

Taking Care of Business



**GREEN SIDE UP
By JOEL JACKSON**

It's no secret that new course construction has been flat for a couple of years along with the participation level of golfers in general. In 2007, the National Golf Foundation reported that course closings outnumbered openings. Those are foreboding tidings indeed for those who depend on the golf industry for a living.

You can talk about the tough economic times, but don't be paralyzed into inaction by all the gloom and doom in the press. Misery is their stock and trade. The people who think creatively and take action instead of sitting and waiting for things to change will have the best chance to see the light at the end of the tunnel. Mark my words; there will be an end to the tunnel. We're beginning to see some signs of that now. But no matter how the economy recovers, things will be different from before.

Paul Grose, president of the Florida Sod Growers Cooperative, recently

outlined some important characteristics which companies that survive and thrive typically exhibit. I thought I would apply them specifically to golf courses.

DIVERSIFY

Can't change a golf course into an amusement park, but you can increase your customer base by getting in on the "Grow the Game" mantra. Kill off some of the old dinosaur habits and create some times for new golfers to get on the course without a lot of pressure to be polished players. Cripes, it still takes the pros more than 5 hours to play 18 holes.

EFFICIENCIES

Must haves vs. Nice to Haves. Must you have green sand to topdress divots or could you get by with something less expensive. Handmowing tees is not in the list of things you must do to have decent tees, but having well trained, motivated operators is a must. Raking bunkers daily is something you can cut back on. After all it's the golfer's responsibility to rake out his or her tracks. You can make your own list based on your course's old ways of doing things.

The cost of materials, chemicals, fertilizers and

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fuel take larger cuts out of the budgets you have to work with. Being as efficient as possible is the best way to counter those uncontrollable costs.

CUSTOMER SERVICE

We don't always see the golfers when they walk in the door but we sure can wave and say "Hi!" out on the golf course, or help look for a ball if we saw it go into the woods as we drive by. Golfers will also need to recognize that, with smaller crews, we need to keep mowing so stopping and turning off the engine might not be a good option if the club is to remain solvent.

EMPLOYEE RELATIONS

We know it's the backbone of any operation, so developing your own leadership skills and being a good listener, coach and teacher are essential. Keep a positive outlook and don't mope around, it's contagious and shows in the work product.

SET OBJECTIVES

This goes for the whole club and means having goals for where you want to be in one, five and ten years from now. You can apply that to your own department as well and work to make it fit the big picture for the whole operation and your own personal achievement.

PRIDE IN THE PRODUCT

When you have done the best you can with what you have, be proud and unafraid to market your product from the playing conditions to the whole golf experience at your club. Don't get into greens fee price wars, but rather

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place good value on your product based on the service and conditions you give to the customers.

If I've said it once, I've said it a thousand times; golf course superintendents are some of the most adaptable and creative people I know. So learning how to better take care of business during these tough times is just another one of those challenges I know you can turn into an opportunity to succeed.