

January. Snow on the ground for Easterners. Plenty of morning frost in the South and West.

Far chillier, however, is that vibe you've detected from the newly crowned green chairman. Maybe it was the suggestion that Times New Roman makes a great resume font or his declaration that this Tillingstein guy didn't get the most out of Winged Foot.

You can smell the trouble a par-5 away. He's fresh off the appointment of a lifetime and for the next year or two or 12, he's your new buddy.

Like hormonally conflicted high-schoolers, you've nervously traded cell phone numbers, mostly so he can call you at bedtime with a reminder that Ed Niblickson would like to see those ball-washer towels bleached, washed and pressed in time for Tuesday's member-guest.

This annual ritual of political sea change at clubs across the land is a tired but inevitable component of country club life. The board reins are routinely handed over to a new chair who appoints a green chairman that, no matter how great things are going, feels the need to right the ship after the last chairman left his mark.

The new green committee head feels he must restore civility because the last one didn't communicate enough with the membership or produce smoother greens. You, having been through this transition, will be tempted to explain to the new chairman that while his intentions may be good, board life doesn't quite work as dreamily as one would hope.

You, having watched grown men and women bicker over the most inane topics, know that the rose will be off the bloom by the Masters, and it'll be full-fledged civil war come U.S. Open time. When the Ryder Cup rolls around, many of the same people currently massaging each other's egos will be locked in a power struggle, with emergency meetings that sound like the Johnsons of "Blazing Saddles" convening in the town church, complete with some drunkard repeatedly yelling "Reverend!"

Complicating your job is the ever-increasing tension between the older and younger members. The Greatest Generation often

Happy New Year, And Good Luck

BY GEOFF SHACKELFORD



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becomes the Lamest Generation, so intensely self-involved that its members resist any change that might impact their final golfing days. Contrast that with Generation Me wanting to transform their golf courses into polished, high-definition masterpieces, and you have chaos.

Naturally, some middle ground would be ideal, but the Shiites and Sunnis stand a better chance of getting along.

You, being the rational person caught in the middle, would like to convince the Greatest Generation to leave their courses in better condition architecturally and agronomically than they found them. And you'd like to think today's younger set would want to keep up with the Joneses without breaking anyone's bank account or causing such strife.

The only thing you can hope for is that someone with sense and gravitas will come along and manage the various sides, while suggesting that experts be consulted for design matters and other issues outside of the superintendent's area of expertise. Though it rarely happens, these wise and clever souls do come along from time to time, bringing stability and a vision for the future with them.

But typically, other than a few benevolent dictators, most clubs are in a constant flux of power and personality, chaos and crudeness.

Did I mention it's your job to stay out of this mess?

If you aren't sure how to go about it, just remember the words of the wise philosopher Chili Palmer in author Elmore Leonard's "Get Shorty": "Never say anything unless you have to."

*Geoff Shackelford can be reached at
geoffshac@aol.com*