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# Taking It to the Next Level

## *Golf course management and golfer expectations*

Every golfer wants to play on quality turf. And certainly most golf course operators and owners want to have quality turf.

And golf course superintendents work hard to achieve that. So why do these desires fail to get realized?

Sometimes they get derailed because golfers are apt to focus on what they are unhappy about rather than what can reasonably be attained. Then course owners or clubs are forced to chase complaints instead of following an achievable plan of action.

A.W. Tillinghast, the architect who designed Bethpage Black course and Winged Foot Country Club, among others, said, "It is my belief that too many American courses are retarded in proper development and improvement by unintelligent – although doubtless well-intended – criticism and advice from the locker rooms. Without a doubt, there exist more amateur course architects and turf authorities among the members of some of our clubs than there are following these crafts professionally."

The GCSAA golf course superintendent is the person who has the most intimate knowledge of the course and who knows best how to go about achieving course maintenance goals, but unrealistic expectations and outside pressures sometimes prevent them from applying that knowledge.

Chris Hartwiger is a USGA agronomist who consults with golf courses and has seen more than a few of these situations. He and other agronomists spend much of their time talking to golf course superintendents, green committees and course owners during Turfgrass Advisory Service and they often hear golfers with unrealistic expectations.

"Good golfing conditions do not happen by accident," Hartwiger said. "They happen when a team is put together that has the resources and infrastructure necessary to meet the desired objectives."



He offered several examples of unrealized expectations:

**Producing a quality cut:**

Agronomists often hear that the cut was not good on one or more parts of the course. Often, it's a failure to allocate adequate resources – the course either doesn't have any reel-grinding equipment or it hasn't allowed the golf course mechanic to get the necessary training for existing equipment.

**Rough that's not "too rough"** A course owner says, "We have a good staff and new leased equipment, so why is the rough so inconsistent?" In many areas, especially the Southeast, shade and incomplete irrigation coverage doom rough to inconsistency.

Superintendents know that asking sun-loving grasses to thrive in the shade and compete with tree roots for water is an exercise in futility, but golfers rarely let the superintendent remove the trees necessary for good turf.

**Consistent bunkers:** Golfers universally want perfect bunkers, not too firm or too soft. Like Goldilocks they want them "just right." Unfortunately, bunkers will never be that consistent over the course of a season.

The solution involves better communication and the development of a network that includes golfers, the golf shop, the general manager, the green committee and the turfgrass management team.

**Better putting greens:** The best putting greens have many of the following factors in common:

- A skilled GCSAA member superintendent and experienced staff
- Good construction and enough size for amount of play
- Use of an improved variety
- Commitment to a sound aeration and topdressing program
- Little shade and good air movement

through either open sites or fans

- Excellent water quality
- Sensible mowing program
- Summer venting

Without them, the likelihood of better greens declines, too.

The role of a green committee or course owner, working in concert with the golf course superintendent, to develop and implement a coordinated plan is obvious, but where does the golfer fit into the puzzle?

A good first step is a change in mindset. If your course is regularly deluged with complaints, it's hard to create a realistic management plan. If instead, golfers are genuinely interested in what happens on the course, and ask questions when they don't understand what is happening on the course, the management team can begin the dialogue that produces achievable goals.

"The trick is to get everyone on the same page," Hartwiger said, "If complaints and criticisms are a recurring theme, focus on building the team and resources necessary to deliver the results desired."

Every course has some budget limitations, so if it's not possible to have all the employees, the machines, the budget, and the infrastructure to satisfy every hope or dream, help is available. In addition to the fact that your golf course superintendent is the person who knows the most about the course and what can be achieved, he or she has a network of more than 20,000 other turf professionals available in the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America, and the extensive professional and educational resources offered by the association.

What golfers say they want may not be realistic at every course, but the good news is that every golf course can set achievable expectations and encourage golfers to enjoy the course when they play.

*Credit: GCSAA Communications Dept.*



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# Managing Labor

*Finding, retaining and managing a fluctuating multi-cultural workforce is just another challenge for today's superintendent.*

With the continued reports of golf growth flat-lining, we thought it might be interesting to ask our members to write about how they have been affected in the labor management department. Since labor generally makes up 55-60 percent of a maintenance budget, how are the hard times affecting that aspect of golf course maintenance. Depending on your particular region, the available labor pool may have been affected by construction and hurricane cleanup projects, when laborers could get a few dollars more per hour for these short-term ventures.

Superintendents have had to juggle budget cutbacks or do some soul searching on when to run light on the crew and either postpone projects or back off on some housekeeping chores like pruning and edging, which might affect the aesthetics a bit, but not sacrifice the playing conditions in the primary playing areas. Here are a few comments on the subject of labor management from your peers

## TECHNICIANS HARD TO FIND

Within the last six months, the labor market over here has seemed to free up; the building has slowed somewhat and we are having steady flow of applicants. Most are Hispanic and not many speak English. A year ago, most guys in town were really struggling to find help. What is hard to fill are the technician positions: spray techs, irrigation techs, etc. If you have a really good worker on staff, it seems as if the language barrier gets in the way with them reading labels, computers for setting up water etc.

We started this year with English classes for our staff. It is a longterm project and will be years before anything comes of it. One thing that is good is that we have a literacy council here in Bonita Springs and they have

book, computers and other materials available for the guys who really want to learn.

I think I will avoid the overtime question. We still run 5 to 7 hours per week depending if our guys work on the weekend. Each year I have to justify the overtime and it seems to be working. We have slight turnover but not too much – seems like the same one or two positions. Maybe the overtime coupled with the good benefits helps.

Private club operations are so much more different from the courses tied to real estate and/or resorts.

*Matt Taylor, CGCS,  
Royal Poinciana Golf Club*

## DON'T BACKFILL OPENINGS DURING SLOW TIMES

Over the past three and a half years, finding an adequate supply of labor has been very difficult due to the rapidly expanding housing market. Although I think few will complain about the exponential increase in the value of their homes, the housing market's effect on available manpower has made many superintendents' jobs more difficult. During the recent times of nonstop home construction, the labor pool from which most golf courses in southwest Florida draw their help was finding higher paying jobs. Price competition generally had not been a problem.

I often ask my colleagues how they are doing on labor, and usually they say they are always a couple of guys short.

In the last six months, since the housing market has flatlined and housing contracts are being fulfilled, several large construction companies laid off a large percentage of their work forces due to slow real estate sales. This downturn in the housing market has made a larger labor pool available once again. Right now I have maybe three to five guys a week walk into the shop

looking for work.

As with any position, salary depends on experience, but we typically start a knows- nothing guy out at \$8, knows-some at \$9-plus, knows-a-lot \$10-plus, and is an absolute life saver at \$11 and up. It's a crude but effective pay scale.

I have worked on both sides of the fence in my short career: courses that spend money and those that try to make money. At Collier's Reserve we would budget 3.5 hrs of OT every week and didn't depend on revenues. Here at Naples Grande we are a for-profit organization and the bottom line is everything. We don't compromise quality, but we try very hard to maintain no more than a 40-hour work week during the summer.

What I will do is not backfill any openings and run a few guys short during the slower summer season to save some labor dollars in the budget for any needed overtime during the winter months when you need all the details attended to as soon as they arise. These past two quarters have been the slowest in club history, thus affecting my spending, but we do what we can to try and ease the hemorrhaging money flow.

One way we will make up "project time" is to do it at night. We have two grow-lights mounted to a workman with a lift, we put a generator in the bed and now you have a mobile light stand. We will do the work and then send the staff home early if the payroll budget is running tight.

*Bill Davidson, GCS  
Naples Grande Golf Club*

## LABOR ISSUES

Availability: Construction still strong here but has slowed down some. Unskilled help readily available, experienced golf course workers more difficult to find, but not impossible.

Starting wages: Inexperienced \$ 8/hour; experienced \$ 9-11/hour; retention: 90 percent of my employees have been here longer than three years. We have had only one new hire in the past 2 years.

About 60 percent of my employees are Haitian, 20 percent Hispanic, 20 percent Caucasian or African American. Almost all speak English well enough to get by. I constantly encourage assistant superintendents to follow up on verbal instructions (be physically present to demonstrate) to those with weaker English skills. As long as we exhibit patience and willingness to teach and demonstrate, language is no barrier at all. If I need a new employee, my current employees usually refer enough candidates to me for me to fill the position without further advertising.

We allow all employees to work up to 6 hours of overtime each week. They were hired with that understanding

and Club has remained committed to honoring that agreement and allowing them that much overtime each week. About 80 percent of crew chooses to work that much overtime each week.

Our labor hours have not been reduced. We work diligently to ensure that our crew members are productive. Its my job to give good direction and supervision for necessary tasks, and not just keep employees occupied doing "busy" work.

I currently have one part-time (30 hours/week) employee. He is semi-retired after working full time here for 20 years. I have had a couple of other similar employees here during my eight years here. Students tend to be a challenge due to scheduling conflicts and restraints, so we have had only three or four (one at any given time) here in eight years. Since our crew size does not fluctuate on a seasonal basis, we have not needed part-time

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## SUPER TIP

## Words That Stick

By Darren J. Davis

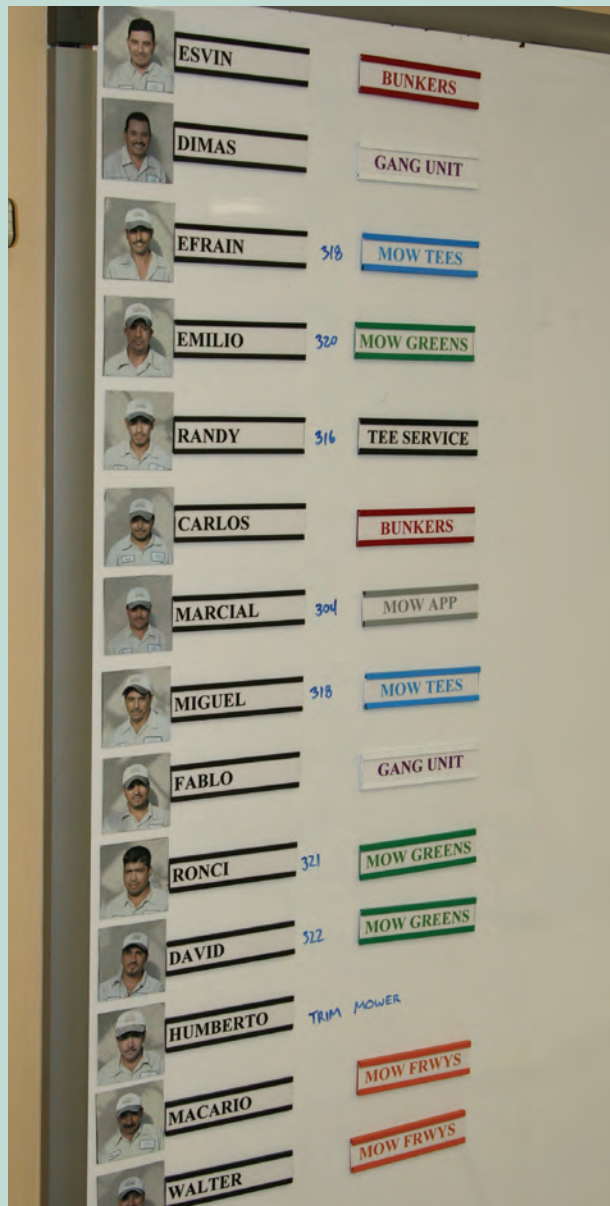
Since I am not one of them, I have always admired individuals with exceptional handwriting. Neat handwriting is definitely a skill I haven't mastered. In fact, given a choice I might use the paper with the dotted middle line used to teach handwriting in elementary school. With this said, the writing of the daily crew assignments on our dry erase board has always been a responsibility I have delegated to my assistant. However, we recently designed a system which, among other things, eliminates at least 75% of the daily writing required.

The first step in creating the new system was to purchase 4 x 1-inch magnetic holders. These are the same style of holder that we use to affix our employees' names to the assignment board (see "Names and Numbers for the New Guys" in the summer 2004 issue of *The Florida Green*). The magnetic label holders were purchased through TIMEWISE, a manufacturer of dry erase boards and accessories ([www.timewiseboards.com](http://www.timewiseboards.com)). A package of twelve holders is \$13.85 and they are available in eight different colors.

While the magnetic holders were on order, my assistant and I decided on the eight most common daily tasks. These included mowing greens (mow greens), mowing tees (mow tees), mowing fairways (mow frwys), mowing approaches (mow app), mowing rough (gang unit), changing the hole location (change cups), bunkers and tee service. We then typed the tasks in Microsoft Word using 38-point Times New Roman font. After printing and laminating the page, we cut the individual words/phrases to fit snugly inside the magnetic holders. The lamination process could be skipped if you do not own a laminating machine. However, since the cost for us was less than \$5 we chose to laminate the paper to increase its durability and enable easy cleaning.

Since I do not write the daily assignments on the board, the biggest advantage of this new system for me is that it enables me to quickly inspect the assigned jobs and the quantity of people doing each. For example, if I wanted to see if my assistant sent out one or two fairway units I

just look on the board for the orange colored label holders. Or, if I wanted to make sure he had at least four walking greens mowers assigned I just count the green colored magnetic holder.



We created a total of 30 magnetic assignment labels so the total cost of the project was under \$45.

seasonal workers. If we need extra help for hurricane cleanup or help to prepare for the opening of the season, we use contract laborers on an as-needed basis to fill in the gaps.

I know a number of South Florida superintendents who rely heavily (up to 30-40 percent of their crew on some

days) on contract labor to supplement their regular crews. Though it has challenges, this method seems to work well for accomplishing low-skill golf-course maintenance tasks like flymowing, edging bunkers and cart paths, etc.

*Bob Randquist, CGCS  
Boca Rio Country Club*

### EXPERIENCED HELP SOMETIMES AVAILABLE

The labor market in north Tampa has been good of late. It seems that every time we have an opening, there is someone filling out an application. Lately, we have had several applicants who have golf course experience. This

is not always the case. New home construction has slowed considerably in our area. Right now, that job market is not affecting us.

We will bring on a new hire with golf course experience on at \$ 8.50/ hour. No experience, \$8. Six of our 16 employees are of Hispanic background. Most speak and understand English. We utilize several crew members to interpret when necessary.

As at most courses we have been asked to keep overtime to a minimum. We schedule overtime for special events, aerification & topdressing.

We have been reduced in manpower by 1.5 workers. Budget reduction for payroll reduced by \$ 25,000 for 2007. For days of scheduled maintenance such as verticutting, aerification, we will start some crew early then overlap by having some come in later in the day to cover what is left to finish.

I do not use any part time help. The best way we have found help has

been by referral. If someone leaves, our Hispanic workers usually know of someone who needs a job.

*Bill Kistler, GCS  
Tampa Palms G&CC*

### **MANY JOB CANDIDATES DON'T MEET BASIC REQUIREMENTS**

There seem to be a lot of people looking for jobs. The problem we're having at Maple Leaf is that our insurance requires that we hire people who have a driver's license and we are a drug-free workplace. We've had problems finding people to meet these two criteria.

Our starting wages are low (\$8-8.50/hr) but we do offer a full benefits package, including uniforms, paid vacations, paid sick time, paid health, dental and vision insurance and 401K contributions. My staff right now consists of mostly older workers who are retired from another job. We have a good core staff, some of whom have

been at Maple Leaf for 10 - 25 years, but a few positions keep turning over. We have no Hispanic workers.

Overtime is generally limited to weekend work except when we are shorthanded or have special projects. Hours and manpower have not been cut, but I have a staff of only eight, inclusive. I have to be creative on a daily basis to get things done. I am budgeted for two part-time people. I have one at the moment and a second new employee waiting for drug test results. The current employee is a retiree and the new one is a student.

Comments: Given the size of my staff, I need to have quality people fill all my positions. I can't waste a pay slot. If I could offer larger salaries, it would definitely be easier to find good people.

*Nancy Miller, GCS  
Maple Leaf G&CC*

*Photo of The Falls C.C. staff by Joel Jackson.*




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# A New Sprinkler for Your Bunker-Face Blues

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** *We can't keep wasting water to try to keep steep bunker faces as green as the rest of the golf course. Here is a new sprinkler version that can help apply water efficiently to hard-to-water areas like bunker slopes.*

By Kevin Scott

Ten years ago, pop-up spray heads around bunkers were about as common as a hole-in-one. As golf course design evolved over time to incorporate visually striking bunkers with steep, sodded faces — and as golfers expect superior turf conditions on these sloping faces — a need developed to install supplemental irrigation systems around bunkers. Hand watering, sometimes supplemented with an application of moisture-retaining pellets, wasn't proving sufficient to combat the sun-fried, wind-struck, dried-out bunker face.

Traditionally, irrigation systems equipped with spray heads at the front line were installed to cure bunker face blues. This method, however, seemed to harvest even more maintenance problems; sprays have a high application rate and emit water too quickly for soils on slopes to absorb, leaving inadequate amounts of moisture for the sod, undulating runoff, and rendering soak times ineffective. Sprays are also not ideal for micro-managing bunker faces due to their inability to maintain uniformity during arc adjustments. With spray heads installed around bunkers, water is being wasted and work crews are still employing the hose-in-hand method to water those

bunker faces that just don't seem to stay green.

A new genre of sprinkler is popping up on golf courses across the country to address the problem: Multi-stream, multi-trajectory rotating (MSMTR) sprinklers are now being installed on problem areas such as bunker faces, slopes, tee boxes and landscaped areas surrounding greens. Currently, only two companies offer MSMTR sprinklers: the Walla Walla Sprinkler Company's MP Rotator, and Rain Bird's Rotary Nozzle.

MSMTR sprinklers have only

fit in Rain Bird spray heads). These nozzles rotate while throwing several powerful streams of water, and deliver water at a one-third the rate of spray heads, allowing the soil to more-efficiently absorb the emitted water. With high uniformity and the capability for longer soak times, MSMTR sprinklers elicit virtually no runoff or standing water, effectively fight wind with stream technology, and can cover micro problem areas like bunker faces with easy arc and radius adjustments that maintain the application rate and uniformity (Rain Bird Rotary Nozzles

have variable fixed arc nozzles, while MP Rotators have a fully adjustable arc on any model).

Compared to spray heads that average 50 percent distribution uniformity (DU), rotary nozzles are between 70 to 80 percent efficient, which is commensurable to the efficiency of golf rotors.

As irrigation efficiency and water conservation migrate to the forefront of



*With multi-stream, multi-trajectory rotating technology, the MP Rotator (shown here) delivers water at one third the rate of spray heads which allows the tight soil on bunker faces to efficiently absorb the water it needs--producing a healthy, green stand of turf. This technology has gradually started to infiltrate the Florida market.*

recently breached the Florida market.

“Originally, our business focus has been on the west coast because of the water situation and climate,” said Chris Wright, regional sales manager for MP Rotator. “This technology has gradually started to infiltrate the Florida market due to new distribution outlets and its reputation as a water-efficient sprinkler. There is a reason why water purveyors have made this sprinkler the most rebated sprinkler in America.”

An MSMTR sprinkler is basically a small rotor that can be retrofitted to any pop-up spray head body (MP Rotators have both male and female thread models, while Rotary Nozzles

Florida superintendents' challenges due to record-breaking drought conditions, these sprinklers have been documented to save approximately 30 percent more water over conventional spray heads.

Harold Wills, irrigation superintendent at Orange Lake Resort in Orlando, oversees the irrigation at the 1,200-acre resort, which includes two 18-hole and two 9-hole golf courses. In 2006, when Orlando received only 34 inches of rainfall and entered into a drought worse than previously experienced in 1932, golf courses and commercial properties were charged to conserve water. Wills decided to work with a water auditor



and create a five-year strategic water conservation plan for the irrigation systems throughout the resort. When researching what water-efficient products to install, he discovered the MP Rotator.

"I have the MPs installed on some of my tee boxes and greens," Wills said. "Right now we have 200 installed, and are working with a water auditor to build a case for installing MPs throughout the whole resort and all necessary parts of the golf courses. The MP's scheduling coefficient is like God's rain. And God's rain is perfect."

While he currently does not have MP Rotators installed around bunkers, he is interested in pursuing the option because of the superior coverage his greens and tee boxes are currently receiving from the MPs.

"Compared to the sprinklers we used to install, the coverage is better due to the MP's ability to apply water uniformly, and adjust to corners while

maintaining a matched precipitation rate," Wills said. "Water is not being thrown everywhere and misting away into thin air. In the last year, I have only had to fix one MP. With the old sprinklers, I was out there fixing them every week."

MSMTR sprinklers, compared to sprays, can also throw further and cover more ground while irrigating at a significantly lower flow rate.

For those superintendents who already have supplemental irrigation systems around bunkers, a switch to these sprinklers is easy, but if no system is installed, the labor costs involved in installing a system can be substantial. Because of the low flow, the irrigation design can have more heads per zone, thus fewer zones are needed, saving labor and material fees for new installation.

Additionally, MSMTR sprinklers will significantly reduce many of the costs typically associated with spray heads or

hand watering. The labor will prove to pay for itself over time.

It is important to note that MP Rotators and Rotary Nozzles have similar functionality, but their specs differ. For example, the MP Rotator has an application rate of 0.45 in/hr, while the Rotary Nozzle delivers 0.75 in/hr. Check the manufacturer's specifications on each of these products before selecting which one is better-suited for your specific application.

As water purveyors mandate stern watering restrictions and strictly monitor water use on golf courses, several water-efficient technologies have been introduced, in addition to MSMTR sprinklers, being employed by superintendents to save water — and avoid being fined.

"I recently learned that three golf courses in my area were fined \$10,000 each for going over their water-usage allotment," said Wills. "We don't want to find ourselves in that situation."



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## USGA Update 'Nobody Knows, How Dry I Am'

*By Todd Lowe*

Golf courses are singing the blues as the drought continues. In fact, a light haze of smoke has wafted in on TAS visits lately. The smoke is not from roughs burning out, but from multiple wildfires throughout the region. Record low rainfall has caused phase II restrictions (30 percent reduction) throughout most of the region to be in effect, with some areas experiencing Phase III restrictions (45 percent reduction). The water management districts are to be applauded for working with golf course superintendents and allowing them to decide when to irrigate; previous restrictions limited use to certain



*Bermudagrass can survive extended periods of drought, but becomes brown as it goes dormant. Photo by Todd Lowe.*

week days. After several meetings with concerned golf course superintendents, it was decided to allow courses to irrigate by a reduced percentage than their normal allotment.

Golf courses use a small percentage of water compared to other users, especially homeowners, and can easily monitor and reduce use as needed.

Enforcing restrictions on other groups is much more difficult for the water management districts, as it is difficult to effectively monitor them. Golf courses report monthly on their usage, and restriction enforcement is a much easier task. Most golf courses truly are stewards of natural resources as they are a refuge for a variety of

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