

A failure to communicate!

For trivia buffs, those fateful words in the title of this column were uttered by the sheriff in the Paul Newman movie, *Cool Hand Luke*. They might as well have been spoken by a golf course superintendent in the course of any given day, judging by recent events.

My esteemed colleagues, Mark Jarrell and Tom Benefield, have already commented thoroughly in *The Green Sheet* on the GCSAA's failure to communicate accurately on member sentiments surrounding the soundly-defeated bylaws changes. There are other after-the-fact communications coming out of headquarters that have many members concerned about how things are being run. We are hoping for better information sharing from the new Board.

But my point is the failure to communicate within our own golf operations! We have all been victims of the surprise shotgun tournament that gets sprung on us at the last minute. What in the world is going on in the clubhouse anyhow? Besides telling the pro shop staff and the food and beverage department, what other department or person might need to know about an 8 a.m., 144-man, shotgun start tournament on a Monday morning? Hmmm?

You know Mondays: they're like Wednesdays, and Fridays when the golf course maintenance staff (only for the last millennium) sets cups, mows greens, tees, collars, and fairways plus any other bunker raking and rough mowing routine. And Tuesdays and Thursdays when we park the tee and collar mowers to flymow bunkers or apply some fertilizer or work on a project. These schedules aren't set in concrete. We can accommodate any special function. It is our job! We just need to know about it!

It is also our job to prepare and present the best playing conditions possible. Since golf courses are operated on an economic calendar instead of an agronomic calendar, we need to know what days or even half-days that we can't have the golf course for normal operations. We do our best to squeeze the agronomy in between the first tee times at sunrise, twilight play, Men's Days, Ladies' Days, group functions, and any other special event where no one wants the maintenance staff to "be in the way"!

This communication problem isn't just a Central Florida phenomenon. I just read the Wisconsin GCSA newsletter, *The Grass Roots*, wherein a group of superintendents detail a list of their communication horror stories: surprise shotgun starts, "nite lite" golf outings that get drenched by

the night-time irrigation, a special group function that finds the aerifier, not a mower, preparing the greens, and so on! All examples of the inexcusable failure of the tournament coordinator, club manager, convention sales staff, golf professional, starter's office, etc. to communicate with those who need to know!

Why do these communication failures continue week after week, month after month, year after year? The superintendents in Wisconsin had several fuzzy organizational reasons, but Monroe Miller hit the nail on the head when he said, "somehow we scramble around and make things right." There it is! We jump through the hoop and perform the tricks that cover up the lack of attention to detail by others. That kind of performance would get a superintendent called on the carpet or fired if he persistently ignored communicating with the clubhouse!

Wouldn't it be interesting to hear the comments from the golfers after a very special event was played on unmowed or freshly aerified greens with no attempt to correct somebody else's mistake. Professional pride and a strong survival instinct prevents most of us from letting some of these potential disasters from unfolding. Because, in some twisted way, we feel it will be construed as being our fault if the course isn't ready. Even, if we only had last-minute notice of an event! It may be a good defensive tactic for the superintendent to call every day to find out what's on the schedule, or if the published schedule has changed. But, trust me, even that is not foolproof!

Doesn't it just seem logical, responsible, and professional that the person, who has first-hand knowledge of information that will affect how the club serves its members or guests, should be the person to insure that communications reach all those who need to know. Of course, I'm being selfish here to include the superintendent as one of those who needs to know.

Hasn't it occurred to everyone associated with golf that it is the condition of the course that makes or breaks an event and generates repeat business or memberships? With all the answering machines, fax machines, and voice mail features available there just isn't any excuse for springing a surprise on the staff anymore.

Now that I have practically accused all of the tournament sales people, golf pros, and club managers of dereliction of duty and malfeasance in office, let me say, I know you are really human just like me so, put down your sticks and stones and just pick up the cotton-picking phone!

Green Side Up



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