



On the Soapbox

A new vehicle for people within the industry to express their viewpoint

'Me, I'm just a lawn mower you can tell me by the way I walk'. A line from the lyrics of a Genesis track from the album 'Selling England by the Pound' or is it how we portray ourselves to our employers and therefore if so 'selling ourselves short of the pound' we deserve!

Following on slightly from Paul Lowe's Soap Box along the lines of complaints received and the pressure that we are all under to provide a surface for our clients to play and enjoy, I do feel that at times we are our own worst enemy with a slight persecution complex. Often on blogs or in conversation it crops up that 'Once again NO praise for the course maintenance team' or 'how hard done by' we are. But do we really market ourselves in the best way? Love them, loathe them, admire them like their principles or not, the 'Gingerbread' men have got the right approach with the major word in our and any industry.... COMMUNICATION.

Could it be that perhaps our talents fall short when communicating with our employers, members or general public? Often viewed as 'grasscutters' or 'environmental enemies' by the un-educated public; how many are prepared to discuss carefully, answer questions and hold forums to help explain problems on the course or plans of the future. But that's the Green Chairman's job I hear you say! No, it's ours - the relaying of messages can get totally confused or fragmented and fabricated leading to further problems. The Head Greenkeeper who stands and communicates with members/visitors/public is actually one in a powerful position with the chance to control the situation.

Is the reason that through the media and seminars the harping on of various theories creates a feeling of inadequacies and the constant pressure of perfection makes some feel failures if not achieving that state of perfection? Perhaps, perhaps not. It is important that education is a high priority but at the same time we should remember that it is 'horses for courses' and all views, opinions and recognition of resources be respected. I have personally met many colleagues who do not discuss their own views for fear of ridicule.

The art of public speaking is often neglected but the use of it highly powerful displaying confidence and intelligence rather than scuttling off to the far end of the course or dark corner of the sheds to avoid

confrontation. The education of the members should not be viewed as confrontation but of the chance to create a new friend and ally. I accept that there are those who want to be confrontational or don't want to know the truth but remember stay calm and precise and the situation remains under control.

As individuals we can only control our own micro domain and as such any further help required can be found from our biggest ally.....Our neighbours and fellow greenkeepers (Perhaps like the Gingerbread group). On a national scale I do believe we are poorly represented by our own bodies/associations as, although many opportunities are created through educational seminars, national media are not used to the greatest advantage possible!

As we eagerly wait the spectacle of The Open on the BBC, the coverage is an ideal opportunity for the golfing public to be educated about the difficulties experienced and the role of the 'Grasscutter', Environmentalist, PublicRelationofficer, scientist, artist, and agronomist, botanist, and pathologist entomologist etc.etc.

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The views of the Professional golfer (Ken Brown) portray an excellent view of the playing difficulties and the rules official on hand for the rules to be explained to the public yet NO representation from the greenkeeping world to answer the awkward question of why do the greenkeepers always get in the way? etc. We rely on the answers of Peter Alliss and co to fight our corner surely this is not right!

During the 1980s the agricultural world was viewed as 'grant receiving wasters' and had little standing with the public but after much behind the scenes work and with such programmes nature watch and country file and others, the farming community, rightly so, are now respected and viewed as countryside rangers.

Imagine a series on mainstream TV that promoted our industry as guardians of the countryside rather than chemical happy eco destroyers. Showing the differences between a links, parkland, heathland, moorland golf courses. The fauna and flora available on the different courses the problems experienced on a seasonal basis. Not necessarily going in

deep about all our mechanical maintenance but it could actually help with the question of 'why the golf club down the road does this that and the other compared to us?'

The 'Augusta Syndrome' is often accompanied with the members discussing the programme about the preparation of the course yet the only programme prior to OUR own Major is about past winners and who's who, Not about the course preparation. The general public do not appreciate that the preparation to hosting The Open takes years, not just the month before.

The fact that the course is aimed to peak for the tournament and that the clearing up and restoration takes time afterwards is never considered!

Do we really have representation with the golfing bodies, such as the EGU, SGU, R&A, or is it that we 'accept their donations' and then allow them to govern us?

To summarise, individually we can help ourselves by improving communication but at the same time let's see the associations promoting our cause outside the industry.



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The views expressed within On The Soapbox are not necessarily those of Greenkeeper International