

Owners, Superintendents Can Never Communicate Too Much

Editor's note: This column, which will run occasionally in this section, focuses on superintendent and owner relationships from a superintendent's perspective.

BY JIM BLACK

I can't tell you how much I appreciate the opportunity to write this column and give you a chance to see our perspective. I feel even greater appreciation to you, however, for taking the time to read it. I honestly don't believe there can ever be too much communication, especially in this business.

At the time of this writing, I have yet to come up with another industry in which highly competent professionals have to answer to each other without having a true working knowledge about the others' responsibilities to the company.

I've always felt that the best boss was one who had climbed the ladder and had actually done the work of his (or her) subordinates. Yet I would venture a guess that in nine out of 10 golf course operations, the superintendent's immediate superior has never been a superintendent. Nor has the superintendent ever been a club manager. So hopefully you

can see the dichotomy here and the intense need for clear communication and vision.

So here comes my perspective, my "view from the maintenance facility." I understand my view isn't necessarily the same as everyone else's, and that some superintendents may disagree with me. That's OK, but I think the odds are in my favor that there are many more who are in agreement.

It's worth pointing out that club managers and superintendents are different, not just from a professional standpoint but as people in general. We have different views, perspectives, wants and needs.

What a general manager sees isn't necessarily what a superintendent sees. This is not a bad thing. Being in separate aspects of the same business, we may see the same things, but chances are we just see them in different ways. This is good actually because, in theory, all angles should be covered.

On the downside, however, if communication is poor you may assume we see the same things and in the same way that you do. Then,



when something fails to happen because we didn't do what you assumed we would do, animosity is created.

The animosity can fester in your mind and Domino into other things that are unrelated, which is totally unnecessary. Please be clear and concise in your communication with us, avoiding all assumptions. This will be the key to a positive operation.

Another key will be for you to include us in the knowledge of the goals of the club. We can't meet them if we don't know what they are.

Of course, goal No. 1 will obviously be to make revenue. That's a given. What I'm saying here is to involve us in the process.

Include us in the club business meetings, take a ride with us on the course once a week and share with us the things you see and the things you want to see. Again, don't ask us to assume. It's really not fair to either one of us.

Keep in mind the reason why people join our clubs and visit our facilities and hand over their hard-earned

money. I'll take a wild guess that 99 times out of 100 it's because of the golf course. Surely it's not because of the quality of the hot dogs at the halfway house. So understand the importance of the role of the superintendent and his or her staff.

I can tell you with confidence that superintendents want to succeed. People come from miles around and pay to partake of that which we have created. We want the club to be in the best possible condition it can be in on a daily basis. Just like you do, and just like your customers do.

Sometimes things can go wrong. Remember, this is agriculture we're talking about, not bookkeeping. There are literally thousands of variables to be dealt with on the golf course on a daily basis. Given this, the golf course may lose turf to disease or other hardship. No one feels the pain of turf loss more than the superintendent.

Lastly, please don't forget that we are not the enemy. We are on your side and we kindly request that you be on our side as well.

Jim Black, a veteran superintendent and frequent contributor to Golfdom, can be reached at greenkeeperjim@yahoo.com.