



On the Soapbox

A stage on which people within the industry can express their viewpoint, this month taken by William Mckechnie

Many golf clubs have over the past three years found themselves in uncharted territory and as a result the financial climate has led many to reduce essential course maintenance, hoping to extend the window of full price golf and maximise revenue from free-paying visitors.

Although the problems are not always immediately evident, as we know the potential for damage or harm is ever present as aeration is postponed or cancelled to minimise disturbance and rollers are continually used on green surfaces to either speed up greens or level softer playing surfaces after excessive rain.

Indications are that these trends may be set to continue, potentially placing greenkeepers in a difficult position.

We are all guilty at times of being eager to see achievement, sometimes at the expense of quality, however unrealistic demands placed on employees in difficult times to provide visual evidence and reassurance that achievement has been made can be a recipe for long-term problems.

Numerous employers are now investigating areas in which they could reduce costs or generate new forms of income.

For this to be successful it is essential that both employers and employees are fully engaged in discussing financial constraints and investigate opportunities for income generation and move forward together with a common goal and understanding.

For a greenkeeper, balancing the demands of an employer with the requirements of essential preparation work can be difficult when aesthetic appeal is more readily recognised and appreciated than the unseen sound management practices which are essential operations, not merely options.

Achieving long term quality and good all year round playing conditions requires a consistent approach aimed at providing reliable playing conditions from year to year, providing the quality assurance that visitors rely on when booking an outing a year in advance.

For this to be achieved it is essential that employers give a commitment to understanding the operational demands of golf course maintenance, while a golf course manager must also strive to meet and understand the employer's management target to generate income and provide financial stability.

This provides an excellent basis for revisiting management structures and strategies as one coherent group, developing where required a management team structure, which formulates a business plan.

To help achieve this, a list of inputs and outputs provides a level of clarity and purpose to both employers and employees, which can too often be taken for granted by some and go unidentified by others.

Inputs

1. Financial investment should be provided to maintain and develop the golfing facilities; consideration should also be given to financial investment, which can extend the range of services available.

2. Provision for staff training is essential and contributes to a level of quality assurance.

3. Provide equipment, suitable to maintain and develop the courses, where possible aiming for state of the art provision ensuring that you can compete in the market.

4. Create and support a good working environment and welfare facilities, improving staff and member morale is essential in difficult times.

5. Create a warm and welcoming atmosphere for members, guests and staff, which builds a culture of customer and staff loyalty and trust.

6. Investment in clubhouse facilities should take into consideration the changes in culture and expectations of the leisure and tourism industry.

Outputs

1. Provide well presented golfing facilities where a high priority is customer satisfaction.

2. Ensure changing rooms, restaurants and on course facilities add to the comfort and enjoyment of the golfing experience.

3. Practice areas and driving ranges increase the capacity to stage events and add to the customer experience.

4. Golf buggies and improved on course facilities can provide a positive experience that help to exceed customer expectation.

Marketing

1. What has the club done to attract business seasonally or each month?
2. What marketing materials are

available to attract attention and are they easily accessible?

3. Marketing materials must attract customers and inform clients what is available, emphasising any special attributes. It is important to check that they serve a purpose and achieve an objective.

4. Online booking systems can be very popular as can clubhouse Wi-Fi for business users making information very accessible. Exceeding the expectations of clients can be relevant to the success of a golf course and clubhouse.

5. Where possible use local suppliers as they are stakeholders in your business and benefit from your success, providing a good service and recommending your product is in their best interest.

Organisational Structure

Developing commercial opportunities is now essential for many clubs and the benefits of having a commercial organisational structure and fully utilising the wealth of knowledge available can be invaluable. Further benefits can be achieved by creating a Hierarchy chart that can serve to identify the roles held within a management structure.

Creating a good culture between management and staff and carrying out a skills audit can be a great place to start and can unveil hidden talents which may have otherwise gone unrecognised.



Bill Mckechnie

Elmwood College Assessor / Training Associate