

SO YOU HAVE JOINED THE COMMITTEE...

Paul Lowe, Course Manager of Bromborough GC and Derek Hartley, Green Chairman, offer some advice

Firstly, may I congratulate you on your appointment? You must feel very proud, all your friends and peers voting for you at the AGM. You must be a popular figure at the club...I hate to be the bearer of bad news but this popularity won't last.

This is a light hearted article aimed to prepare you for the rollercoaster ride that is the 'Greens Committee'.

Let me start by listing some common mistakes we committee members make while in office, hopefully these can be avoided.

- Pleasing everyone
- Second guessing - I don't know
- Greens meeting calamity
- Not trusting the experts
- Trying to achieve the impossible
- Neglecting your prized possession...your greenkeeping team

Pleasing everyone is impossible. The problem you are going to face is that golfers are human beings. Complex, emotive and passionate - especially when it concerns their golf. No two golfers are the same. From the dear old grandma who plays a few holes on ladies day and then supports the clubhouse with her cup of tea and half sandwich, to the young gun with the 300yd drive and ego to match. How can you please everyone when they are so diverse? The fact is you can't.

Then you have our favourite, the compulsive moaner; those members who are only happy when they are complaining. It's not personal, it's just the way they are. It's only a small percent, but boy they can make some noise after a few pints and a bad round.

Trying to please this lot is certainly impossible, they are unappeasable. Trying, will ultimately and certainly have a detrimental effect on the course and the work needed to maintain the course. The skill is determining who is a compulsive moaner and who has a genuine complaint. If you get this wrong then you are wasting your time - time that ought to be best spent on the genuine concerns. You will get criticized, it's part of the job.

Avoid second guessing at all cost. Just by saying "I don't know" will get you out of difficult and

sometimes confrontational discussions. Remember to follow it up with "I will ask the experts". Don't fall into the trap of second guessing. Remember that it's human nature to question what they don't understand. Greenkeeping is a very complex profession; it takes many years of studying and experience to reach the dizzy heights of Headman. Don't expect your members to grasp this complex subject and don't you expect to grasp it yourself. Just ask the greenkeeper, and report back. You could even ask the greenkeeper to explain to the members personally; after all he is the expert and will be able to explain better than you can.

The committee greens meeting - formal Green meetings are set on a regular basis. This gives the greenkeeper the opportunity to reveal his progress and problems in a formal manner and vice versa. The Green Chairman and Greenkeeper should always discuss the agenda before the meeting and everyone should have the agenda before a meeting. This gives everyone ample time to prepare. Encourage open lines of communication; the outcome being surprises at meetings are kept minimal.

Never intentionally wait for a meeting to attack or even gets one over the greenkeeper or anyone else. This is poor practice, poor teamwork, poor management, poor conduct, and poor communication and is not acceptable at a meeting. If you corner a wild animal, it will bite and attack you. Humans are no different. This only encourages discontent and communication breakdown. Good teamwork and open communication is a more productive way of working.

Trusting the experts. You have just got on to the committee; you're full of gusto and want to change the world. You're under pressure - peer pressure, there's no bigger pressure placed upon your shoulders than your mates at the bar. Well hold on... take a deep breath and calm down a moment. Golf courses have been around for hundreds of years, and during those years they have made many mistakes. Sadly the mistakes keep repeating, why? Maybe because we keep listening to our mates and failing to trust the experts.

It sounds ludicrous but it is very common. You employ your staff, you spend the club's money on



college education, training them, and you send them on seminars, workshops and conferences. You buy them the latest books, magazines and publications to keep them abreast of new initiatives. You may appoint a consultant, a person who is at the peak of all greenkeeping knowledge and education with a string of letters after their name. Your consultant will visit a vast amount of courses seeing firsthand the successes and failings of others and relay this invaluable knowledge back to you. Then, your highly educated staff, your highly regarded consultant is undermined because you choose to listen to bar room talk.

You may disagree with certain matters. But before you start expressing your opinions, why not read some articles, go on the internet and Google the subject...make an educated opinion, instead of an emotional one. I know it's difficult, but now you are on the committee it's part of your responsibility to communicate and educate



Your greenkeepers will have attended workshops and seminars

yourself. The most important part of communication is listening. Listening to the experts!

Trying to achieve the impossible - AKA the Augusta syndrome. By all means be the best that you can be, but it's important to be realistic. Budget, weather, landmass, soil type, membership are just some of the factors you need to work with. No two courses are the same, so to expect to emulate Augusta at a traditional members club and after a hard British winter is like expecting your family BMW to win the F1 championship.

Work with what you have got here, work with Mother Nature. Artificially changing your course to emulate another is never as good as the more natural approach. Just look at the top 100 courses and you will see that they work with what's natural. If you work against Mother Nature she will win, like all women they are far superior to us mere men. She also has a bigger budget.

Don't neglect your prized possession...your

greenkeeping team! Remember now that you are on the committee, you are an employer. Yes, as an employer, you have the same duty and lawful responsibility as every other employer:

- Health & safety
- Welfare & working conditions
- Bullying & harassment
- Stress awareness
- Training and development

These are just a few of the things you need to be aware of. Every employer needs to protect their staff from bullying and harassment to dangerous practices - golf courses are no different. You have a duty of care.

Ensure your staff has the appropriate PPE and working conditions:

- Is the maintenance department up to modern legal standards?
- Do the machines comply with modern EU regulations?

• Do your members bully and harass your staff?

• Do your staff members have a development plan?

It is imperative that both the greenkeeping team and the committee have respect for each other's role. Why not join your greenkeeper; learn from him, respect him, walk the course with him and ask questions...become a valued member of the team. Listen to the advice that you pay for, trust your consultant and greenkeeper. Take a day out with your greenkeeper and go to Harrogate for the BTME show, attend the seminars and conferences, dream about winning the lottery and what shiny new machines you could buy. Then buy your greenkeeper a pint afterwards.

Develop a good working relationship with your greenkeeper and become part of the team - Together Everyone Achieves More - TEAM. Corny, I know, but so true.