

The silent majority: Discovering how members feel

By TERRY BUCHEN

WILLIAMSBURG, Va. — Superintendents always seem to know the golfers who like what we are really doing, whether providing smooth, firm and fast putting surfaces, or consistently attending to detail throughout the golf course and grounds. Conversely, critics always seem to be there, also — vocal about things they do not like.

We always know how the vocal supporters and critics feel about many subjects because they tell as many people as will listen to them.

Whether it be to our face, the green chairman, course owner, manager or club president, these vocal individuals make sure they tell anyone and everyone what they think about almost everything that goes on.

A random survey at any one individual golf course would probably number the vocal golfers at no more than 25, maybe 50 at most.

The next obvious question is, what about the silent majority of golfers who feel the opposite and are quiet about it? What's really on their mind? Are they mostly happy but do not want to bother anyone on the staff? Are there some matters they are not happy about but do not take the time to speak with course managers? Is the silent majority in the club just for the fun of it, not wanting to get involved whatsoever?

Most superintendents we have spoken with feel the best way to discover what is really on the mind of the silent majority is to talk with them as much as possible. And what better way than to play golf with a different group of them each week?

Most feel that simply by asking the silent golfers what they really like and don't like about the course would open them up, especially when they are allowed to voice their opinion quietly during a round of golf. The biggest way to get them to open up is to be a good listener and to ask specific questions if they do not express much of an opinion.

Why go to this bother to possibly open up "a can of worms"? Most superintendents felt the silent majority is the true individuals who really run the course operation and they are the ones who will usually be in the most powerful positions when push comes to shove. Many superintendents also feel they must always know what the golfers like and dislike because they are the

"customers," and if we do not monitor our job performance by how they feel, it might be too late and job changes inevitably will result.

Some courses send out surveys to all of their golfers in hopes of getting a feel for what they want. Some pretty good results have come forward.

Unfortunately, many times these surveys have a low percentage of return and still do not voice what the majority of golfers really feel.

So, most superintendents believe talking with a golfer in person is still the best way to communicate with them and playing golf with them, or

walking a few holes with them while they play has the most positive effect.

At the same time, showing golfers that the superintendent takes the time and energy to talk with them shows that superintendents really care. This is one of the best public-relations tools in the world.

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