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Wide range of public courses needed

During the past month, I've had the opportunity to play two levels of public golf in my home state of Florida. I say two levels because these courses, although both public, are on nearly opposite ends of the public golf spectrum.

Buffalo Creek is a municipal course operated by Manatee County. It's out in the sticks, where rattlesnakes and armadillos still thrive, and gators sun their backsides in the shallows and on the banks of water hazards. It's a wide open links-style course with plenty of water, plenty of length and in decent condition (the greens were in great condition). The cost to play this fine course is approximately \$25 with cart (per person). Buffalo Creek has a comfortable pro shop and coffee shop, and was fun to

play.

On the other end of the spectrum is Emerald Dunes, located a half mile from the Florida Turnpike in the middle of Palm Beach County. Designed by Tom Fazio and opened a year or so ago by Ray Finch to be an upscale public facility, it is truly a spectacular golf facility.

As you arrive, the attendants at the bag drop are cordial, and direct you to parking and the pro shop. The locker room facilities equal many private facilities and the locker room attendant was terrific. The



Charles von Brecht
publisher

course is a tough but fair test of golf in excellent condition. For a day, Emerald Dunes makes you feel you're a member of a private club. For \$94 (including cart and tax) you can enjoy a round at this great facility. I might add that Palm Beach County residents pay less, and out-of-season rates are lower.

The point is, here are two extremes. I enjoyed each equally for different reasons. Although the majority of us can not afford the upscale fees of the new breed of public facility, I believe there is a market for these courses. The TPC courses have been very successful in promoting public participation of their facilities around the country for a high greens fee.

The major point I'm making is the continued need for public golf

— whether it be the Emerald Dunes/TPC concept, municipal facilities like Buffalo Creek, or nine-hole executive courses. We need more public facilities of all types.

In case you missed the National Golf Foundation's reply to the *Forbes* article, "Extrapolation Madness," you should get a copy through the NGF. Joe Beditz responded with expertise and specific numbers that will dispel any concern the *Forbes* story may have raised.

There is no question the golf industry has taken some hits in this recession, but I'm convinced it will come back strong, and perhaps sooner than many other leisure industries.

You can reach the National Golf Foundation by calling 407-744-6006.

COMMENTARY

The tongue: Quieting or creating the storm

The tongue.

The more we talk with superintendents, their mechanics and crew members, club professionals and others in the industry, the more we hear about the importance of that little organ.

The quality of communication between people in the golf course industry is the most critical factor in their jobs, they say. Superintendent Ken Flisek's guest commentary in April focused on communication between the super and the pro. Mechanical technician Dave Franz's commentary below zeroes in on the super-mechanic relationship. And a poll of USGA agronomists (see page 1 story) showed they felt communication was the No. One problem in the world of golf course maintenance.

You might think the worst problem would concern agronomics. Or pesticides. Or mechanics. Or just about anything... But communication?

Communication has to do with speaking and listening—the latter being a major problem with too many of us. We should practice listening, make an art of it. All too often, though, we are just anxious for others to finish speaking so we can say what's on our own mind; and thus we never hear what they're saying.



Mark Leslie
managing editor

Eighteenth-century English essayist Sydney Smith once said of a man: "He has occasional flashes of silence that make his conversation perfectly delightful."

And British author Samuel Johnson said: "That is the happiest conversation where there is no competition, no vanity, but a calm quiet interchange of sentiments."

But the tongue is the center of the most illustrative comment I can recall to improve communication.

St. James wrote: "It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison... It is a fire, a world of iniquity... so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell." (James 3: 6,8)

The tongue is the smallest, yet by far the strongest, muscle in the

body.

With it, we can destroy another person just as surely and powerfully as we can by physical violence. We can set a forest ablaze if we let it go unmuzzled. We can destroy friendships. We can wreck reputations. We can do immeasurable harm to people we do not even know.

Yet, we can do a world of good with it as well—if we bridle it. By keeping it under control, thinking before we speak, we can maintain lines of communication—even in the midst of disagreements—and work cooperatively with employers and employees. Just as unpleasant words do evil, pleasant words are a powerful source for good, improving the entire atmosphere of a workplace.

Let's exercise that muscle for the good of one another, not for harm.

GUEST COMMENTARY

Mechanics deserve more respect

By David Franz

Have you ever wondered what the golf club member thinks when he sees a meticulously manicured course? Does he think the superintendent is the best professional around? Or does he think the turf equipment technicians have their act together?

I think the superintendent probably receives the accolades, while the equipment technicians are left wondering if they are doing the job this member expects of them for his "enormous" greens fees.

I feel it is high time turf equipment technicians of this industry stand up and take a bow for the tremendous task of maintaining today's complex and vast variety of equipment.

Turf equipment is a lot more precise and complicated than 15 to 25 years ago.

Years ago, superintendents realized they weren't qualified to re-

pair the new equipment. So they found "mechanics" to do the job. At that time, anyone who was mechanically inclined could be a golf course mechanic.

But, like the industry itself, times have changed. The turf mechanic of 1965 would have a tough time keeping up with the turf technicians of 1990.

The evolution of more complex equipment and technology to meet the changing desires of golfers has increased the demand for skilled technicians.

Technicians have to constantly update their knowledge of troubleshooting and repairing equipment through schooling or practical experience.



David Franz

A major industry change has come from low cuts on turf. Greens are mowed at one-eighth inch, tees are mowed at one-fourth to three-eighths, and fairways are mowed at seven-sixteenths to one-half inch.

This makes for fine putting, but also for headaches for the technician.

When I started in this business 10 years ago, golfers wanted fast greens, and greens that looked good to boot.

So one-fourth inch was acceptable. Not any more. Not for the members, and they are the ones we have to impress, since they ultimately pay our salaries.

COST CRUNCH

As golfers want better conditions and faster greens, we as technicians have to step up our maintenance routine to keep the equipment in perfect condition.

The intensified mowing routine,

along with all the other aspects of equipment repair and maintenance, causes scheduling problems. Equipment is in the shop for repair or maintenance when it should be out on the course mowing, vacuuming, etc.

Thus the need for overtime on a budget that might not allow for overtime.

With the budget not increasing as fast as technology and the price of equipment, pay scales did not rise enough to attract skilled persons. So equipment got (and still does get) abused.

If it weren't for the technicians, the equipment wouldn't stay in working condition, the course would start to suffer, and the superintendent would start to look bad.

Technicians deserve credit for doing the job they do—not only keeping the equipment running,

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Franz

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but doing so within the budget guidelines set up by the superintendent.

So there's the question of salaries. How much do you pay a top-notch technician? In the Sarasota, Fla., area \$8 per hour is about average. But is this wage really competitive and fair compensation for this dedicated "backbone" of the golf course maintenance department? I think not.

My feeling is that a qualified technician should earn at least \$350 to \$450 per week. The term "qualified" meaning someone who has been a professional for at least five years and has worked on a diversity of equipment ranging from string trimmers to backhoes.

But how does a superintendent justify paying a technician \$8 to \$12 per hour? Tell the bean counters the truth about his position of great importance and responsibility. Tell them he is responsible for perhaps hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of equipment.

This should aid the bean counters in their decision. If superintendents will more fairly compensate their technicians, we will see a marked increase in professionalism among technicians.

And these qualified technicians are invariably the backbone of this very prosperous industry.

COMMUNICATION A KEY

Now let's talk about communication.

It is a big word that means one simple thing: Let's talk!

If communication exists between technician and superintendent, life is great. If it doesn't exist, life can be unbearable at times. I know this first-hand. I love to be patted on the back as much as the next guy. It's human nature.

But I also like to be told when I'm doing a less-than-pleasing job. This type of communication is very productive. It works in both directions. Too much criticism and too little praise is detrimental. But too much praise and not enough criticism isn't healthy either.

There should be a balance. There are some superintendents who will only talk to their technicians when something is wrong on the course.

Yet when something looks great, they keep it to themselves instead of thanking their technicians. Why is this? It's an age-old problem that too often goes unsolved. When it goes on for a long time without resolution, it can ruin a friendship as well as a professional relationship.

Superintendents are like parents. Some are more strict and dominant than others. Some give you room to grow and express yourself, while others suppress and limit you like a dictator.

But each individual is allowed to run their golf course as they see fit. All I am asking superintendents and technicians is to talk to each other.

Air your feelings, your likes, your dislikes, so that you can work on your problems together.

Be allies, not enemies. We are all on the same side here. To coin a phrase: This marriage either works or it works. It cannot not work. It has to work.

Superintendents, talk to your technicians. Technicians, talk to your superintendents. And let us all reap the benefits and rewards that will inevitably result from this industry that we all love and count on to pay the bills.

Evan a backbone needs a little support sometimes!

Dave Franz is a technician living in Sarasota, Fla.

Boom in management competency next on agenda

To the editor:

As the golf industry accepts the reality of its "boom" not touching all with Midas-like prosperity, the certainty is there'll be another boom. This external surge in the popularity of the game will happen when the baby boomers who have been an anomaly throughout their lives begin to reach retirement after the year 2010.

To survive in these intervening years, we'll need a boom in management competency; a preoccupation with management that can deliver profits, consistent with public expectations of benefit and value.

Future growth of the industry should stress the mundane skills of financial analysis, cost containment, scheduling, forecasting, marketing, public relations and a host of other talents perhaps overlooked in our recent celebration of unbridled optimism.

In my younger days in the hotel industry, a mirror-image of golf existed. The 1960s saw hotel occupancies and industry predictions soar with the opening of each new hotel. No one gave much thought whether the needs curve was being hyper-extended.

While building in the 1970s continued to meet the needs of earlier years, the industry was intoxicated with its own success and oblivious to over-leveraged "Taj-Mahals."

The "morning after" did arrive in the 1980s with an extended hangover and continuing industry distress of today. This new reality indicated in sad retrospect how overbuilding and unsound business practices can be intoxicants of choice.

Much the same can be said for golf courses. Some served their purpose as realty sales inducements, testimonials to bloated egos, or victims of inept management. In the future, they must be able to stand alone as businesses. There won't be a need for them to stay open, dispensing charity in their markets.

The business of golf can create an internal boom in management know-how. It can sharpen skills demanded by the public, the lending community, owners and elected officials charged with operating public golf courses.

Better tools to judge the quality of management through studies of other successful operators will equip these constituencies to reward or punish their golf enterprises. Expectations will increase as public awareness of success in other quarters demands imitation.

At least for the moment, golf has it all.

Ninety percent of the courses today can take advantage of the lessons of other businesses to survive and prosper. The public's

wide variety of choices will mean loyalty to courses perceived as good values.

Returning to the basics of seeking customer satisfaction, courtesy, cleanliness, telephone courtesy, image projection and a wide variety of costless improvements will tell the public we want and appreciate their business. It should continue the reasonable growth of the game, consistent with its universal appeal, an aging population and greater leisure time.

These changes will have their price.

A leaner, meaner breed of professional manager, meeting the expectations of his/her various constituencies, will emerge. They'll be the superstars of the next 20 years, helping to create internal and financial growth for the business of the game, and thus the game itself.

The lesson of the '90s will be: Manage or move!

Sincerely,
Curt Walker, executive director
Public Golf Management Assn.
Minneapolis, Minn.

Letters to the editor are welcomed.
Just address them to: Letters, *Golf Course News*, P.O. Box 997, Yarmouth, ME 04096.

P.J. Boatwright, 'soul of USGA,' dies at 63

MORRISTOWN, N.J. — P.J. Boatwright Jr., 63, called "the soul of the USGA" by the organization's current president, died April 5 at a hospital here after a long illness.

Boatwright had been prominent in the United States Golf Association since 1959, when he was named assistant director. He served in that capacity for 10 years before succeeding Joseph Dey Jr. as executive director. In 1980 he became executive director of rules and competitions. He was joint secretary of the World Amateur Golf Council for the last 20 years.

"He meant so much to golf. For many

years he was the ultimate authority," said USGA President C. Grant Spaeth of Palo Alto, Calif.

"Whenever anybody anywhere had a sticky problem, they came to P.J., whether it was in the United States or anywhere in the rest of the world."

David B. Fay, USGA executive director, said, "We grieve for him and his family, and at the same time we're so much better for having known him."

An Augusta, Ga., native, Boatwright grew up in Spartanburg, S.C., attended Georgia Tech University and Wofford College. He

won the Carolina Open in 1957 and 1959, the Carolina Amateur in 1951, and qualified for four U.S. Amateurs.

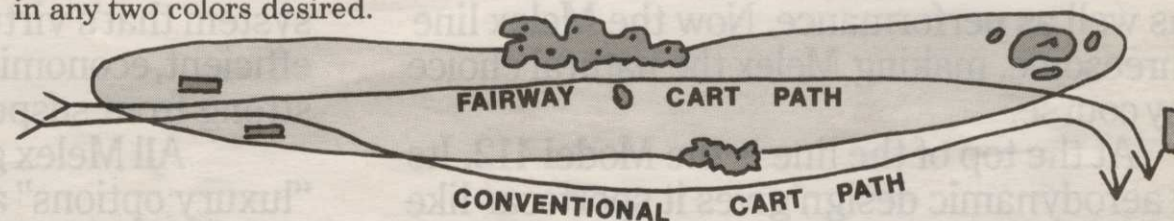
He was inducted into the South Carolina, Carolinas and Wofford College Halls of Fame, and was presented the Metropolitan (N.Y.) Golf Association's Distinguished Service Award in 1983, and the Metropolitan Golf Writers Association Gold Tee Award in 1986.

He is survived by his wife Nancy; two daughters, Cindy of Wayne, N.J., and Carolyn of Columbus, Ohio; a son, P.J. III of Dallas; and three grandchildren.

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