

PHI TURFA KAPPA

The golf course business has always been – as our friend Gordon Witteveen once described it – a band of brothers. It's almost like a giant, weird fraternity – Phi Turfa Kappa or something – where the support system is there from the moment you pledge to the moment they pry your cup cutter from your cold dead hands and you go to meet the Great Agronomist in the Sky.

In Phi Turfa Kappa, ideas are shared, as are burdens. Good advice is usually free and easy to come by. Got a weird patch on the 12th green? Your buddy will come take a look. Looking for a job reference? Sure! Need help after a storm or a flood? Your brothers will be there with portable pumps and chain saws.

(By the way, this is a good place to shout out to our small but awesome group of sorority sisters over at Beta Turfa Chi. We always try to include you but we sometimes tend to get all testosterone-centric for obvious demographic reasons. Sorry ladies!)

Anyway, the heart and soul of this fertilizer- and fungicide-fueled version of Animal House has always been the venerable institution of the local chapter meeting. For decades, these monthly events have been the place to see your brothers, exchange the secret frat handshake and compare notes on courses, the profession and the world at large. The formula was always simple and successful: chatting, education, golf, beer and more chatting. A good brother rarely missed a meeting.

That, my friends, has changed in 2010. Local associations are scrambling to find solutions as the tried-and-true formula for chapter meeting success has collided with the modern realities of our business:

- Time: I'm too busy to go every month;
- Fear: I'm not comfortable with ownership knowing I'm taking the day off to schmooze and play golf;
- Internet: I can Google any question I have or e-mail a pal if I need information;

- Money: My education and meeting budget went bye-bye;
- Isolationism: I don't need to network ... I'm just fine working solo;
- Values: Old assumptions about success in the industry are eroding among younger guys; and
- Quality venues: Fewer "good" courses are willing to host.

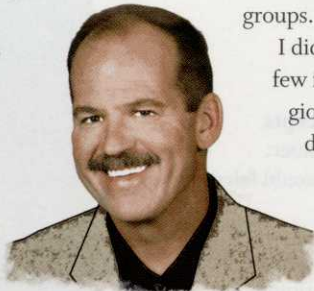
So, chapters everywhere are scrambling to put butts in seats at meetings. The most common solutions I've heard from frustrated leaders are to reduce the number of meetings, focus on good sites, bring in "name" speakers instead of (no offense) the same Ph.D. or USGA updates and do more joint meetings with local PGA, CMAA or owners groups.

I did a little brainstorming with a few folks at the New England Regional Turf Conference in Providence last month about creative ways to get better attendance. Good ideas included focusing on employment issues for a series of three or four meetings and making sure to always have some kind of a take-home piece (printed

PowerPoint summary, etc.) to show the boss when you came home. The point was to add value to the meetings without adding cost or hassle.

So, I'm curious: what's your chapter doing to fight the trend and keep the fraternity healthy and growing? Shoot me an e-mail and let me know and we'll share the best of the suggestions with everyone next month.

In the meantime, don't forget what Woody Allen said: "80 percent of success is showing up." When you show up, you win and the fraternity lives on. GCI



Pat Jones

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