



Candid in Camera

Candid *adj.* frank, not hiding one's thoughts
In Camera *adj. or adv.* phrase. In private.

There are many things you'd like to say, but can't because of the potential consequences. Greenkeeper International is offering you the chance to be a little more free with what you say, safe in the knowledge that your identity will be protected. The first Course Manager to be Candid in Camera has some extremely interesting things to say about dealing with staff and golf club members...

I'm employed by my golf club to manage the course and enable us to bring in revenue. I use my staff to do that and I believe that I have to have to keep a certain distance between me, as a manager, and the staff.

I have a great laugh with my staff but they know I'm not going to go on nights out and come in rolling drunk with them at 2am. However, I will fight to make sure they get the best equipment to do their job and we all have Gore Tex waterproofs and boots etc.

It's vital that as a Course Manager you remember who pays your wages so when it comes down to a tough decision you have to side with the club. A lot of Course Managers have a fear that if they side with the club their staff won't appreciate them or want to work for them.

That's where a skill in management comes in. I am a Manager, not a Shop Steward and, in my position, I have to be the one to break the news that they're not going to get a pay rise because the club can't afford it. I also have to tell them that I support the decision and that I full agree with it... even if, on balance, I don't.

If I were to say, "I don't agree with the decision and I'll fight to get you a pay rise." and it got out, the management would quite rightly be unhappy with me for not supporting their decision.

You have to remember that the green staff are not going to pay

your mortgage if you get sacked.

I had to make a very difficult decision recently and make a guy redundant. He was a really nice bloke, but as a responsible manager I decided that, as we were not going to undertake any projects over the winter because of budget cuts, we had too many staff and I could make a significant saving for the club. Would I have been able to make that decision if I had been really friendly with him? I reckon I'd have said "He's a good lad. I'll keep him on". But if I had I wouldn't have

been fulfilling my contractual obligation to make the most of the resources and the budget. If the club had overspent on the year would I have been able to say that I'd done everything I could to prevent it? I don't think so.

I would advise young greenkeepers to work hard and to appreciate that there is a big gulf between the job a greenkeeper does and the job a Course Manager does. It's a long hard road to cross that divide and you've got to decided early in your career if you are going to work hard for the five or six years it takes to be able to progress - often perhaps not feeling that you are getting

anywhere. That is what you need to do to put yourself in a position where you can ultimately manage a Turnberry or a Wentworth..

I've learned from some of the best Course Managers in the business and at a young age was taking in how things were done - good and bad - and have put those lessons to good use on the courses I have managed. I'd say watch, learn and take on board.

Don't be disruptive and argumentative. I must admit I was guilty of this a few times when I was younger. When I thought

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the Head Greenkeeper was doing something wrong I found myself saying, "At college they say you should hollow tine twice a year..."

By all means ask your manager why something is being done, or not done. You can ask his reasoning but don't question his decision making. Don't say, "What are you doing that for?" Much better to say, "Why are you doing that?"

I truly believe that there are very few bad Course Managers out there. Nine times out of ten what sets a not-so-good golf course



off from the rest is ground conditions – how well it drains etc – and the resources that are available to the Course Manager.

You could go to a course at the poorer end of the scale, one which everyone says is bad, give the Head Greenkeeper £200,000 and tell him to buy what he needs and do what he wants.

I guarantee that he'd do as good a job as the next Course Manager.

My budget is half of that at a club a few miles away and they pay their staff more than us and are able to carry out additional work. Just because they overseed four times a year and I can only afford to do it twice doesn't make me the poorer Course Manager. However, a young greenkeeper might think that I'm not doing my job properly until he asks "Why aren't we doing more overseeding?" and I can explain the full picture.

One of the main problems we face is difficult staff and sometimes we have to take the tough decision to go down the performance management route.

A member of staff might be causing you so much grief and trouble that he drags everyone down for 12-18 months. Standards could drop as a result and it could conceivably end up costing you your job.

Someone first advised me to go down the performance management route when I had

a problem member of staff and I must admit I thought that I hadn't got the time to do all of what was required – it would be a year before I would have enough evidence to sack him. But it is the only way that the law is on our side and if we have a problem member of staff we shouldn't be frightened to take the long haul.

It can also have positive results. I started performance management on one guy and he soon became my best member of staff. It gave him a kick up the backside and stopped him coasting.

It made him ask himself if he wanted the job and when he did start working effectively he realised that he quite liked it. You may also find that the person who has been giving you problems hasn't been given any real direction.

If you're performance managing someone they might still be off "sick" for 50% of the time but at least during the 50% they are in they are performing to a standard you want.

If you do things by the book ACAS and the law will back you up. Don't be frightened.

When it comes to the club members despite the fact that I may come across as quite aggressive, people are amazed at how polite I can be to members when they have done something wrong. If, for example, I see a member not replacing a divot I may say to my staff, "I'll have him" but I'll go over and say, "Excuse me Sir, but

would you mind replacing your divot.

It really does help the greens staff and saves us a lot of time and effort which we can then put into other areas of the course."

By saying it in such a way it gives them nowhere to go. They can't very well say that they don't want to help us produce a good golf course.

A lot of greenkeepers would go up to the guy and say along the lines of "What am I? Your slave? Put your bloody divot back." If you take the "Get off my land" approach you will soon alienate 20 or 30 members and they will tell their friends and all of a sudden you'll have the entire membership against you.

At the first sign of something going wrong you'll have real problems.

If you've been firm but respectful towards them they are more likely to say that our Course Manager has got a bit of disease but he knows what he's doing.

What I believe I've achieved since being at this club is a feeling of "Don't mess around with him. He knows his stuff and you can talk to him as long as you don't try to tell him what to do." I've heard them saying "Hello. Head Greenkeeper's about. Careful where you leave your trolley." That's what I want.

A lot of it is creating the environment where members are helping and working with us to produce a top standard golf course.