to get it right or "others", who do not have the skills to do the job but can communicate well, will oversee our profession.

The most observant of my colleagues may remember similarities in each of my previous articles to those of seven years ago, but this last article is vastly different for two main reasons.

1. Rapid technological advances.
2. The increasing importance of personal presentation in the job we do.

I will therefore list briefly the areas of communication required and concentrate on these two areas in more detail during the course of this final article.

### AREAS OF COMMUNICATION

It is safe to say that golf clubs have many different sections within the total membership where communication between sections is not good - club officials and well meaning members will endeavour to improve this because it is good for the club as a whole (ladies v gents/mixed matches, juniors v seniors, high v low handicaps, artisans v directors etc.) but we mostly play and therefore communicate within our own individual sections - probably because we feel more comfortable within our own perceived abilities and kind.

This of course makes our task much more difficult because to effectively communicate we must aim to get to all sections of the club no matter how small - even the 3/4 ball who start out extremely early in the morning and never go into the clubhouse, or the small percentage of committee members who may get voted on to committees, but seldom attend meetings.

The Course Manager must therefore cover all the following areas of communication to ensure accurate information on course matters is available to all members of the club.

### OFFICIAL COMMUNICATION

- Attending committee meetings.
- Publishing and distributing the club's agreed Golf Course Policy Document.
- Attending management meetings with the Club Manager and other department heads.
- Club Manager and Course Manager regular dialogue - formal/informal.

### DIRECT WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

- Monthly course reports.
- Major project proposals.
- Renovation work proposals.
- Internal magazine/newsheet articles.
- Distribution of important up-to-the-minute information on course activities.

### DIRECT GENERAL INFORMATION

- Presentation to members in large/small groups, sections, the morning medal players etc., in both formal and informal ways.

- Question and answer sessions - the course manager learns a great deal from these types of gatherings - not easy but again necessary!

### GENERAL COMMUNICATION

- Golf course notice board - your own (not shared) in a prominent place in the clubhouse.
- CDs, Videos both professional and home made on relevant issues.

### PUBLIC RELATIONS/SEMI-SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

- Staff match/es with sections of the club.
- Workshop visit - cheese and wine and machinery costs/staff importance.
- Course Manager lunch in clubhouse with members periodically and golf with certain members who require more involved information on course matters.
- Play in the occasional medal - but you cannot win it!
- Be on the course when that early 3/4 ball plays and give general information on what is done on their behalf.
- Call in to the clubhouse at the weekend occasionally just as the members are coming off the course - I didn't say it was easy!

I do not believe it is the job of a club official to write articles on subjects regarding golf course management/work programme up-dates/course information etc, or stand as a barrier between the Course Manager and the membership.

In golf clubs where this happens - with all good intentions I hasten to add - the Course Manager becomes isolated from the membership and therefore communication lines are no where near as good as they should be.

It has been explained to me in some cases that officials do this to "protect" or "cushion" the Course Manager from difficult situations and criticisms - this is not good policy - something will give eventually - the Course Manager must be aware of the membership's concerns and answer those concerns by communicating effectively.

The Course Manager is the expert in golf course matters and should be trained to communicate and deal with difficult situations.

### TECHNOLOGY

As previously stated this area has improved so much over recent years that we now have an incredibly useful tool in which to communicate quickly and effectively with officials as well as the general membership.

- The course notice board can be updated frequently with up to the minute digital photos of areas on the course to back up your short text information.
- You can e-mail the membership before they arrive at the club on relevant issues/information - particularly helpful in April when Augusta is on television and golfers' expectations are high but temperatures are low!
- Digital photos can be e-mailed, used in the newsheet, on the website etc.
- Presentations to committees and the membership are made much easier to explain using computerised presentation packages at a fraction of the cost of old style slides.
- International as well as national websites can be visited where information can be found and used to back up your own reasoning and observations.

## PERSONAL PRESENTATION

As I stated at the very beginning of this final article this area of management is vital to carrying out the job successfully and is not for giving presentations to conferences - that would be a bonus.

Successful personal presentation I am now convinced is what makes the difference between success and failure - being in control of the course and your own destiny.

The Course Manager must present himself/herself appropriately and manage situations in all the following areas

- One to one staff appraisals/assessments/setting goals/monitoring progress.
- Staff group discussions and "brain storming" sessions.
- Sub-committee meetings/presentations.
- Board meetings/presentations.
- Members meetings/presentations.
- Question and answer sessions.
- Attending official/semi-social functions - lunches. Lady Captain's/Captain's day etc.

At a recent meeting of some of our top Course Managers in the profession the question was asked, "What one skill do we believe is essential in succeeding as Course Managers?" The resounding, unanimous reply was, "The ability to present oneself appropriately, confidently and succinctly to the powers within our golf clubs." Thus ensuring the course gets the required resources for continuous improvement.

So forget about this type of training being for those of us who choose to stand up at conferences - this skill will ensure you are successful in getting over your point of view and therefore allow you to manage the golf course effectively.

## HEALTH AND SAFETY

This is a vast area and a sometimes rather frightening one and I cannot possibly cover all the requirements/legislation in the space available.

The best advice I can give is not to be fearful of the prospect of "getting your house in order" - if we are fearful we delay, and matters just get more frightening.

The HSE do not want to prosecute anyone following a dangerous incident - they want to reduce the risk of that happening in the first place.

If you do not have a Health and Safety Policy Document in place do so as soon as possible - once you get started it is not nearly as difficult as it seems.

This document is often bought "off the shelf" and then put on the club's shelf seldom to be seen again - until something nasty happens and the club find that the document is not adequate for the purpose - it is then too late!

You can produce this document yourself within the club with the help of HSE guidelines but some may find this too daunting - if you want a safety company to help make sure of the following criteria:-

- Ensure it is a specialised company dealing with golf and golf courses.
- Ask for references of previous clients and follow them up.
- The company must work with you to develop the document not do it for you.
- The company must involve not only the Club Manager and Course Manager but all the department heads, staff, and club officials in the formulation of the document.
- The company should explain right at the start that the document is "live" and that the department heads must be capable of up dating the document regularly.

## IN CONCLUSION

Over the past few years I have been fortunate to be in places where I have had the opportunity to speak to some fairly high ranking officials within private members' golf clubs - the clear message I get is that they want their Course Managers to manage, which is exactly what I and my like minded colleagues would like to see.

Some of my colleagues are however reluctant to take on the responsibility, particularly in the areas of budget, communication and personal presentation.

I therefore take this opportunity in stating that if this attitude continues I am convinced the profession of Golf Course Management will not survive and what remains will be controlled by "others" with little or no knowledge of the work involved, but are able to communicate and present well.

This will in turn seriously affect the general condition of our golf courses in future (if it has not done so already).

I therefore make an impassioned plea to all Course Managers and aspirant Course Managers to seek out personal presentation and communication training - you will not regret it - we will then go from strength to strength, and ultimately gain the recognition that our profession deserves.

The decision rests with us.

# We test where others guess



## Don't gamble with your top dressing

Is your top dressing compatible with your rootzone? We can take the guesswork out of choosing the right top dressing by taking core samples from your existing profile and analysing them at our laboratory. Using our custom designed software we can then identify the most suitable top dressing for your green.

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