



On the Soapbox

A vehicle for letting people within the industry express their point of view

What I would expect from my Course Manager, and what he should expect from me.

Sadly, there are still too many clubs who see the Course Manager as an underling, rather than a skilled manager.

The reason often derives from the dated, but not unusual view of the Course Manager as the humble keeper of the green, who does little more than cut grass and rake bunkers. It can equally, however, be the fault of a well-educated, competent Course Manager who has poor communication skills.

Whatever the reason it is a mistake not to use the expertise and knowledge of this specialist senior employee. At forward thinking clubs the Course Manager is invited to attend strategic meetings.

This has twofold benefits as it offers the Course Manager a wider insight into club issues, as well as giving decision makers the opportunity to understand a little of the intricacies of course management.

Furthermore, it aids rapport and builds confidence in the Course Manager, whom board members may not have the opportunity to meet on a regular basis. The club committee knows what to expect from its other officers, but the performance of the Course Manager is not always so clearly appreciated.

It may be worth listing the different skills required by today's Course Managers; Personnel Manager, Acquisitions Manager, Financial Manager, Administrator, Agronomist, Machinery Manager, Irrigation and Water Manager, Health and Safety Manager, Estate Manager, Communicator and Golfer.

Should the golf club expect all these skills from their Course Manager? Well, yes, because the job is to provide the members with a golf course that day-to-day, is challenging, optimises playing quality, is economically sound, and works responsibly in its natural environment.

Course Managers must also understand the wider picture: the business of golf, the club's long term objectives and programmes, they must also keep up with technology and legislation if they are going to contribute fully to the management team.

Sometimes the Course Manager may have to lead the club management in areas in which it has no knowledge or expertise. Water has become the big issue. Is it for instance responsible for the Course Manager to recommend installing fairway irrigation? In even the hottest summers it will probably be required for only two or

three months, if you're fairway grass needs water you probably have the wrong sort of grass. This can be corrected agronomically at minimal cost over a few years, rather than through irrigation, which could cost in the region of £300,000.

If irrigation is used irresponsibly it will alter the character of the course, and change the quality of the sward, encouraging the growth of disease prone and drought sensitive grasses.

Moreover, it is likely that water availability for golf courses will become either reduced or in some areas prohibited.

This happened in the Surrey area only a few years ago, where golf courses had a total irrigation ban for three months.

Fairways may lose colour, in extreme weather, but they won't die, and surely golf is more fun in these conditions?

This was epitomised by the excellence of Hoylake's sustainable golf course in the 2006 Open Championship. A tribute from Tiger Woods said it all, "With the golf course

This is detrimental to reaching even the most basic objectives. Compounding this is the puzzling notion that a committee, after employing the best qualified person to manage the clubs most important asset, then has the right to over-ride even the least important decisions.

This has to be the most contentious aspect of the job for any professional course manager.

So there we have both sides of the problem. Golf clubs with a lack of continuity through ever changing committee personnel and short term policies have a bleak future and their golf courses will suffer because of inconsistent management.

For a club like my home club temple with a course policy document in place, and continuity established the route to maximising the golf courses potential is clear. A holistic style of management has evolved which will give the golfer a multi-sensory experience, which can be appreciated for 365 days a year.

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being this fast, it lent itself to just amazing creativity. This is the way it all started and how I think it should be played."

It may also be useful here to look at what the Course Manager can expect from the decision makers. First comes the golf course, is it maximising its full potential, can it be played to the philosophy of its architects design, does it work in harmony with its environment?

If any one of the answers is no, is it because the Course Managers advice is being ignored, or is it because these issues have not been brought to the attention of the committee?

If not, why not?

Is it because the Course Manager feels misunderstood, or perhaps undervalued, is his/her work hampered by internal politics, members personal agendas or egos?

All of these issues lead to a lack of direction and continuity, and obstruct the course manager in producing a well managed golf course. This scenario is frustrating, and more importantly unprofessional. The Course Manager often has to put up with persistent meddling in policy making from ever changing committees.



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