

Turf Conferences: Professional Opportunity or Waste of Time?

Winter is the time when several educational opportunities arise for superintendents to attend turf conferences and seminars. With so many seminars and meetings to choose from, it is possible to spend a substantial amount of time away from the course. This can prompt managers and course officials to start wondering if the seminars are a legitimate educational opportunity for the superintendent or just a chance to waste the club's time and money for relaxation away from the course.

For some courses with tight budgets, it is difficult for the superintendent to justify the time and expense to attend conferences and seminars. A recent article in the *New Zealand Turf Management Journal* by Richard Odgers offers some great points regarding the importance of attending seminars and helping to justify such attendance to your club management.

Time Off

Some may argue that attending seminars is simply time off. True, it is time off, but for the purpose of professional development to allow superintendents to do a better job. It is so easy to get tunnel vision when looking at the same golf course day after day. A seminar, conference or simply visiting another course down the road provides an opportunity to challenge your current method of operation, pick up new tips and compare notes with other professionals.

Work

Attendance at a seminar is definitely work-related and should not be considered personal time. Skeptical managers or course officials might object that you went to the same conference last year or that the expense of the seminar is just more

money spent on nothing. Odgers related an old story about Albert Einstein, who asked one of his students to hand out the weekly test paper he just finished writing. After the papers were handed out, one of the students spoke up and informed Einstein that the test contained the same questions as last week. "True," replied Einstein, "but this week, the answers are different." The point is that as superintendents, you are faced with many of the same challenges and high expectations, but you are expected to come up with new and innovative answers to solve these problems and produce even better golf course conditions. Attendance at a seminar and collaborating with colleagues can help you come up with some of these answers, and possibly help you learn from someone else's experience or mistake.

Value

The money spent on attending a seminar is a good value to the course and your employer. Many industry professionals, including company representatives, consultants, featured speakers and fellow superintendents, are typically in attendance, providing a great opportunity to ask questions and pick their brains either during the formal presentations or in casual

conversation during the breaks or lunch. Chances are, somebody in the audience has experience with the same problems facing you. It is also important for you to report back to your committee or employer on what you learned at the conference. You may wish to make a short written report outlining the important information gathered at the seminar and how it might impact your staff and golf course maintenance operation. Also, don't forget to thank your employer for the opportunity to attend the conference and seminar and let them know what a valuable experience it was for you and your club.

When conference season is in full swing, it is important to schedule your time to make the most of the available educational opportunities. Information is changing at a rapid pace, and it is important for superintendents to tap into all the available resources at their disposal. Trade journals and the Internet are a good starting point, but these references cannot provide the valuable personal interaction, camaraderie and enthusiasm of attending a conference in person.

