

# Using Practical Psychology in Golf Course Management

By ARTHUR LANGTON

The greenkeeper's problems may be divided into three classes: natural, economic, and psychological. The first of these has to do with the development and maintenance of the golf course in spite of the worst efforts that nature can provide. The second has to do with adjusting expenditure so as to coerce nature most expeditiously for the amount of money involved. The third has to do with keeping the golfer happy in spite of what the preceding two can offer. And therein lies the subject and text of this paper—you gotta keep 'em happy!

Believe me, gentlemen, that represents actually the toughest phase of your job. It is not too far-fetched to say that a greenkeeper could provide absolutely the best in golfing conditions for the amount of money allowed, and yet be a miserable failure at his job because he did not satisfy his players. Conversely, you probably all know of greenkeepers who manage to retain good jobs by some mysterious alchemy in spite of the fact that their course is often in poor condition and that they spend money not wisely but too well. The race is not always to the swift nor the best jobs to the best turf experts. This treasonable doctrine which I preach before you I hope you will temper with a certain amount of reason, else I am sure your golfing conditions will suffer while you all develop yourselves into a group of happy extroverts.

I merely wish to point out the existence of certain socio-psychological relationships which may guarantee or jeopardize your jobs.

The psychology of management has three phases: first, the relationship of the greenkeeper with the golfer; second, the relationship of the greenkeeper with the golf course crew; and third, the relationship with his fellow greenkeepers.

However, time permits of treatment dealing with the first of these only, and this relationship presents probably the toughest of all the problems. The greenkeeper's position has no counterpart in industry; indeed, industry would not tolerate for five minutes some of the so-called supervision that greenkeepers have to endure year after year without recourse to union protection, government aid, or any other agency save the hope that next year things might be better.

You know the facts in your own particular case. Typically it works out about as follows: A perfectly ordinary American through, let us suppose, good judgment and business acumen makes some success of the garbage can industry. Indeed he may become a tycoon of tinware, a veritable colossus of canned goods. He joins a golf club in due time, as befits his station in life; whereupon, also in due time, the same qualities which made his name the household word in garbage disposal get him elected to a position of responsibility in the club; he becomes Chairman of the Green committee, no less.

Now by some magic transformation he becomes possessed thereby of all the world's wisdom in matters of golf course culture and maintenance. Purposely I am making this picture just about as black as I can. Please do not be too harsh in your judgment. The guy has been placed squarely on the spot. As a successful business executive he knows that everyone expects him to do something. Somehow or other it would reflect upon his position in the garbage can industry if he did not make something of a splash as chairman of the Green committee.

## Hires Expert Technicians

Now things begin to get really mysterious. In the garbage can industry, our Mr. X probably hires the very best technical help that he can get. He has metallurgists, engineers and chemists at his disposal and he follows their guidance very closely in directing the destinies of his business. He would not dream of challenging the judgment of his technicians on a matter of choosing the proper soldering flux, but let him loose with a little authority on a golf course and he can produce all the answers to a lot of tough questions all by himself—this man who at home may allow his Jap gardener to browbeat him into staying off his own lawn.

Consider the psychological aspects of the case. Here we have a man who has achieved some success in his business by making decisions and giving orders. His self-esteem has received an additional charge when his fellow club members appointed him to a position of responsibility. Obviously, then, he must make decisions, give orders, and see that they are followed.

Now Mr. X's contact with the golf course has been that solely of a golf player. I need not tell you gentlemen that there exists a vast difference between keeping on the green and keeping the green. But being a golfer, Mr. X has very definite opinions in regard to changes to be made on the course. The trap at No. 2 will have to go because it catches many a fair approach — his. New traps will have to go into service on No. 12 because some players (his opponents) take advantage of the open space to approach the green in an unorthodox angle (not mine). And so he goes around the course with a gleam in his eye.

Regardless of how well-intentioned the motives behind the orders, a good percentage of them will cause the greenkeeper's hair to stand on end and shorten his life considerably. Imagine Mr. X's outcry on Joe Greenkeeper's suddenly inheriting a controlling interest in the garbage can business, and then and there trying his wings as a business executive. Despite the disastrous effects upon the garbage cans I should love to see the day.

#### **Resentful Attitude Arises**

Consider now the reaction of Joe Greenkeeper to the advent of Mr. X and his orders. Joe, chiefly concerned with battling nature and the budget, typically resents the introduction of a third factor, new management. Joe's training and experience have concerned themselves with how to overcome everything except changes in club executive personnel. He rather suspects that Mr. X will try to make a showing at his expense.

He tends to resent everything that Mr. X plans to do, long before Mr. X gets a chance to show his hand. Consequently a dangerous situation develops. Joe's resentment may show itself in only insignificant ways, but unless he possesses marvelous acting ability, that resentment will show on the outside just as sure as it exists. He may obey the new orders to the very letter, but unless he is wholeheartedly behind them, tension between him and Mr. X will develop. This basic antagonism tucked away back in the subconscious of the greenkeeper lies at the bottom of most golfer-greenkeeper friction. Regardless of how justified this basic attitude may be; regardless of how much the greenkeeper tries to cooperate, the mere presence of the attitude will tend to make any contacts between greenkeeper and golfer about as productive of good will as two strange tom cats meeting in a dark alley.

The obvious remedy to this unhappy situation — to make the greenkeeper free and independent of the golfer in matters of maintenance policy — simply cannot be anticipated generally in our day. Any remedial measures to stem this psycho-

logical conflict must be taken by the greenkeeper. I offer a few suggestions as to how you can accomplish this.

1. Assume that the golfer-official has something to offer. Let Joe Greenkeeper argue this way: Mr. X has made a success of the highly competitive garbage can business; therefore, he must have some faculty for organization and administration above that of the ordinary mortal. Mr. X has selected Joe Greenkeeper's course to play upon, therefore, he must possess some power of discernment concerning the broader points of course maintenance. Mr. X enjoys the confidence of his fellow members, since they have appointed him to a position of responsibility; therefore, he cannot be regarded as a complete moron. Taking him by and large, Mr. X probably has a lot that Joe Greenkeeper can learn from him; therefore, it would be well for Joe to pick up all he can from this man before the fates remove him from the scene.

2. Let the golfers know what the greenkeeper has to offer. Inarticulateness probably constitutes one of the ordinary greenkeeper's greatest handicaps. By nature Joe shuns the limelight and would just as soon do his job with no contact with the player. Unfortunately for Joe, the typical golfer, a fairly successful business man is of a considerably different type. Having gained his success by initiative and drive, he is quick to recognize and respect that quality in others. The chances of the typical businessman golfer being of this type are even greater if he happens to be a club official. As I have pointed out before, that which has made him a successful businessman, will also lead him to become a club official. Joe probably has some good ideas of his own, but he tends to wait until he is asked about them. To a businessman this equals in stupidity and unprofitableness the act of the better mousetrap builder awaiting the world to beat a path to his door. A platitude voiced loudly and frequently enough will gain the speaker far more status than the finest of unexpressed philosophies.

#### **Greenkeeper Makes Publicity**

I advise you to go on record as much as possible. Write up your ideas and send them in to the Board of Directors. Publish bulletins on the current and future condition of the course and post them on the bulletin boards. Make sketches of improvements in the course layout, and be sure to autograph them. Take advantage of opportunities to address garden clubs and other community groups. Public appearance such as this give you poise (and the incidental publicity will do you no harm, particularly if press clippings manage to find their way to the bulletin board). If you inaugurate some time- or money-

saving improvement, document that saving by a facts-and-figures formal report. Again, need I remind you to leave no doubt as to its authorship. Outline a long-range program of upkeep and improvement to prove that you have more than a day-to-day attitude towards your job. Furthermore, the adoption or endorsement of such long-range program will exercise a highly stabilizing influence upon new club officials.

Prior to tournaments, don't wait for the tournament committee to come to you to tell you what it wants to have done. Go to the tournament committee with written recommendations and sketches showing the progressive changes in cups and tee markers. Show where you will have men placed to smooth out traps. Advance a definite program for handling galleries. Show how you will take care of any emergency from a broken main to a case of heat prostration. In other words, gentlemen, prove, on paper, that you have been doing a lot of extra-curricular thinking on behalf of the golf course. Believe me, even the most hardened garbage can manufacturer will be impressed by that.

3. Employ sound golf course tactics. This vague sounding heading can mean just as much to the greenkeeper as it does to the general or the football coach. An army may be headed by a brilliant strategist, a general with a fine overall campaign. His soldiers may be brave, rugged, and well-equipped. But history reveals scores of such armies which have been made foolish in disaster by a ragged bunch of tacticians fast on their feet and able to hide and shoot behind every log, rut, or cotton bale that came handy. Many a high-priced football coach with high-priced players with the

best of equipment has met calamity from a band of players who ran more trickily, tackled harder, blocked more knowingly, and took quicker advantage of the breaks. Every alert greenkeeper knows that many phases of golf course upkeep which will offend at least a minority of the players is not an unusual situation. Be smart and unobtrusive in doing these jobs so that your days may be long on the fairway.

#### Strategy in Avoiding Trouble

One golf course not a million miles from here is blessed, or plagued, by some marvelous oak trees. Years ago a terrific feud developed within the club in regard to the removal or retention of a certain group of these trees. Certainly the trees unfairly handicapped some shots, but what were a few golf shots compared with 800-year-old trees. The intramural battle grew so hectic that an author-member of this club sold a very good thinly disguised account as a short story to the Saturday Evening Post. Imagine the predicament of the greenkeeper when he received orders from the chairman of the Green committee to take the trees out immediately.

These trees happened to be in the full view of the nearby residences of some of the influential tree-loving group. But the greenkeeper's tactics were equal to the occasion. He picked a crew of grounds men and armed them with a formidable battery of axes, saws, shovels, crow bars, and ropes. He marched them over to the offending trees in broad daylight and after giving them very explicit instructions he retired hastily from the scene. The crew began to work like fury, clearing the ground, rigging ropes in the branches, and generally engaged themselves in loudly doing every-

*(Continued on page 77)*

## WHERE GIRLS LEARN GOLF



Not among the great courses of the U.S. but a happy nursery for girl golfers is the course at Wells College, Aurora, N.Y. where Edw. Hayton is pro-greenkeeper. The course is short, 2287 yds., and gets a good amount of play. Public is permitted to use the course to a limited extent, on payment of small fee. Hayton does a good job of maintaining this course, practically single-handed.

## USING PSYCHOLOGY

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thing to those trees except severing a single twig or root.

Action, other than around the trees, soon took place. A delegation of members from the surrounding houses marched on the grounds crew ordering it to cease and desist. The laborers took no notice and continued to mess around and size up the trees. Indeed, they made it obvious they understood no English. Here was a pretty pass—something had to be done immediately to stop these men from destroying the work of centuries. *Ha!* The Greenkeeper! But this particular greenkeeper was carefully avoiding being found, being lodged in a safe vantage point. Meanwhile, the grounds crew continued to peck away in a determined but undestructive way around the trees. Goaded to fury, the indignant club members at last formed a protective cordon around the oak, which by this time was probably shaking with mirth. Someone went to call a board meeting right then and there.

The whole matter was thrashed out and settled, once and for all in favor of preserving the trees. At the psychological moment the greenkeeper arrived to call off his crew.

As a sidelight on this episode, this particular greenkeeper takes another good tactical step during the annual program of tree pruning and renovation. Any major tree surgery, such as main limb removal, is done very early in the morning before the players arrive. The freshly cut stump is painted over and camouflaged as an old wound. There have been no complaints.

### Warn Them of Work

While some golf-interfering tasks can be performed at night, some must be done in the daytime, which means that some golfers are bound to be inconvenienced. Among those so disturbed are bound to be one or two who take the matter as a personal affront. The greenkeeper can take a considerable amount of the sting out of any remarks they might make by publishing on the bulletin board a timetable of such top-dressing, sod replacement, weeding, etc., that he plans, with a brief explanation appended regarding why these activities are essential at the season scheduled. In the presence of such a timetable even the most vindictive golfer cannot support the claim that the club management has designs upon his full enjoyment of the game.

Very good managerial tactics include the establishment of a set of rules regarding behavior of the grounds crew in the presence of players. Usually a crew man manages to fade into the background very quietly when golfers approach his field of

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activity. But troublesome moments do occur to disturb the most conscientious greensman. How well do I remember the time when I was cutting some weeds near a green as a foursome approached. I stopped swinging my cutter (I was off to the side of the green) just before the players started to putt. When they had finished, one of the sportsmen pointed to me and said, "That's why it costs so much to play golf. Too many men standing around doing nothing."

Stung by this remark, I continued to slash at the weeds until the following foursome was actually in the act of putting. Whereupon I took a bawling out for having distracted the golfers even while they were making their approach shots down the fairway. What I wouldn't have given to be able to quote a club rule to the effect that grounds crew members must remain still while within 25 yards of a player making a shot.

Careful work scheduling will keep most crewmen out of the way of the heaviest play. In those cases in which removal of the greensmen is impossible during the rush hours, the greenkeeper would do well to find an unobtrusive secondary task for his men to fall back upon. Thus if the men are repairing greens turf in the direct line of play, it would be excellent psychology to have tools available for say, sweeping leaves nearby. Even though the need for sweeping leaves may not be great at that particular point, the effect upon the average club member would be much better than that were he to see a group of men apparently idling.

### Keep Players Happy

4. Help the player to enjoy his game. Generally speaking, the more contented a group of golfers may be, the less disturbed will be the life of the greenkeeper. Axiomatic though this may sound, the action of some greenkeepers indicates that they reap their greatest satisfaction from trying to annoy the player. I do not deny the excellence of their greenkeeping ability, but when they permit their men to leave tools, hose, sprinklers, and mowers even partly in the line of possible play, he is just making trouble for himself.

The placing of tee markers, frequently left to the haphazard guess of an untutored groundsman, can and does cause a lot of player annoyance. I once played on a course upon which at least six of the tee markers had been placed in such a way that made the playing of a good tee shot legally impossible. I played as a guest at this particular club, but had I been a member I would have taken the greenkeeper's scalp. Of course, many players do not realize what a downhill or a sidehill stance will do to a normal tee shot, but a series of

bad tee shots never yet have contributed to a greenkeeper's tenure of jobhood.

As a frequent player upon another course, I had a bad habit of slicing into the hilly rough bordering the slightly curved fairway. Those of you who know my so-called game will testify that my slicing is no more a remarkable phenomena than the fact that when it rains, the grounds get wet. In defense I must say that I slice only 50 percent of my tee shots; the other half I hook. But on this particular hole I always sliced. Furthermore, a casual check showed that about three out of four players sliced their tee shots on this hole. The tee was flat and the fairway wide. Neither of those factors could cause the trouble. Exasperated, one day I checked on which way that dratted tee faced. Sure enough it faced directly toward the hilly rough. It exercised a marked psychological effect upon the players teeing off. Unconsciously they lined themselves up with the facing of the tee, and try as they might to swing the club to shoot down the fairway, they too frequently wound up on the hill. Though not one player in ten thousand would notice that tee particularly, many players lost their temper because of it. Not more than a day's work by one or two men would have made lots of happier players.

A particular green on another course gave a lot of trouble because most players could not seem to hold a pitch shot on it. They complained that the turf was too hard, that the grass was too short, that the green was too dry. The greenkeeper knew that none of these were the true cause, but he did his best to accommodate the players by increasing the grass length on that particular green and giving it extra water. This brought further complaints because the putting surface was inconsistent with that of the other seventeen greens. Finally the green was regraded and all the complaints stopped; in fact, players now compliment the greenkeeper on the vastly improved turf and putting conditions on this green. Actually, the green foundation and the grass is the same as on all the other greens, and just the same as on this green before regrading. The difference lies in the fact that the green now slopes toward the fairway; whereas previously it was flat, and even tended to slope away from the fairway.

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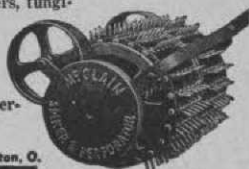
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By going around your own course with a critical and calculating eye, you may be able to make several improvements on your own course to improve player morale. The removal of low-hanging branches, the improvement of a pathway, the frequent application of paint to signs and markers, and scores of others all pay big dividends. Always keep in mind: You gotta keep 'em happy!

## MUST FACE PROBLEMS

(Continued from page 41)

Ky Laffoon and was offered a job under Big Chief Ky at Northmoor, Chicago. Claude was given the facts of the golf business by the ever alert Laffoon, and the young Floridian learned fast. He was a worker from the start and never chose the easy road. I knew him well in those early days, and remember his winter as pro at Quincy, Fla. He made no secret of the fact that he saved every possible nickel so that he might play all the tournaments over a stretch of years and gain solid experience. He did just that.

Harry Cooper took over Northmoor when Ky decided to give more time to dogs and hunting and live on his backlogs of gilt edge stuff. Claude trudged right along as the assistant to Cooper. Craig Wood, ever alert to choose nothing but the best in assistants, signed Claude for Winged Foot, in the New York suburbs. During these grueling years of apprenticeship, Claude was doing his job and building a solid foundation. A short swing to Detroit as a full fledged pro preceded his return as head man to Mamaroneck's famed Winged Foot. He also holds Seminole's fine pro job. Claude has climbed the long way through years of hard work and close study of pro golf.