



Palm Beach Trade Winds

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Can You Talk?

HOW DO YOU COMMUNICATE WITH YOUR MEMBERS? Surely you will not go out and talk to every golfer today, however let us think about this....we are often the unknown professional. Typically there are three divisions within most golfing facilities: the clubhouse (club manager), the pro shop (golf professional), and the golf course (yourself). How often do you really get a chance to communicate with the people you so diligently work for . . . the golfer? Obviously we can not spend a great deal of time talking with our golfing public. As a matter of fact we typically find that we spend a very small percent of our time doing just that, why? Because we are busy supervising our crews, examining the course for work completed, and for future work to begin; not to even mention keeping records, placing orders, processing purchase orders, and all the other facets within the realm of our responsibilities.

Let's face it, we are the unknown professional. It is not uncommon for the golf course superintendent to be the least recognizable figure within the club, but this supervisor is commonly responsible for probably the most important division of the club's operation . . . the golf course. The golfer typically comes into contact with either the golf pro or the assistant pro at least twice a day. First an interaction is required for signing in, getting their clubs, the cart and whatever else they require. Secondly, at the end of the round the golfer discusses their game, thoughts about curing that slice or keeping their head down, along with pasting the days score for their handicap. Then the golfer will usually have lunch or dinner at the club, where an interaction with the club manager usually takes place. Here one might discuss an upcoming function or discuss their monthly billing.

We see how within a typical day at the club the golfer will interact with the pro and the club manager, but what about you? The golfer realizes you are out there, somewhere getting the work done somehow....after all if it were not for you the grass would be sky high, but, do they know your last name? If this is the case, what can you do about the "no name syndrome"? Somewhere within your busy day you are supposed to make the golfer aware their club employs a golf course superintendent. Yes, it is your responsibility for creating a meticulously maintained piece of real estate that enables the golfer to go out and shoot a great round of golf. This is not a problem that you can overcome in a matter of just a few weeks. It will probably require several

months before the golfer knows your name on a regular basis.

The following is a list of ten suggestions that just might help in creating an environment where the golfing public can know you on a first name basis, and most importantly, realize just what kind of an individual is responsible for their golf course.

1. Play the role of high visibility during prime time. True, most good golf course superintendents have examined the entire golf course and know the real estate like the palm of their hand before the first golfer even gets to the first tee every morning. Still it is a good policy to review the course again at the time of day when you will most likely be seen. Even on days when you might be tied up in meetings or at your desk preparing budgets or other paper work...it can be to your advantage to review the course. Of course you are totally confident your assistant is in control however, who does the golfer recognize as the boss? If the golfer doesn't see you, then who is in command? The golfer could very well tend to recognize the assistant as the superintendent.

2. Interact with the golfers in a nondisturbing manner. Since you will often find yourself examining the greens within the day, why not briefly discuss the conditions of the course with the golfers in a nondisturbing fashion? Obviously one should not disturb the concentration of the golfer, however, when walking to the next tee, try to carry on a quick discussion. If there is a complaint, you probably have already performed a cultural practice to rectify the problem, such as verticutting for grain, aerifying for softness, topdressing for smoothness, fertilizing for additional greening and so on. If the golfer realizes what you are doing and why, they will begin to understand we deal with a science rather than just mowing the grass.

3. Single out unknown faces. Most clubs have quite a few members and to recognize everyone on a name basis is impossible, I'm sure all of us can identify with this problem. It is important though to recognize the majority of the membership, not so much on a name basis, but at least be able to recognize their faces. You should however be familiar with the board members and the regulars, and if you are not familiar with any of these persons you should make it a point to go up and introduce yourself!

4. *Play golf with your membership.* How can one go take a test ride if you don't know how to drive? The golfer tends to appreciate the fact that you know the game of golf and if you play the game well, that's all the better. Our chapter has several superintendents playing to a single digit handicap. A good superintendent can hold his own ground not only on a mowing machine, but also at the first tee. Playing a round of golf with the members at noon, once a week, in season should not be frowned upon as taking the afternoon off. Reviewing the course with the members allows you to view the course from their point of view. Are the greens really too hard? How about the lip edge on those sand traps? Is the rough too thick? Should that tree on the left side of #7 be cut down? These common questions can be mutually discussed and usually a practical solution can be made before the end of the round.

5. *An article about the golf course in the club's newsletter.* Every month, within our club's newsletter I write an article entitled "The Greener Side". This allows me to prepare the membership for future projects such as aerification, drainage, fertilizing and other various factors having a direct influence upon the playability of the course. I also like to play the role model of the critic in regards to exercising "care maintenance", such as keep carts on cart paths, repair ball marks and divots, stay off the fairways whenever possible and so on. By discussing these various topics, the membership has been advised on proper techniques and they have an understanding about my style of maintenance operations.

6. *Memo communications posted at bulletin boards.* If your club does not partake in newsletters perhaps you can pass memos to communicate with your membership. Bulletin boards are common in both the ladies and men's locker rooms along with the pro-shop or snack bar. Even if you are fortunate enough to write articles within your club's newsletter, why not still pass memos of communications at these strategic locations. "It is better to over communicate, than to just sit down there in the barn and worry about whether or not the membership understands a certain procedure that is taking place on the course".

7. *Post your own golf tip of the month.* Golf tips can include a wider spectrum than just the ability to play the game. There is the proper technique for repairing a ball mark, replacing a divot and just where a cart should really be driven. An entire memo can be written on just one topic.

8. *Display the periodicals of your industry.* As members of the associations (GCSAA and FGCSA), we receive issues of "Golf Course Management" and "The Florida Green" that can be put to good use. Have a copy of each available within the lobby of the clubhouse. Let your membership appreciate the fact that we are an organized association striving towards professionalism within our industry. Perhaps the "Green Sheet" might even be put out for display too.

9. *Allow membership to partake within projects.* If a golfer can take a part of the action, it makes them feel important, not to mention the tremendous help they can offer. Periodically on Sundays, I hold a project called

"Fire Ant Day". Considering that the eradication of the fire ant can be much like looking for a needle in a haystack, I have created a situation where the golfers help me locate the fire ants. On those Sundays, the golf carts are supplied with a bundle of perhaps 10 survey flags. The golfers within their round, simply stick a flag in the ground near the mound. Why on Sunday? Because after two days of no mowing the mounds become recognizable over the top of the grass. Then early on Monday morning the sprayman will go out to each location, pull the flag, spot spray the area and voila! This creates an environment of pride and satisfaction for the membership, not to mention the safety factor of specifically eradicating the pest.

10. *Help sponsor Florida Golf Day.* By overcoming the barrier of the golfer not recognizing their superintendent, we begin to find the membership mutually caring for the same goals as the superintendent. In order to achieve a good environment for both the superintendent and the membership, your club can help sponsor Florida Golf Day. Your influence, and the clubs' response can all work together towards improving our industry. Research and Development is a vital link towards improving courses for the future. Kevin Downing has created an event that has proved to be very beneficial for upgrading the image of our industry, not to mention the rewards for future research work.

Perhaps these suggestions will not be appropriate for your club, however in my situation I am constantly striving towards bonding together the attitudes of the membership to understand exactly what type of work is being performed on the golf course. I have concluded these topics to be extremely necessary in order to achieve a sense of security and calmness for both the membership and myself. We commonly hear of frustration and disappointment from both the membership and the superintendents at clubs where legitimate problems exist. These problems can not be cured in the matter of just a few months. It might require several years in order for a club to accomplish its their golf course. As long as the superintendent communicates closely with their membership in a way which allows the membership to understand exactly what is going on, why it is going on and how long it will take, then I believe that both parties will be able to see the goals of achievement. It simply requires: *communication.* ■

