



COMMUNICATION and COURTESY

By Monroe S. Miller

I received a long distance telephone call from one of our club members last winter. He spends his winters in the south and belongs to a golf club there.

He called me to ask a dozen questions about the course he plays in the south.

I offered up some vague speculation, but told him he was crazy to be talking to me.

"Why not," I asked, "go ask the man who is managing the golf course? He's the one who can really answer your questions and address your concerns."

I didn't hear anymore about it and had, in fact, completely forgotten the telephone call.

Until sometime in late June, that is. The member who called me (nice fellow, by the way) in the winter stopped by my office.

He told me he had taken my advice and gone to see the golf course superintendent of his southern golf club. The questions he had for me were all answered to his satisfaction by the person who should have been queried in the first place.

Many were related to weather — heavy winter rains and sub-freezing temperatures. Others dealt with chronic troubles we've all had — triplex rings, traffic pattern wear, shade and soil compaction.

"You really should write an article for the club newsletter and explain these problems to the players. Most will be understanding. As it is now, they are simply upset, like I was, with some marginal conditions," the club member told our colleague.

He was in my office that June morning to show me the May 1990 newsletter from his southern club. The course manager had taken his advice and written an intelligent article that discussed the problems in detail and offered the remedies that were being implemented. It was a good piece, well organized and definitive.

I was asked for my impression and I gave it — "excellent."

"Too bad," the member said, "he waited so long to write it. He was fired before the newsletter was mailed to the membership."

I could have cried. Here was a guy having tough times like we all have had, dealing with them the best he could. Yet his dismissal was due to more than his troubles.

He lost his job, most likely, because of his failure to communicate with the members of his club.

Every once in a while we need a slap like this to remind us of the critical value of communication. Communication will not substitute for competence, but it will almost always win understanding for your problems, even from the most severe critics.

I just hope the lesson wasn't lost on the person who suffered the job loss. He had the most to learn.

It was a rough hour and a half earlier this season. Despite having one of the most friendly and capable crews I've ever had, they about did me in over the course of 90 short minutes.

I watched one of them cross the railroad tracks from the shopyard and proceed across the seventh fairway without a glance — for either trains or players. I was most concerned, though, about the player who was ready to hit but pulled up at the last instant. He promptly slammed his driver into the tee ground.

Another one of the guys was mowing a green surrounds. He clutched, reached down and picked up a golf ball (in play), flipped it over his shoulder and started mowing again. Luckily, for me, he moved the ball of a very pleasant golfer.

And so it went. A fairway mower moving past a player poised to shoot. A utility cart across a full practice range. Loud conversation too close to a putting green.

Each incident was a gross violation of one of the most important precepts in our business of managing golf courses — COURTESY.

A lack of courtesy adds aggravation to a round of golf; the presence of it adds to the players' enjoyment.

You cannot have too many lessons, I learned, in courtesy on the golf course in a busy season. This is especially true when the play is slow or when we are in the midst of a big course project.

Players respond favorably and positively to a friendly wave or a smile of a crew member. They will always appreciate (and really ought to expect) the course employee who yields the right-of-way. The need to rush isn't always that great.

The members of our club seem to genuinely enjoy conversation with golf course staff people. They are curious about specifics of a job and the purpose of specialized machines.

They are interested in why things are done certain ways or at certain times. Often they wonder about the employees themselves, asking things like 'how long have you worked here?' and 'how do you like your job?' Courtesy dictates polite answers.

There is an art to golf course courtesy, and it needs to be impressed on staff by example. They must realize the players are on the course for enjoyment of the game and the beauty of the golf course itself. Courtesy from us can only enhance the day's experience.

"Courtesy," wrote E.M. Forster, "is the civil deed that shows a good heart." Mr. Forster has something there, something that seems especially important and particularly apropos to the game of golf itself.