



“Our golfers told us they didn’t know which golf course they were going to get — the one that was well maintained or the one that wasn’t.”

MARK WOODWARD, *Contributing Editor*

Survey says

We’ve all heard the survey results — golf course conditioning is the No. 1 reason golfers favor one course over another. The role of the superintendent therefore is even more important today than it was in the past, when greenkeepers had bigger budgets to work with. Tough times require superintendents to dig deep into their repertoire of knowledge and experience to create more from less.

Some of the best superintendents I know work at limited-budget facilities and are required to be as creative as they can be to get the most from their allocated resources.

I recently saw this firsthand on a consulting job I’m involved with. I was hired as a consultant for a golf course in the Phoenix area that was challenged at almost every level. Rounds were down, the condition of the golf course was not where it could be and for a variety of reasons (that would require more space than the magazine can allow me) the course was struggling. We immediately put a plan in place to get back to what I call “the basics of golf course management.”

We talked about implementing programs that would

focus on golf course conditioning, customer service and competitive rates. We wanted to provide customers with a great golf experience at a competitive price.

Treating our customers well was easy, because it came naturally to our staff. The part about the rates proved to be a little more difficult, because in our efforts to establish fees we had to take into account the condition of the golf course and determine what we thought would be a fair value-added fee for the product we were providing.

And then came the most important part, the condition of the course. One word kept popping up in all our discussions — “consistency.” The frequency of all maintenance tasks was sorely lacking, and our golfers told us they didn’t

know which golf course they were going to get when they played — the one that was well maintained or the one that wasn’t.

In response to that feedback, we got to work. Every day, we cut new hole locations, mowed greens and raked bunkers. We mowed fairways, roughs and tees at least three days a week and generally increased the frequency of each and every maintenance activity. That alone improved consistency.

And golfers noticed. They quickly realized they would get the same well-maintained golf course no matter which day of the week they played. As a result, in a little more than a year, rounds have nearly doubled and revenue has risen substantially.

In fact, for the first seven

months of this fiscal year (from July 1, 2012 through January 31, 2013) revenue is up 48 percent compared to the same time period last fiscal year. That rise has increased cash flow, allowing us to give our superintendent more money for materials and leasing new equipment.

The golf course continued to get better and better because of the momentum we created. Golfers are now saying we put the “soul” back into the golf course. They love playing it again.

Barring any unforeseen problems, emergencies or major weather issues, this golf course is on track to be self-sustaining for the first time in the past 10 years.

Like any service industry, golf relies heavily on repeat customers. When we ask ours why they like this golf course and continue to come back and play, by far the No. 1 reason is the course’s condition. Word of mouth is starting to spread, and the course is on track to have its best year in ages.

This simple “back to the basics” management approach has been a true team effort. Every one of our staff has bought into it. As for those survey results showing course conditioning is the No. 1 reason golfers prefer a course? In this case, they couldn’t be more accurate.

Mark Woodward is president of Mark Woodward and Associates, principal of DaMarCo Golf, CEO of MasterStep Golf Management Group and a contributing editor for *Golfdom*.