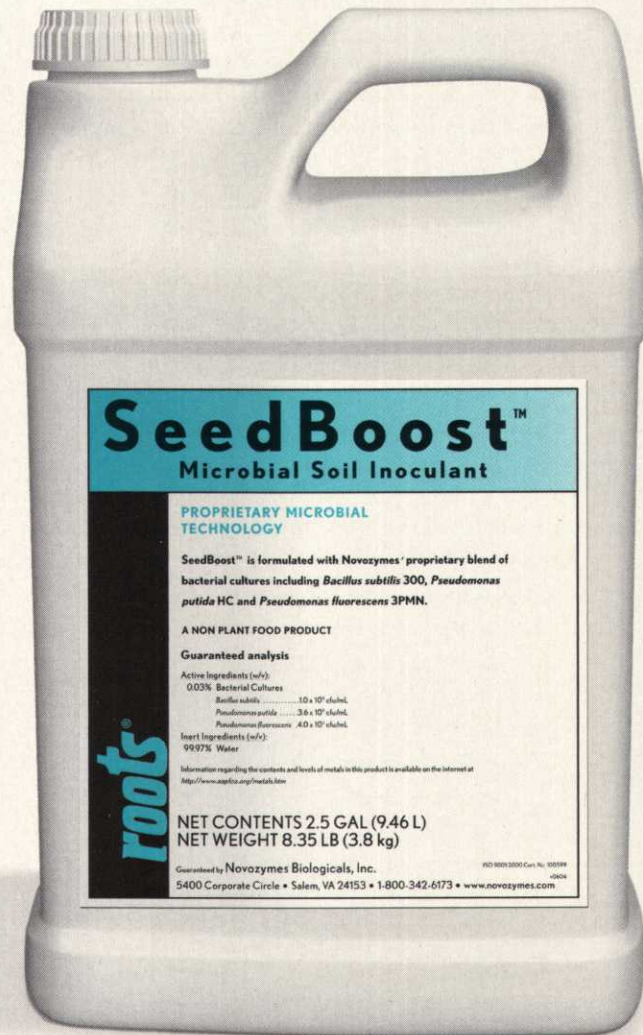


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## Super Service



**“I would rather buy 1,000 golfers a cold beer each on a hot day than put a \$500 ad in the newspaper.”**

JUDY HUTT

*Continued from page 40*

As part of the customer service plan, Hutt and her staff seek opinions from their customers constantly about how to improve the course, which charges \$25 for 18 holes during the week and \$33 on the weekend.

The process entails an annual poll sent to customers to ask them what changes they would like to see. We're not talking small things, like a new hot dog brand in the deli. We're talking big things, like course renovations. One year, respondents said Shadow Valley needed bunkers, so Hutt had them built.

In one survey a golfer wrote, “You're not my favorite course, but because of the condition you keep it in and because your staff is so friendly, it's where I choose to play.”

Hutt says she puts money back into Shadow Valley every year. “We make sure that when we open our doors every year, there's something new and tangible they can see.”

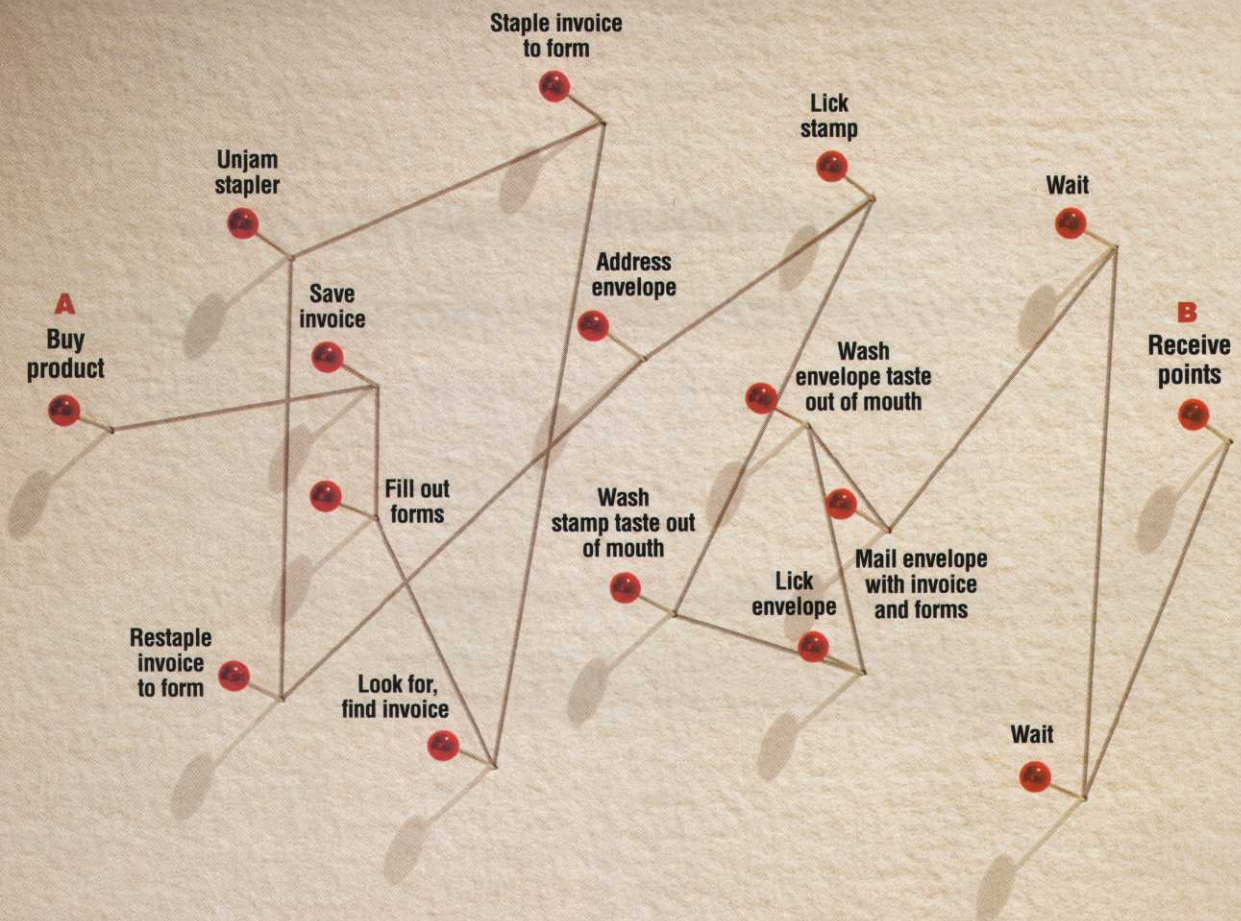
Hutt says her business savvy is the result of experience. She admits she has learned a few lessons the hard way.

“I'm not saying I've always done it right,” she says. “But I think we're doing it right now.”

Hunnicut, who has been with Shadow Valley for about 10 years, says Hutt has learned a lot about the business in that time. For instance, Hunnicutt says Hutt “ruffled the feathers” of some sales and service people by trying to get them to flat-out lower their prices on products. But Hunnicutt says Hutt has learned that such negotiating strategies weren't good business. “She negotiates differently now,” he says.

**A** few hours have passed, and the sun has risen higher in the cloudless Florida sky. It's time for Hutt to leave for another appointment. But before she goes, she has more than a passing remark to say about her staff. Hutt says she couldn't run the course without key input from staff members, from the pro to the superintendent to the deli manager, who are heavily involved in making decisions.

“Sometimes they say you're only as good as



the people you surround yourself with," Hutt says. "We have some really good people, and most of the decisions made are group decisions."

Hutt credits head professional T.J. Gomez, who joined the course about a year ago, with helping spark Shadow Valley's business last year. Business has been slow at Shadow Valley the past few years, but Hutt says the course posted an increase in 2003 for the first time in three years because of increased corporate-outing business secured by Gomez.

Gomez has a candid relationship with Hutt. He's not afraid to disagree with her, but he knows she's the boss and respects her.

"Everybody knows where she stands and what she believes in," Gomez says. "If she doesn't like an idea, she'll tell you. If she loves an idea, she'll tell you."

Hunnicutt describes Hutt as a tough boss, but one who is honest and approachable. He also says Hutt has shown more gratitude to her staff the past few years and is paying staff members better as well as communicating to them how important they are to the operation.

Hutt thinks most golfers perceive her as a good businesswoman, although she believes men think of her as a "demanding" good businesswoman. "I have that perception because I'm hard-nosed, and I'm a woman in a man's world," she says.

Hutt, whose hobby is riding horses, doesn't play much golf, but insists she knows the game's ins and outs from talking to players.

"I've been doing this for more than 30 years," she says. "I know enough about the game to talk the game."

She also has a pair of eyes in her husband of 15 years, Ron, who is a five-handicap and plays the course several times a week. He keeps Hutt apprised of problems on the course.

"He's the biggest complainer in the world," Hutt says with a chuckle. "He'll let me know if something is not right on the course."

As she does with other customers, Hutt will listen intently to her husband's concerns.

"I don't think I know anymore than anybody else does," she says. "But I always listen to customers." ■



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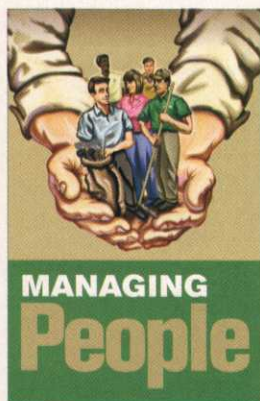
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# A 'LEADING' Question

Recently, I found myself wondering what my crew members think of me as a leader, so I decided to ask them

By Ron Furlong



I spent a recent lazy Saturday afternoon watching *Master and Commander: Far Side of the World* on DVD. The idea was to forget about work for a day, but while watching a particular scene in the movie I found myself reflecting on some of my managerial techniques.

The scene involved Russell Crowe's character, Captain Aubrey, reprimanding one of his lieutenants for not reprimanding an insubordinate sailor. The lieutenant, frustrated, said he meant to reprimand the sailor, but couldn't find the right words. Then he confessed that none of the men liked him, and he found it difficult to lead them. He also confessed he had difficulty making friends among

the crew. Captain Aubrey told him he wasn't there to make friends. He must be strict, but not a tyrant. Above all, he must have their respect, because without their respect he'd never be a leader.

I couldn't help but transfer this situation to that of the golf course superintendent and his crew (I'm sure it will do absolutely no good whatsoever to mention here that the lieutenant ends up killing himself, but there you go).

I found myself wondering what my crew must think about *me* as a leader. It's something, I must admit, I haven't often considered. I tend to see an outcome in my mind and set about achieving that outcome, often not consider-

*Continued on page 46*

ARTVILLE



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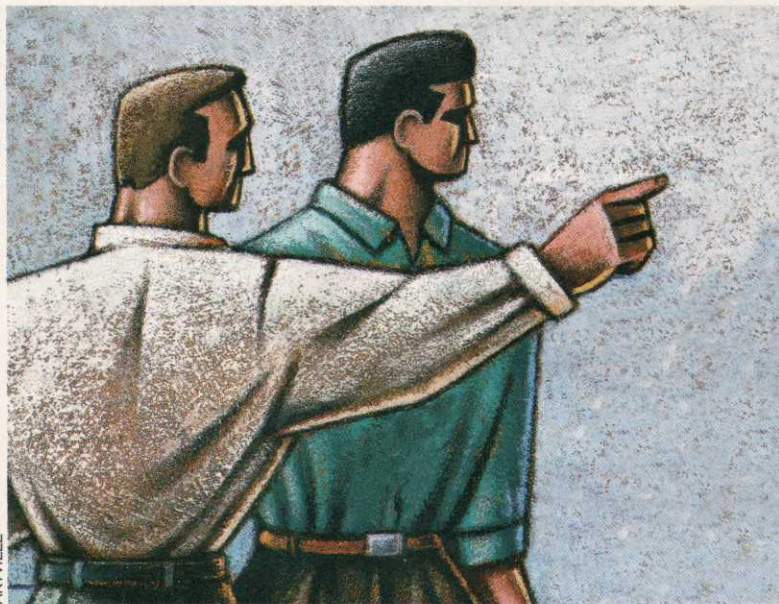
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*Continued from page 44*

ing the fact that I *need* my crew to help me achieve the goal.

In my own case, I know I have my crew's respect, but to what end? How has that respect been earned, and what other feelings accompany it? Do they consider me a tyrant? Unreasonable? Willing to jump in the ditch with them when the going gets tough? A friend? Someone to whom they can tell the



ARTVILLE

**Never ask of someone more than you are willing to ask of yourself when you are in his or her situation.**

---

truth in tough situations? After asking myself some of these questions, I suddenly realized I couldn't answer any of them.

I'm pretty sure none of us consciously gets into this business to actually become a manager. When asked what I do for a living, I've never answered, "I'm a golf course manager." It's not really what I or many of my peers consider ourselves to be. We are superintendents — growers and fine tuners of grass. The managing aspect of the job is something that's been thrown into the mix. As much as we sometimes wish it wasn't, it really can't be avoided. Often, because it's in the back of our minds, it tends to get overlooked. This, I'm beginning to realize, is a mistake.

After the movie (great ending, by the way), I set about trying to answer some of the questions I posed to myself:

### **Do they consider me a tyrant?**

I have my moments, there is no doubt, of what I like to call "focus." When in focus, I tend to see the problem, the solution and the means

without often considering the human element. This perhaps is my greatest weakness as a manager. Often, I think I forget I have allies — people there to help me with the problem, not add to it.

### **Am I unreasonable?**

The answer again is more than likely not one I'm really going to like. I must admit that this can be the case. Never ask of someone more than you are willing to ask of yourself. But even, I think, not even that. Never ask of someone more than you are willing to ask of yourself when you are in his or her situation. I think that's a valuable distinction that needs to be remembered.

### **A friend?**

I once worked for a superintendent who made a specific point one day to tell me he wasn't there to make friends. He even went to the length of telling me he was a better superintendent because he didn't befriend anyone on the crew. I must admit, I have followed this advice over the years, although maybe not always consciously. I was friendly, perhaps, but not a friend.

Recently, I've changed this philosophy, if ever so slightly. I still do believe a certain arm's length separation must exist between manager and employee. But I'm starting to feel there's nothing wrong with the occasional golf outing together with the guys, or even a pick-up game of hoops and a refreshment afterwards. It's a delicate line, but try to keep a distance without seeming like you are.

### **Someone to whom they can tell the truth in tough situations?**

This is similar to the friend question, but with a slight twist. There are going to be situations that arise with every employee that involve that employee's personal life. It can't be avoided. Everyone is human, subject to the trials and tribulations that come with the package. These personal issues, these life issues, are going to come to your golf course sooner or later — with some employees more than others, and with some employees a lot more than others. You will have to deal with them, no doubt.

But one thing that may help is the ability and willingness of employees to confide in you the truth about problems that come up. Faking illnesses or vehicle troubles or whatever

else they may come up with instead of telling you the truth can never result in a positive outcome for an employee or employer. Maybe an employee is simply burned out and needs some time off. Maybe he's having troubles with a spouse and needs to spend some time to work it out. Having someone with the confidence to confront you with honesty is half the battle to helping him or her be a more productive employee.

When I got back to work after taking off the weekend, I approached a few employees to give me some feedback on what they thought of me as a manager. After some initial reluctance, I received a few useful pointers.

One was to be more open to their suggestions. I'm as guilty as the next guy in thinking I know all of the answers. Open your mind and actually listen to people. They wanted to feel that their ideas might actually be useful to the operation of the golf course.

Another pointer was echoed by nearly everyone I asked, so I took it seriously. "Empower them to solve problems." Give

them the tools (not just literal tools) to solve the problems they encounter. That could mean fixing a scalped plug, communicating with the pro shop or addressing a disgruntled golfer. Have the confidence to let them solve problems, and give them the ability to do so.

I think it's inevitable in the course of one's golf course management career to question his or her abilities. No one is perfect, and no one should ever be so confident in his or her own abilities to never question them. As important as your knowledge of growth regulators, ET rates and topdressing practices, you should consider the facet of your management skills. It may not seem as important, but it is.

I think the one thing within your management arsenal that you should remember is to make sure you have the respect of your employees. Without that, as Captain Aubrey said, you can never lead. ■

*Furlong, superintendent of Avalon Golf Club in Bellingham, Wash., can be reached at rf7500@aol.com*

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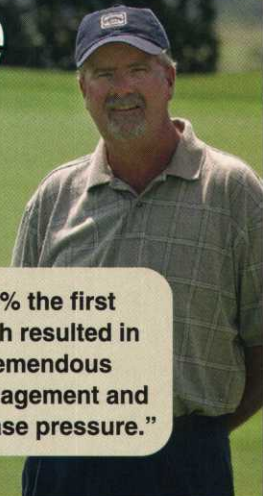
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**E**arly into the 2004 U.S. Open, it appeared that Shinnecock Hills Golf Club would be remembered as an enormous success. Superintendent Mark Michaud's recent in-house bunker renovation looked awesome. Course conditions seemed perfect. The layout was tough but fair, albeit too narrow for "links conditions."

After two rounds, the leader board was dominated by the world's best. One problem — the leaders were five-under par. They were hitting wedges into long par fours. The once unreachable par-five 16th was vulnerable to players reaching it in two. In USGA parlance, the Southampton, N.Y., sky was falling. Something had to be done.

The turning point came Friday evening of tournament week. Several hard-working volunteers and officials have confirmed that after leaders reached six-under par through 36-holes, the self-obsessed USGA, led by championship committee chairman Walter Driver and senior rules and competitions director Tom Meeks, attempted to restore order.

As of this printing, it still wasn't clear who OK'ed the quadruple cut and double rolling of greens Friday evening. But the excessive preparation was done under USGA supervision.

When things went bad Saturday, Driver first pinned the par-three seventh hole debacle on an "inadvertent" rolling of the green. When no one believed him, Driver tried a new spin Sunday night.

"I'm sure someone was asked to roll it, but that instruction came from someone down the chain of command, and I don't know who," Driver said after Retief Goosen saved the USGA with his 24-putt final round. "I think it's just human error. I think somebody thought they were supposed to roll it and told the fellow who was on the rolling machine to go ahead. He didn't just make it up, but it didn't come from me."

Sunday, the entire course turned goofy, except to the same sadists who cheered when a car crashes into a wall. Those who love watching a demonstration of skill were horrified.

The cause of this madness? The USGA has lost control of the game. The excessive setup was employed to compensate for the USGA's inability to regulate equipment.

## Pin Shinnecock's Shame on USGA

BY GEOFF SHACKELFORD



AT THE U.S. OPEN,  
WE SAW HOW  
DESPERATE THE  
ASSOCIATION  
HAS BECOME,  
RESORTING TO  
RECKLESS AND  
REVOLTING SPIN

In the distorted USGA mentality, a high winning score might wake up a golf world reluctant to admit that the game is totally out of whack. Folks might realize that golf is working around the demands of equipment manufacturers who have no interest in anything but their own bottom lines.

At Shinnecock, we saw how desperate the USGA has become, resorting to reckless and revolting spin: Blame the superintendent, blame the crew, blame the old architecture, blame the wind.

We did good, it just went bad.

"I have no regrets," the USGA's Tom Meeks told *The Golf Channel*.

Others may take some heat, namely the USGA's Tim Moraghan and Mike Davis, or Shinnecock's Michaud. But it's clear that unless they secretly defied orders — which no one believes for a second — the blame begins and ends with Meeks, Driver and the USGA's warped U.S. Open approach.

Meeks has a track record of set-up follies, but he has been allowed to carry on because USGA Executive Committee egos need a high winning score so they can say, "See, we haven't blown this equipment regulation thing."

"Let's keep this in perspective," Driver said. "This is the third modern Open at Shinnecock. Retief [Goosen] shot four-under par. In 1986 [Raymond Floyd's] one-under won the tournament. And in 1995, [Corey Pavin's] even par won the tournament."

Driver added, "I would rather not have had the controversy, but we couldn't do anything about it."

Except dump the blame on someone else. Shame on the USGA for refusing to take responsibility for anything these days.

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



# TURFGRASS TRENDS

## INSECT THRESHOLDS

### Consider Nematode Thresholds Before Treatment

By Nathaniel Mitkowski

Plant parasitic nematodes on golf courses present special problems for both disease diagnosticians and superintendents. In contrast to fungal diseases, which are unacceptable at any level, low to moderate levels of plant parasitic nematodes should be expected in any stand of turf.

The difficult part of managing a potential nematode problem is determining when the nematode population is actually a cause for concern. The point at which nematode populations become a problem is called the population, disease or damage *threshold*. The threshold concept is used widely in plant pathology and is often the underlying mechanism of an integrated pest management strategy.

Nematodes are aquatic organisms — even terrestrial nematodes live in films of water.

Many factors contribute to nematode thresholds. While some of these factors are obvious, others are not. Additionally, interactions between these factors have the potential to dramatically influence a threshold. In short, thresholds are not as absolute as they may seem.

**Pathogens:** A nematode population's species is commonly recognized as the most important consideration in determining a nematode threshold. However, it is extremely difficult to identify the majority of individual nematodes to species in any soil sample. As a result, identifications are usually made to the genus level even though management recommendations are made using numbers published for an explicit species.

While this would seem to be a major problem, it is generally considered an acceptable practice. The biological differences between species within most genera of turf pathogenic nematodes are considered to be slight. For instance, few morphological differences exist between most turf pathogenic species of the lance nematode, *Hoplolaimus*, and the assumption is usually made that pathological differences are also few.

Whether this assumption is true is debatable, and it points to a potential source of significant uncertainty. Is a published threshold for another species valid for the species of nematode found on your putting green? If experimental data doesn't exist, a guess may be in order. Such a situation rarely occurs in most other agricultural systems because the diversity of serious plant parasitic nematodes is much lower than that in turf stands.

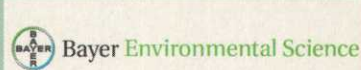
A cyst nematode on soybean is most likely to be *Heterodera glycines*, and a positive identification is a relatively straightforward procedure. A root-knot nematode on lettuce in New York is almost certainly *Meloidogyne hapla*. In both of these cases, the thresholds are well-established for the identified species, and that species is the only one likely to be encountered. A stunt nematode on bentgrass, on the other hand, could easily be one of half-a-dozen different *Tylenchorhynchus* species, but it is unclear whether this fact is important in using established thresholds. *Heterodera* and *Meloidogyne* are unique examples on turf because, at least in the Northern states, no generally recognized thresholds are available for these two genera. While *Heterodera* is encountered sporadically, its damage poten-

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