

Until I read a recent article called "The Club Agenda" in the December/January issue of "Club Director Magazine," I could never grasp why general managers, club officials and golfers just couldn't understand the challenges superintendents face to groom their courses up to their expectations.

I have opined on several occasions about why superintendents are left to challenge the media, local ordinances and water management districts to defend the game of golf and golf course management practices. The answer is relatively simple: The club's agenda is focused on other issues. I'm not saying these aren't legitimate issues that can have a serious impact on a club. What I'm saying is that our issues must compete with those that rank higher in the club's agenda. In the article mentioned above, there are two lists of priorities: one on federal issues and the other on state issues.

On the federal list, environmental issues, which the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA) and local associations must devote so much time and energy to either defuse, refute or modify, place fourth behind: health care costs/association health plans; labor/wage/retirement issues; and increased scrutiny/tighter regulations of nonprofits.

For state issues affecting golf clubs, water restrictions is the top turfgrass issue and is only in seventh place with pesticides in ninth. Placing higher was: health care; worker compensation; property taxes; taxes on club fees and services; general liability issues; and state/federal minimum wage.

So it's little wonder we don't get a lot of club participation in our causes that we see as the big-picture issues of: water availability, use, conservation and quality; pesticide and fertilizer bans and restrictions; and the negative perception of golf courses in the media. We can argue that without the water and other tools needed to grow good playing surfaces, all the other challenges listed on club's agendas are moot points.

They don't understand evapotranspiration or pest resistance, but they can relate to wages, taxes and health care. The kicker is that their concerns are legitimate in the daily operation of the club to keep it profitable and affordable. The solution, of

Attention Where Attention Is Needed

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course, is for compromise. The finance committee can tackle those wage and hour issues, but the Green Committee members should be out there helping to secure water rights and helping to support and defend our turf management practices.

Several state and local superintendents associations have made great strides in the past couple of years to earn respect and credibility among regulators and legislators. Perhaps those successes are reflected in the lower ranking of what we consider sensitive and key issues in a club's agenda. I guess I'd just like to hear or see something in the industry trade publications from golf clubs, managers and owners that acknowledge that effort.

Maybe the media are also learning we can manage golf courses without despoiling the environment, but they have their own credibility problems to deal with right now.

Meanwhile, if the greens are slow or bumpy, the superintendent wants more top-dressing and a new mower and the club manager is trying to balance payroll and health care costs for the staff against the budget. It's a new irrigation system that will run more efficiently to conserve water resources vs. renovating the club to meet access requirements for the Americans with Disabilities Act.

We're just coming off the newly formatted Golf Industry Show. Maybe the stage is finally being set for true cooperation among the management team members at a club. Maybe it's time superintendents took time to appreciate the complexity of conducting the business side of the club's operation. And conversely those in the clubhouse need to appreciate the superintendent and his association who fight city hall for the essential resources and tools needed to protect a club's biggest asset — the golf course.

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