

SHARED SACRIFICE

For many of you, calling 2009 a "tough year" is an understatement.

That's why this month's cover package attempts to provide some perspective on budgets, as well as suggest an intriguing new perspective for compiling your 2010 budget.

This year many of you – some for the first time – had to determine how you were going to operate at an acceptable level with an average 10 to 15 percent reduction in your maintenance budget. Similar budget reductions are on 2010's horizon, as well.

In fact, according to recent Golf Course Industry research, nearly 65 percent of golf course superintendents indicated they had their budgets slashed in 2009. And of those cuts, more than 84 percent of superintendents indicated those cuts came at the expense of personnel.

In the wake of these budget reductions, many of you whom I talked to throughout the year said you were doing the best you could and would make it through 2009 with the limited resources at your disposal. And while economists have declared an end to this devastating recession, no one expects the road to recovery to be devoid of a few bumps and potholes.

This presents a unique problem that, if it hasn't already, will test your management skills in the coming year. Many of your team members who survived the first round of budgetary bloodletting were left with a mix of feelings and emotions. At the forefront was the elation that they still had their jobs during this time of record unemployment. But over time this devolves into a sense of frustration and emotional fatigue. What's left is the perception that, at least for the foreseeable future, everyone must do much more with much less, and are powerless to do anything about it.

Be warned. This is a dangerous, emotional quagmire for any team to fall into.

Recently, I discussed this problem with Jon Gordon, a management consultant and author

of the book "The Goldfish and The Shark."

Gordon says feelings of fear and impotence keep even the best teams from working to their highest potential. Instead, their energies become scattered and the foundation of principles they once focused on crumbles, impacting quality.

"You can tell when someone has become disengaged by the way they act," Gordon says. "Are they complaining and blaming others? When people feel powerless they complain and blame more and it's a symptom that they may have checked out."

Sound familiar?

"You've got to rally your team together," Gordon says. "You need to be very transparent and open and say to your people: 'Here's where we were. Here's where we are, and here's where we're going.'"

A unifying vision provides your team a focal point, Gordon says, and it's something they can grab hold of as they ride out the bumpy road to recovery. Most importantly, Gordon says this vision needs to outline the role each team member will play.

"Drill this down into them," he says. "Ask them how they

can contribute to this vision to move your operation forward. Then, tell them you're going to help them achieve this shared vision. The most important thing is to empower every member of your team and show them how they can be a part of the solution."

While your 2010 budget is the financial framework for your maintenance strategy, devising or revisiting your strategic objectives for your course, sharing these goals with your team and outlining their roles will go a long way toward keeping everyone engaged and oblivious to some of the bumps in the road ahead. GCI



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