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Are your course maintenance \$\$ spent wisely?

There are three major elements of golf course maintenance which influence the amount of value derived from the money spent. These are: (1) the quality of the supervision, or the ability and competence of the golf course superintendent and his assistant, (2) the quality of the golf course crew, and (3) the amount and quality of equipment available for maintenance.

Insofar as the first of these elements, the golf course superintendent, is concerned, most of the nation's golf clubs are fortunate indeed. There are many excellent golf course superintendents. This is a profession that has made remarkable strides in a relatively few years. Pride and ability on the part of the top superintendents combine to provide excellent value for every dollar expended in the form of salary. Those clubs fortunate enough to have the services of competent men should make sure their superintendents are not taken for granted and permitted to be lured away by a little more money offered by a neighbor club. There are many good men, but there are not enough top men to fill all the positions.

It has been demonstrated many times that a club which pays more for supervision will receive much greater value for the money spent for labor and machinery. When the relative costs of supervision are weighed against the total budget, it makes sense to acquire the best supervision and planning ability that is available.

The second element mentioned is that of the golf course crew. Labor costs are usually calculated

Dr. Ferguson gives his opinions on such questions as whether it is better to:

- Hire a superintendent at \$8,000 or \$15,000.
- Hire 20 men at \$1.75 an hour or six good men at a higher pay scale.
- Have eight mowers, each 10 years old or five machines, replaced regularly.

to be approximately 70% of the total maintenance budget. It is the observation of this writer that this is one area where clubs do not get good value for the money expended.

Unfortunately, golf clubs generally are accustomed to paying labor at a rate equal to the lowest scale offered by industry in the vicinity of the club. A man being paid at the minimum rate certainly cannot take much pride in his position. If he is capable of learning any kind of skill, he can better his position. If he is not capable of learning skills, the golf course is no place for him.

I have seen two examples recently that illustrate the point. In one case a greensman had a bolt loosen in his machine and his mower blade dropped down on the putting green. He finished one green and started mowing another before discovering something

wrong. In the second case, a man with a spray gun overlapped some areas with a fungicidal spray. The overdose caused burning of the grass.

"Cheap" labor is very costly indeed when its use creates damage of this kind. Observations made on many golf courses offer convincing demonstrations that it is more economical to hire more competent and more reliable men. Then if money is a limiting factor, find ways to get by with fewer men, but do not settle for incompetents.

The late O. J. Noer stated on many occasions that money should not be wasted on a golf course, but he also said to beware of trying to save money on the golf course to the detriment of expensive turfgrasses. Club memberships are much less forgiving of poor golfing conditions than they are of a budget which was exceeded in an effort to provide good conditions.

The third element mentioned is equipment. The manufacturers of equipment, chemical tools, and fertilizers have contributed greatly to the excellence of golf course turf. Efficiency of maintenance is enhanced greatly by the availability of a broad array of machines and products.

It does not detract from their importance to point out that the chemical tools and the machines must be handled by intelligent, careful people. In the hands of competent people, their impact for good is tremendous. In the hands of untrained or careless people, their impact can also be tremendous, and costly.

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It is frightening to find chemical products being used on golf courses when the user has no idea of what the effect may be. Far too many cases occur where a "superintendent" with questionable ability uses a product simply because a salesman has convinced him it will be good for his grass, or his soil, or his cart paths. The salesman who gives away a "17 jewel watch" with every barrel of his elixir that is sold to an unqualified person in a superintendent's job is performing a great disservice. If such products were of proven value they could be sold for a fair price without offering special inducements to the buyer.

These remarks will indicate that the three elements of golf course maintenance are inseparable. A competent superintendent is a good investment even when he commands a large salary. Good workmen are necessary to maintain turf that will satisfy the demands of discriminating golfers. Good equipment and good chemical tools will allow a modest crew of competent workmen to do more than a horde of poorly trained men.

THE BUDGET

The relative efficiency of golf course operation is quite difficult to ascertain because methods of accounting vary, golf course terrain and physical features vary, and because ecological factors affect maintenance needs. Some attempts have been made by the United States Golf Association Green Section to reduce golf course maintenance costs to standard units which may lend themselves to comparison.

Not all golf course budgets contain the same items. Marvin Bussey, former superintendent at Jackson Country Club of Jackson, Mississippi, and John Riordan,

who was manager of that club during Mr. Bussey's tenure, established three separate budgets. One was a maintenance budget. It contained only those items which reflected true maintenance costs.

The second was a budget for machinery amortization and replacement. These men used their combined experiences to predict "failure rates" for various machine parts and they established an average "economic life" for each piece of equipment.

The third budget was one which contained renovation or construction items. They believed that the cost of building a foot bridge or the time required to reshape a bunker was not properly chargeable to maintenance.

Mr. David Lilly, president of Toro Manufacturing Company, has contended that golf course superintendents have proved themselves to be exceptional turf-grass growers, but he believes their next challenge is to improve their managerial skills. By doing a better job of managing, they can make their services even more valuable to their respective clubs.

For a great many years, management consultants have worked with industry for the purpose of improving efficiency of operations. Such management specialists have analyzed operations, have challenged the status quo, and have pointed out methods of doing the same jobs easier.

It would appear that there is a need for the "systems analysis" concept in golf course management. The superintendent needs to challenge each operation that is performed to see if there is not a more efficient way to do the job. A great deal has been written about "putting wheels under golf course workmen" to reduce the time of moving from one job to

another. Two way radio communication is gaining favor. Automation of irrigation systems is becoming more prevalent.

All these things are steps toward greater efficiency. But in addition, one needs to challenge his overall concepts in the areas of management and supervision, labor, and the profitable use of machinery and chemical tools. Can you afford to pay a golf course superintendent \$8,000 per year if your greens are poor during a sixty day period each year? Or is it better to hire for \$15,000 a year a man who has the knowledge and ability to keep those greens? Is it better to hire 20 men who will work for \$1.75 an hour in order to find six or seven who will stay and do a barely acceptable job, or is it better to hire six good men who would be attracted by a higher pay scale and who may be depended upon to do good work? Is it better to have eight greensmowers that are ten years old and in need of frequent repair, or is it better to have five machines which are replaced regularly so that repairs and "down time" are kept to a minimum?

The club which will undertake the task of evaluating its operation and of answering questions such as those we have used as examples may find some surprising answers. It may undergo some drastic revisions of attitudes. It may find that the best tools available, a small but well paid labor force, and the best superintendent it can find will be the least expensive choices it can make.

As costs continue to climb, there are going to be larger maintenance budgets. The increases will be inevitable. The aim will be to buy the greatest amount of golf course maintenance with the number of dollars the club can devote to the purpose. An overall analysis may be quite enlightening. □