

Longing to Be A "Great Communicator?"

Insights from some of our industry's best

After the golf cart ran over the "no carts" sign, I took the time to straighten it. Next, we pondered where communication had failed. "Communication" seems to be one of those popular buzzwords. We hear it, say it and attempt to be proficient at it, but what does it mean? In order to gain further insight, I contacted a few of the effective communicators in our industry and asked some key questions concerning an ambiguous subject.

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Why communicate?

The need to communicate should be obvious to the golf course superintendent. Any large operation that strives to achieve common goals knows the importance of clear, concise, documented communication. The classic movie *Caddyshack* would sure be different had Carl said, "Okay, consider it done" upon Sandie's instruction to "keel all the goofhers."

Didn't I already say that?

All of the gentlemen I contacted agreed that one-on-one communication, as compared to newsletters, is by far the most effective and easiest way of informing others. Unfortunately, this method excludes 90 percent of golfers, which brings us back to newsletters. If it is becoming painful to write your club newsletter, it probably doesn't read any differently. Too often, newsletters and postings are repetitious and lose any effectiveness. If this scenario sounds familiar, try including some home lawn maintenance recommendations and use catchy phrases or humor. John Gurke does an excellent job of combining information and entertainment in *The Bull Sheet*. We are visual creatures, and photos and flashy graphics are real eye-grabbers. Newsletters can also serve as an opportunity to inform others of continuing education and personal improvement efforts.

Doohh!

Beware! Although communication is critical, carefully consider what and how much information is passed on. Some personal information is good, as it allows others to recognize you as a productive member of society. Caution should be exercised here; some personal information should remain personal. So parking your new Cadillac next to the president's is not recommended.

Also, carefully think through the relaying of technical information. We've all heard the saying, "A little information is dangerous," while too

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much information may cloud the real issue. Prior to speaking, it is strongly recommended to consider the consequences and how those receiving the information may use it (or abuse it).

I just wanted to help!

Always having a ready response is not the best tactic in all situations. Realize which problems are yours to solve and which problems require the membership's/owner's input. Steer clear of political situations and keep communication directed toward the appropriate agenda. Comments made off the cuff can sometimes be misconstrued and have the potential to cause problems.

Does anyone care?

Keeping your boss "in the know" is crucial. Distressing news, such as hydraulic leaks and disease breakouts, are always received better when the powers-that-be

are notified ASAP. Imagine a golfer attempting to show off the course to a business associate finding the 5th green a 5th brown. No one over the age of 12 likes surprises; if this includes your boss, don't surprise him by divulging information immediately to all parties deemed appropriate.

Keep in mind that you are a professional. Not everyone sees what you see. A slight discoloration or insignificant dollar spot needs no attention drawn to it. In this business, we have no need to go looking for problems. Will your boss care about the slight fertilizer striping on the 14th tee? If the answer is no, then it is best to address the source of the problem, correct it and move on.

If you can, please do so!

Most concur that the hardest thing we must convey is the amount of work necessary for rou-

tine course maintenance. The extent of our operations is lost on the majority of the golfing public. When possible, take the opportunity to educate others on the resources necessary to achieve an elevated level of maintenance.

What did he say?

With the adage "brevity is a virtue" in mind, let's review some key points from industry leaders Mike Bavier, Dan Quast, Mike Sauls and Paul Vermeulen.

- 1) Clarify objectives. This applies to the information you give and the information you receive.
- 2) Give instruction. It may be necessary to show workers what you want: "No, Carl, the gophers."
- 3) Newsletters are a challenge, rise up! Find new topics. Use graphics and trendy "golfspeak."

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- 4) Realize the importance of one-on-one communication and be available!
- 5) Avoid the after-the-fact, hoof-in-mouth disease; think before you speak.
- 6) Don't create "grill-room" agronomists; end any simple explanation with complex chemistry that exceeds your own understanding.
- 7) Politicians live in Washington (D.C., not the state of).
- 8) Avoid surprising your boss; it can cause heart attacks, job openings and newly found "free-time."
- 9) Some turf is "for your eyes only." Remember—minor blemishes are minor.

- 10) Always be professional and represent your profession with the utmost dignity.

I would like to thank all of the aforementioned for their participation and for sharing the information used in compiling this article.



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