

# Professionalism — An Observer's Viewpoint

by Lynn Griffith

I grew up around the game of golf. My stepfather was a golf pro and a golf course superintendent. As a youngster, I spent many hours around clubhouses and maintenance barns rubbing elbows with "golf people" of all kinds. I'll never forget coming home with fifteen dollars in my pocket at the age of thirteen from my first "real job" as a caddie. I picked up range balls, filled the ball washers, and vacuumed the pro shop.

From all the activity, I learned at an early age to pick out which people were dedicated to their job and their love of the game, versus those who were the shysters in plaid pants. And today, in operating a service business to the turf industry, I'm still aware of professionalism as an extremely important factor in the golf industry. Everybody knows what professionalism is, but it nevertheless difficult to define. There is, quite simply, an air about some people that tells you they are serious and dedicated, and that they mean business. That subtle air of professionalism takes on many forms.

The job of golf course superintendent demands professionalism as much as any field of endeavor. For one thing, I can think of no other form of agriculture where the grower is directed, budgeted, reviewed, and judged by a panel of laymen. I'm talking, of course, about the Greens Committee. Tomato farmers do not have to go to meetings to be informed that their fruit is soft and that yields are down. But superintendents do! The golf course superintendent has to explain what went wrong, even if Mother Nature had control of the situation. This indeed requires professionalism.

The way a superintendent handles the members is of paramount importance. I've seen many a golfer's face beam when a thoughtful superintendent says, "Good Morning, Mrs. Rogers." I've also seen superintendents who snicker when Mrs. Rogers dribbles a forty foot tee shot out of bounds. Now, which superintendents is more likely to be on the hot seat next time number eight has a few brown patches on it? (Mr. Rogers is, of course, on the Committee.) Those who treat their member's enjoyment of the game with courtesy, concern, and respect will

always fare better in difficult times.

Dress should not be important, but it certainly is! Most golf courses are image conscious, and the appearance and demeanor of their superintendent (not to mention their fairways) is a big part of that image. Think now of the finest course in your area, and then picture their superintendent at work. I doubt that your image is of a rumpled, unshaven guy who looks like he just woke up. Your professional image is important to your members, as well as to your employees. The best superintendents just naturally have a change of clothes in their office in case of bad weather or equipment problems. Your wardrobe has no reflection on mastering the intricacies of turf management, but somehow people think it does.

It helps if your shop and office look, if not immaculate, at least organized at all times. If things are too perfect, people tend to wonder if this guy really does anything. Posted job orders and signs urging responsible employee behavior carry some weight. Seeing ancient, discarded equipment overgrown with weeds, and newspapers scattered on the desk is certainly a detraction.

It's also a nice touch if your golf cart is identified as belonging to the superintendent. It tells the membership that you are available, in touch, and in charge. Forty two different sizes of pipe fittings rattling around in the back really isn't necessary.

Doing a few little extra things for important tournaments goes a long way. It's the kind of thing people remember. Some well placed flowers and welcoming signs add as much to the impression that you prepared for the event as freshly detailed traps. Members are proud of their club, and such little touches are especially appreciated when guests are playing.

Encouraging golf etiquette on your course is a sure sign of professionalism. It shows an interest in the quality of play at your club, and while some members simply will never repair a ball mark or replace a divot, they still respect you for encouraging it. Those members that do care will feel that you are on their side. It helps not only to encourage good manners on the golf course, but to recognize it and show appreciation when it occurs. The professionalism of the golf maintenance staff can and often does rub off on the membership.

Superintendents should also encourage professional behavior from the staff. Members are impressed when a worker quickly and courteously shuts off an errant sprinkler head or retrieves a club cover. Some golf courses just seem to exude professionalism, but such attitude and performance must come from the top. Professional behavior on the part of the golf course superintendent is important to his club, his employees, his members, and his career, and should not be taken lightly. ■

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