

I guess we can assume golfers will cut superintendents some slack if their golf courses look a little shaggy, considering that superintendents had to slash their maintenance budgets in light of the economic turmoil we've been enduring.

Fat chance.

It would be a nice and polite gesture for golfers to sympathize with superintendents over this matter, especially in this time of financial upheaval. But nice and polite don't make the world go around — especially the golf world — no matter if the Dow is at 13,000 or 3,000.

I had a recent conversation about this topic with veteran certified superintendent John Miller, who also happens to be the LPGA tour agronomist. John Miller knows golfers like that other Miller knows beer. He also knows golfers are a demanding bunch.

Miller says if a course's maintenance budget has been cut to \$700,000 from \$1 million, the golfers playing that course still expect it to look and play like a million bucks. They don't care that a superintendent had to cut his maintenance budget.

But it's not just golfers who are demanding when it comes consumer satisfaction. Most Americans are that way, whether they're buying a round of golf or a round steak at the supermarket. And demanding has a propensity to intensify during economic crunch times.

None of us are spending much money, whether we have it or not. Truth is, many of us do have it, but we're saving it just in case something bad happens, like job loss. Others don't have as much money to spend because something bad did happen, like job loss.

Hence, we spend less (which has caused the recession to deepen even further, but that's another story) and watch what we spend with greater scrutiny. And because we spend less, we want the best for what we do spend it on. Quite frankly, we want a bigger bang than a sonic boom for our bucks.

"It's like the family that goes out to dinner four times a month," Miller says. "Well, they won't go out to dinner four times a month in this economy. They might go out once or twice, and that once or twice better be memo-

Joe Golfer Doesn't Feel Your Pain

BY LARRY AYLWARD



DESPITE CUTS TO
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rable experiences for them wherever they go. Or they will go someplace else."

It doesn't matter to the family that the restaurant might have had to lay off some of its help, which could hinder the overall dining experience. Like the golfer, the family doesn't want to hear any excuses.

Sure, this all means more pressure on superintendents' shoulders and their depleted crews. But they just have to deal with it.

Alas, there are some things superintendents can do to help them deal with it. They can try to cut the money in their budgets where it won't show on the course. For instance, they can cut a fertilization application in the course's rough, where golfers probably won't notice the aesthetic impact. Or they can reduce the weekly mowings of fairways from three to two to cut back on fuel and labor costs.

A superintendent doesn't want to cut costs in the wrong places, however, like in the bunkers. "There's still going to be a premium on bunker maintenance if that's what golfers have come to expect," Miller says.

It's also vital for superintendents to communicate what they're doing to golfers. But they must choose their words carefully. They don't want to come off like they're looking for sympathy from golfers.

"You have to let them know that management has asked you to cut your budget, but you're aware how important the conditions are to the golfers — and your doing everything you can to keep them happy," Miller says.

Like I said, it would be nice for golfers to understand what superintendents are up against. Yeah, and it would be nice if my 401k doubles in value next month.

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