

# What We Have Here is a Need to Communicate

By Bruce R. Williams, CGCS

Golf course superintendents do a wonderful job of providing great golfing conditions. Some have learned the trade through formal education and others have learned through hard work and good mentors. At some point we all acquire the skills to keep the turfgrass looking super within the constraints of our budgets and weather conditions. However, there is one area that I believe to have a wide variance in competencies and that is our ability to communicate.



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I have a couple of theories on communication and how it can affect superintendents. By sharing them in this article, I am not expecting everyone to agree with me but it may start a few people thinking about the value of communication.

- More people lose their jobs over poor communication than poor turfgrass conditions.
- Many superintendents miss opportunities to shine by not telling their stories.
- Writing, speaking, providing reports, etc. are not natural talents but skills that must be acquired. They take practice and effort.

Let's look at a few things that you might be able to put into practical application at your golf course.

I hope you have some vehicle to convey your message to your golfers. Standard vehicles would be a golf course newsletter, a Web site, bulletin boards in the pro shop, locker room, etc. Every month I receive about 100 newsletters from clubs all

across the country via our GM. Only 20 percent have monthly articles from the superintendent, yet all of them have monthly articles from the pro and GM.

The same is true with Web sites. Some superintendents have done a marvelous job of contributing to their golf course Web sites but again the golf pros and managers outshine us in this category. It is easy to say that you don't have time to write a monthly message but I would say that you can't afford not to take the time to communicate clearly the great and exciting things that are happening on the golf course.

I can't tell you how many times I have had peers tell me the Rodney Dangerfield line "I don't get no respect." Perhaps it is because we don't do a great job of developing our own public relations campaigns. It has been said that the three key steps to promoting your success are:

1. Do the right thing.
2. Do the right thing.
3. Tell people that you are doing the right thing!

To be successful and receive the respect you are due, you must recognize opportunities and take advantage of them. When you get a chance to attend board meetings, committee meetings, golf advisory meetings, etc. welcome the opportunity. Prepare well for these meetings and be certain to present your message professionally either verbally or in print. Too many people shy away from these opportunities. When you are invited to the Guest Day banquet, don't turn the chance down. Sure, you got up at 4 a.m., but you owe it to yourself and your crew to rub elbows with the players and receive the accolades for the great golf course.

When problems arise on the golf course, don't allow someone else to tell your story. I never want to depend on a waiter, bartender, golf shop employee, etc. to explain why we have some thin

areas on the golf course. The message is sure to get mixed up and perhaps put you in a bad light. Be accessible when problems exist. People typically want to know three things when trouble happens on the golf course.

1. What happened?
2. What are you going to do about it?
3. When will it be back to normal?

Nobody can carry the message better than you. Communicate it every way you can until the problem is resolved.

A picture is worth a thousand words. Use pictures as a vehicle to communicate your successes or to demonstrate areas that need improvement. In this era we should all learn to utilize digital photography and power point to make powerful presentations to promote programs and projects. It is a tool that can make us all look pretty good in front of our employers.

While space does not allow me expand on the subject, suffice it to say that the largest area for communication improvement is the skill of listening. If you go to the library you will find hundreds of books on public speaking. However, I doubt if you can find any that deal with listening. Listen to what your golfers want. This can be done through customer evaluations or personal feedback. Don't hear what you want to hear but try to understand what people are really saying. Don't be defensive. Learn to accept constructive criticism. Employers want people that bring them solutions rather than someone who gives excuses.

Think about the top five superintendents you know. What puts them in this special category of high esteem? Is it their ability to grow grass or is it their ability to communicate? I feel strongly that today the grass growing is the fundamental part of the job but the ability to communicate is paramount to career success.