

One of the most useful, practical benefits of membership in a professional association is the opportunity to network with peers, no matter what occupation we are talking about.

Because of current economy concerns I know many of you might not have been able to make it to Orlando for the Golf Industry Show, however, thanks to networking you might be able to find out something that one of your luckier colleagues learned at a seminar or during breaks or at a reception.

Of course that means that you have to get together with those folks somewhere, somehow. How about getting the lowdown at a local chapter meeting? I have to admit that a large percentage of my turf and business management education came via one-on-one or small group conversations in the 19th hole after a chapter meeting and/or round of golf.

I know superintendents are very sensitive to being away from the workplace these days, but somehow you have to convey the value of the problem solving knowledge and turf tricks you learn from your fellow superintendents. You don't even have to be gone all day. Most chapters offer registration fees for meeting, lunch and/or golf so you can attend the parts of the day that fit your schedule.

Or worst case, you go after work and just have a beer with the guys and gals after the golf round is over. You still get the latest news and information and you haven't missed work. So it can be done, if you want to make it a priority to stay in touch and up to date. Funny, how we find the time to do the things we really want to do.

Sometimes you pick up practical tips and solutions to a problem and sometimes the value in interacting with your peers is to find out you really don't have it as bad as someone else and the grass isn't always greener down the road. Here are a few tidbits from recent round table discussions, dinner table and 19th hole encounters:

■ Since overtime and regular time have been trimmed from budgets along with freezing wages and cutting bonuses, several superinten-

19th Hole Networking

BY JOEL JACKSON



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dents are working with employees to provide as flexible work schedules as possible, so they may pursue second jobs or share child care duties with a working spouse.

■ At a club that has frozen wages for three years they are embarking on a multi-million-dollar clubhouse renovation. Imagine the staff morale at that club.

■ A superintendent gave his golf and finance committee members a staged tour of his equipment fleet complete with posters showing purchase date, annual repair costs with the mileage equivalent of an automobile's lifespan. Who keeps a car for 700,000 miles? It was something they could relate to. They are now looking at a lease plan to begin replacing 7- to 10-year-old mowers and tractors.

■ At another course complaints on turf conditions began building after last year's harsh winter. The superintendent produced a spreadsheet comparing the maintenance budgets for the past 10 years. He was able to show the correlation between the steadily increasing cutbacks and the ability to maintain conditions to their expectations. Champagne tastes and beer budgets don't mix.

Quantifying the value of networking is not an easy task when budgets have to be trimmed. It is a fluid and unique opportunity at our events, but it has proven to be invaluable to the most successful members of our profession. You have to be willing to join in, make yourself available, ask questions and learn to listen.

Networking sounds like a new-age buzzword, but really it's just fellowship and camaraderie all dressed up in new clothes. To take advantage of networking all you have to do is show up!

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