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MARK WOODWARD, *Contributing Editor*

Tough but good questions

In my current role as Senior Vice President of a golf management company and one of the owners of a golf course renovation company, I get around to many golf courses in the Southwest region of the United States.

The best part about my job is that I have many opportunities to talk to a huge number of people in the golf industry from all types of golf courses. Those of you who have been in the business for a while fully understand that getting to know your fellow professionals in the industry and building lifelong relationships is by far one of the greatest blessings that we have.

Based on my longevity in the industry (that's a politically correct way to say I'm old, before you do) and the variety of positions I've held in golf, these colleagues tell me how they feel about things and ask me tough questions.

Probably one of the toughest questions asked by superintendents, golf professionals

and general managers is: "In today's ever changing golf industry, with technology and the economy and the fact that my club is struggling, what is the relevancy of being a member of a national golf association?" They tell me they can get almost anything they need to succeed in their jobs at the local level.

In this day and age I agree that in most cases the local associations are doing a great job of offering programs, services, education and growing membership. I remember when I was running for GCSAA's board, a high-profile member asked me, "If you only had one choice and had to make a decision right now, which would you choose — your local association or the national?" This was in 1999

and it was a great question. By the way, I chose local when I answered because everything starts at our local levels.

After being a member of an association for over 36 years, I can clearly explain the value. You can get way more value than you pay in membership dues if you want.

I also hear questions about certain programs and services, particularly in the GCSAA, and members and non-members want to know how these programs are benefiting them personally. They comment about the role of the national association versus their local chapter association.

One of the programs offered by the GCSAA that I hear a lot about is the field staff program that is the

topic of the cover story of this issue. The program has grown substantially over the past couple of years.

Questions I'm asked include, "What is the Return on Investment (ROI) of this program? Is this program bringing in new members? Is it bringing in new revenues? What does the program cost the members? Is this program infringing on the responsibilities of the local chapters?"

Obviously, I don't know the answers to all these questions, but they seem to be good questions that need to be answered. I do know that this program is a substantial hit to the GCSAA budget. In my opinion, the jury is still out as to whether this program will be successful.

My overriding point is that our associations still have some work to do if they expect to grow their number of members, revenues and services. With all the changes in the golf industry and in our society, we may be "at the turn" in terms of how people feel personally about these questions. There will always be people who question things and don't fully understand the role and value of associations and their services, so I guess the more our industry changes, the more things stay the same.

Mark Woodward is a senior vice president for OB Sports, principal of Damarco Golf, president of Mark Woodward and Associates and a contributing editor for *Golfdom*. He can be reached at mwoodward@obsports.com.