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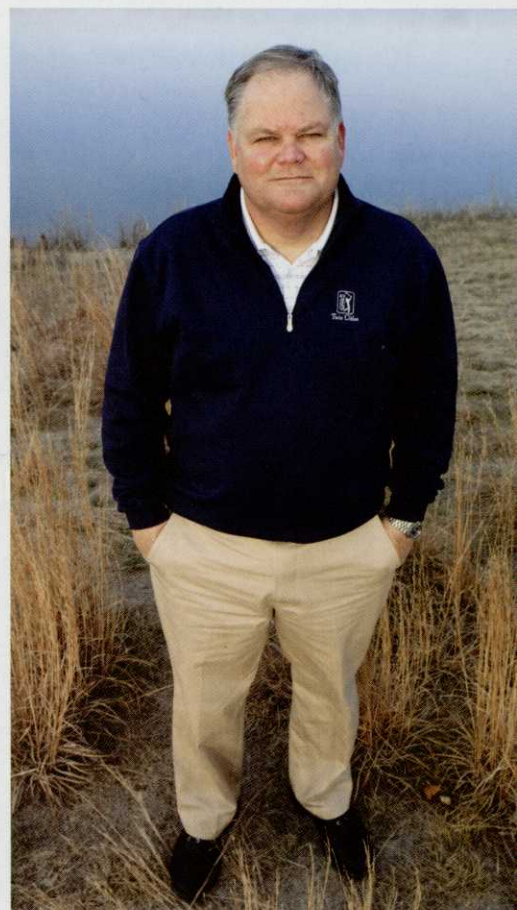


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## PHI TURFA KAPPA

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 12<sup>th</sup> 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.

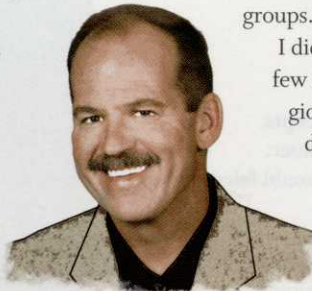
So, chapters everywhere are scrambling to put butts in seats at meetings. The most common solutions I've heard from frustrated leaders are to reduce the number of meetings, focus on good sites, bring in "name" speakers instead of (no offense) the same Ph.D. or USGA updates and do more joint meetings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

Editorial director and publisher

*Pat Jones*

## GOLF COURSE INDUSTRY

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## HOW WIDE SHOULD FAIRWAYS BE?

**A**t the Golf Industry Show in San Diego, I had the chance to meet many readers, talk with them and answer some of their questions.

One superintendent asked, "How wide should a fairway be?" I tried to think up a pithy response, similar to Lincoln's admonition that a man's legs should be just long enough to reach the ground; instead I referred him to a column I'd written a while back. But he was interested in information on creating strategy, not just a way to reduce fairways to reduce maintenance. He actually wanted to widen fairways to speed play and create more playing interest.

He was thinking like golf course architects, who know that courses don't need to be a repetitive, one dimensional series of narrow (or wide) fairways, and that most holes will be more interesting with some strategy and tee shot options.

Your original golf course architect had something in mind for those fairways. If your fairways have crept several yards inside your fairway bunkers, you should make them relevant again by taking fairways edges back out to bring them back into play. They might have been put there as a safety or directional device, as a target or for aesthetics.

But, most likely they are intended to create strategy. This can involve playing a full shot vs. laying up, or playing to one side of the fairway near a hazard to gain an approach advantage like a shorter shot, green contours helping your shot, or a better stance. But the advantage is typically an approach shot with no hazards on your direct line to catch a short shot.

U.S. Open-width fairways only 27 to 32 yards wide are difficult to hit at all, much less attempting to favor one side. Strategic holes need wider fairways, but by how much? It depends on *approach shot length*

and the *green angle*. If we want golfers to place tee shots near the fairway edge to gain advantage, it becomes a simple geometry problem. (Your teacher was right – you would use it someday!)

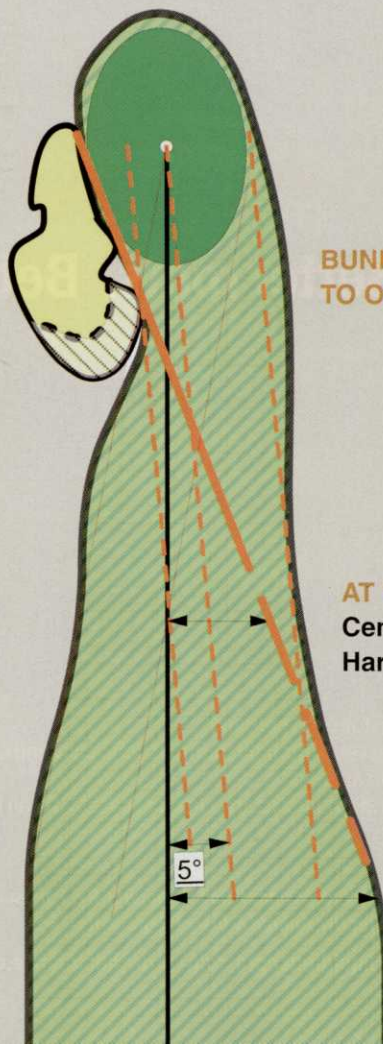
The illustration shows a green angling 5 degrees to the right, with a bunker on the front left. To create completely open access to the center of the green or to the tightest tucked pin, the fairway in the landing zone can vary from 9 to 21 yards right of the center line for a 100-yard approach and 14-43 yards right of the center line for a 150 yard approach. The angle dictates that longer holes generally need wider fairways.

Given the free-form nature of golf

courses, it can and will usually be somewhere in between those extremes. A mostly open green is an advantage over a bunker carry, and creating a fully open green can require a fairway much wider than is possible to recapture.

The diagram also shows the potential for reducing greenside bunkers to open up the green front slightly. The less the green set at an angle and the more the front is open, the narrower the fairway can be.

For all the mathematical study I might do, you can probably visualize possible changes just as easily in the field at your place. It's all too easy to miss how mowing gradually narrows fairways and reduces strategy and interest. By putting some thought into the original design, you can maintain and present the best possible experience for your golfers. For the passionate superintendent, no detail is too small to overlook. **GCI**



**BUNKER POSITION MAY BE ALTERED TO OPEN OR CLOSE GREEN**

**AT 100 YARDS, OPEN SHOT TO:**  
Center at 5 degrees, 9 yards right  
Hardest pin, max 21 yards right

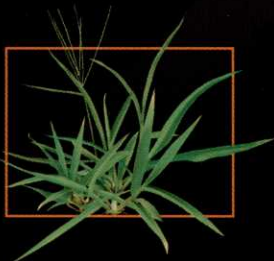
**AT 150 YARDS, OPEN SHOT TO:**  
Center at 5 degrees, 14 yards right  
Hardest pin, max 43 yards right

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## COMMUNICATION TOOLS

Communication can be defined simply as a process of transferring information from one entity to another, and is a vital component to the daily performance of a golf course maintenance operation. But communication is not limited only to verbal exchanges; it includes listening and visual interactions as well. Effective communication must be a mastered practice in an assistant superintendent's arsenal of skills, as golf course maintenance operations have the difficult task of connecting all aspects of a course through effective communication.

One of the most important interactions within an assistant's day is that with the superintendent. At first glance, only the most basic verbal communication skills are necessary, but one must not overlook the importance of listening. Active participation in a conversation requires speaking and listening, and to successfully communicate the superintendent's commands you must adequately hear and understand those demands.

Reaching all employees effectively and efficiently can be a difficult task. Differences such as gender, ethnicity and language barriers can make communication difficult, but for the safety and training of the crew members, it's essential that you get through to them. One way to accomplish this is by thoroughly training the crew, both initially and continuously. You probably already use a daily job board, but consider including safety standards for the tasks. Daily verbal and printed reinforcements help employees better understand their jobs and how to do them safely. Also consider scheduling individual safety meetings to enhance training and keep employees constantly thinking how to be safe. Instead of reading safety procedures from a piece of paper, a PowerPoint presentation with pictures and real life stories will help get the point across without boring the employees.

Clubhouse communication is crucial as well and should be reciprocal. Consider having a facility-wide, Web-based calendar available for all departments to share information. Color-coding each department for easier readability is a good idea, as well.

A turfgrass management calendar could include practices such as aerifying, verticutting, topdressing, chemical applications and fertilizer applications. In addition, daily updates regarding course conditions and maintenance practices should be delivered in person to the golf shop in the morning before golfers arrive.

The golf shop calendar could include course activities such as golf outings, tournaments and daily play numbers and times.

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**You probably already use a daily job board, but consider including safety standards for the tasks. Daily verbal and printed reinforcements help employees.**

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Food and beverage operations have quite the busy schedule, so the Web-based calendar is efficient for maintenance to view outdoor events that need planning for, such as weddings and outside parties.

These are just a few ideas centered on communication. The sky's the limit when engaging in and putting together an effective communication strategy. Communication is a constantly evolving and developing skill, and while not all golf courses require the level of communication as described above, at some point in an assistant superintendent's career each of these communication challenges will need to be met. **GCI**

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## CONSUMER RESEARCH

A glimpse of how golfers' behavior affects the business of golf facility maintenance and management.

### Tracking golf hat, shirt and shorts buyers

Customer profiles are important tools to drive revenue at any golf course facility. The National Golf Foundation released its "Golf Consumer Buying Profiles" in June based on a survey of 2,400 adult core golfers. The research was conducted in November 2008. Core golfers play eight or more rounds per year. Here are some highlights:

#### Golf hats and caps

(bought a golf hat/cap in the past 12 months, any type of store)

- Men make up 80 percent of core golfers; they also purchase 79 percent of all golf hats and caps sold.
- Golfers who subscribe to golf magazines spend 71 percent all dollars spent on golf hats and caps.
  - Forty seven percent of golfers ages 50-74 bought a golf hat or cap in the last year.
  - While women only make up 20 percent of core golfers, they are 22 percent more likely to have purchased a golf hat or cap than total core golfers.

#### Premium golf shirts

(bought one or more golf shirts in the past 12 months for at least \$40 at on-course or off-course shops):

- Of golfers who are male, 18 percent purchased a premium golf shirt in the last year, compared to 20 percent who were women.
- While golfers 60-plus represent 27 percent of golfers, they purchase 32 percent of all premium golf shirts sold.

- Golfers playing public courses represent 59 percent of all dollars spend on premium golf shirts.
- A quarter of golfers ages 30-39 bought a premium golf shirt in the last year.
- Golfers who play 25-49 annual rounds are 11 percent more likely to have bought a premium golf shirt in the past year than total core golfers.

#### Golf shorts

(bought shorts specifically for playing golf in the past 12 months at any type of store)

- Women golfers are more likely to purchase golf shorts (37 percent purchase incidence) than golf slacks (21 percent purchase incidence). Likewise, men were more likely to purchase golf shorts (29 percent purchase incidence) over golf slacks (12 percent purchase incidence).
  - While golfers who have an average score of between 80 and 89 represent 27 percent of golfers, they purchase 52 percent of all golf shorts sold.
  - Those golfers who maintain a handicap spend 85 percent of all dollars spent on golf shorts.
  - A little less than half (43 percent) of private club members purchased a pair of golf shorts in the last year.
  - Golfers who play more than 75 rounds per year are 41 percent more likely to have purchased a pair of golf shorts in the last year than total core golfers.



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