



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...

I went to a Section Meeting the other day. The golf course, for an inland course so early in the year, was in fantastic condition and chatting to a group of the guys in the bar afterwards, even the greenkeeper (modestly) said he'd never seen it so good at this time of year. I thought he'd then go on to be really positive about the season ahead and his work for the year.

But no – the poor guy was really down. The club had just appointed a new Managing Director, and nothing was right. The bunkers were poor, the greens were too slow, the fairways needed shaping properly, the trees were overgrown and needed pruning. He couldn't do anything right.

The new man had even started discussing his ideas for possible green staff cuts and changes to their working practices with one of the clubhouse staff in the bar, who naturally headed straight down to the green shed to share the information. Before long, the poor greenkeeper had a near riot on his hands which, by his own admission, took a lot of calming down.

I then expected the conversation to move on to beer, women and football, but no, this turned

out to be not an isolated incident and we were soon talking about Green Committees in general, and group rapidly swapped horror stories.

One guy had 19 people on his Committee – “So many people turn up I don't even think the Chairman knows who's supposed to be attending”; “We never seem to get much done, and last year I was told to dig up a tree and move it at one meeting, only to be told

keepers in our group were well unimpressed.

Another greenkeeper recalled the tale of a club where a neighbour had put up a wind turbine in his adjoining property. The turbine was big news locally – gone through planning as part of the Council's “Green Drive”, and was hailed far and wide as a break-through in green energy technology. The club, however, immediately instructed their

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to put it back again a couple months later at the next one, by two members who'd missed the original meeting.”

It turned out one of them and his wife had dug this particular bush as a sapling off another course where they'd won a big Mixed Open, brought it back and planted it.

Luckily this guy was fairly philosophical and his staff had had a good laugh about it, but I sensed that the other green-

keeper to get out there and plant a row of poplars in front of it “as big as you can get”.

This brought resigned sighs from our group, (Poplars, windbreaks, less-than-efficient turbines, enraged out-of-pocket neighbours, local papers, NIMBY's etc). There was a complete lack of appreciation of how important local opinion is becoming for the survival



of golf, and how important it is that golf projects a positive feel to its local communities.

It went on. "Car Park Duty," said another guy heavily. "At our place 'Car Park Duty' means having the whole staff on standby 24-7 in case two snowflakes fall in the car park. Back in December when the police were warning people not to venture out on the roads unless their journey was really necessary- the Chairman rang me up on the home phone at 11.30 at night - waking the whole family to insist that we get the car park cleared of a foot of snow and ice by 9am the next day. 'Just in case any members want to drop in for a coffee'."

"Wouldn't have been so bad, but the local TV news was showing pictures of expectant mothers being winched off roofs by the RAF, and stranded motorists being rescued from their cars. So who in their right minds was going to, 'Nip up the golf club for a cup of coffee?' The lanes up to our place were choc-a-bloc with snow anyway."

Another (Assistant) greenkeeper chipped in. "I read on our Bulletin Board that someone is about to start offering training courses for Greens Chairmen. Do you think they're trying to train them to be greenkeepers?"

(Raucous laughter at this point.) Sounds pretty scary actually and as for being strictly necessary? Hey I don't think so....

So where is it all going wrong? The majority of golf club members are not expert players, but the lower the handicap the seemingly louder they shout. Whatever happened to fresh air? Camaraderie? Exercise? Fun? Some players are eaten up by the game. A never ending sense of one-upmanship and no apparent appreciation of reality.

Golf courses are outdoors and subject to a lot we can't control. What's so difficult to understand about that? If it's not five hours of mind-numbing grinding in a competition, and they can't come back in moaning about slow play, and they haven't compiled a full list of course defects, they're not happy.

But the ordinary members are almost as bad. A couple of years ago I had a minor issue with our greens in the early spring. Nope - not looking at their normal best - cold, dry, windy - should never have hollow tined - you know the feeling?

So - let me pose a question. When you've got an issue with a product you own a share in - do you?

a\ Quietly and gently explain to prospective new customers

what has happened, and what is being done to resolve it?

Or b\ Moan and complain relentlessly about what a rubbish service you're getting to anyone who'll listen, to the point where no-one wants to use your product at any cost, and you've adversely affected the green fees and income? Yep - think we've all guessed the answer to that one.

Last year I hosted a major county amateur event. Late May - often not the best time of year. It went really well with rightly a lot of good comment about the course, particularly the greens - only soured by one of our members who, when complimented by a visitor on the condition of his course, allegedly snorted - "Pah - don't think it's always like this do you?"

Another complete amateur capable of doing considerable damage to his club.

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Then the members can get back to just enjoying playing the game? Rediscover the simple joys of knocking a ball around in wonderful surroundings.