

**A** guy walks into the golf shop after his round and says, "The greens were fabulous today." The pro smiles and says, "Thanks." Another guy walks in 10 minutes later and says, "The greens stunk today." Same pro says, "You're right, that lousy superintendent has to go."

The moral of the story is that communicating with golfers is an uphill battle. Nine times out of ten, superintendents don't have the training, the visibility, the time or the support from management to truly educate golfers about maintenance.

And even if you do have a knack for schmoozing, a fancy office in the clubhouse and a pro who worships you, there's still one more teeny, tiny obstacle to overcome: Golfers just don't care.

## Elves in the night

Sorry to break it to you, but the average golfer would be just as happy thinking that the course was maintained by magical elves who work at night and disappear at dawn. Face it, the typical player shows up, smacks the pill around for five hours and heads to the 19th hole without giving you a second thought. (Unless, God forbid, they have to wait on the tee for two endless minutes while that damn kid hoses down the green and screws up their putt for a 50-cent skin.)

Like Pete Townshend of the Who, golfers ask, "Why should I care?"

The answer is that they have no reason to care unless you give them one. In highfalutin' marketing lingo, it's called the Value Proposition (i.e., "Buy this toothpaste and beautiful women will flock to you"). In finance, it's called Return On Investment (i.e., "Pays for itself in 38 seconds"). In simplest terms, it's the answer to the question, "What's in it for me?"

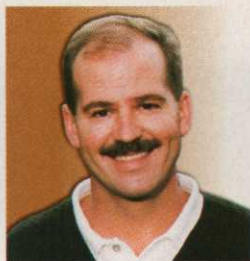
## Carrots and sticks

Your mission (should you choose to accept it) is to give them a compelling, selfish and profitable reason to listen to you and, hopefully, change their behavior as a result. It's like trying to get a reluctant mule up a hill it doesn't want to climb — you have to use carrots and sticks.

For example, a sign saying "Please Repair

# Visions of Elves Mowing at Night

BY PAT JONES



HOW CAN YOU  
GIVE THE IMAGE  
YOU CRAVE?

Ballmarks" ain't gonna do it. A sign saying, "Unrepaired Ballmarks Cost \$20,000 to Fix Last Year" is a pretty good carrot. Slapping a \$25 fine on someone who doesn't repair a ballmark is an excellent stick.

## The image thing

But even if you change their behavior and they fix every divot and rake every bunker, they still might not recognize you as a professional deserving of their respect. How can you gain the image you crave?

Well, GCSAA is taking care of that, right? The association's big public relations initiative will win over even the most critical or apathetic of your players and they'll soon be sending you nice handwritten thank-you notes and inviting you to their son's wedding, right?

Well, I have more bad news for you. The National's well-intentioned (but sometimes quirky) PR initiative may enlighten a few folks for a while, but a true campaign requires more than just a handful of ads in golf magazines or the occasional TV spot. It requires lots of repetition of the right message to the right people. And, if you don't keep repeating the message, people forget fast.

Unfortunately, that kind of sustained, frequent advertising and media relations effort requires a lot more money than GCSAA can responsibly commit to the program — even with the generous support of our good friends at John Deere.

A national campaign is a nice idea that helps a bit, but it simply cannot replace what you can do for yourself. It's up to you to educate golfers. It's up to you to earn their respect. It's up to you to make them care.

---

*Pat Jones is the editor/publisher of Golfdom. He can be reached at 440-891-3126 or [patrick.jones@advanstar.com](mailto:patrick.jones@advanstar.com).*