



Education is Key in a Recession

By David Brandenburg, Golf Course Manager, Rolling Meadows Golf Course

Over the past few years budget cuts are a common occurrence in all industries not just golf. Each season the cuts go deeper and affect more of the operation. Labor and capital purchases are usually the first to be cut because they are easy to see on a spread sheet. Lucky superintendents are able to select the cuts themselves while others have cuts handed down by upper managers.

In the best operations, budgeting is a joint effort between all parties. However club politics is food for another column. In reality, if the revenue is not there cuts have to be made to expenses and the decisions are not easy for anyone. One trend that concerns me is the cut to continuing education funds.

Continuing education may be considered optional by many managers but in reality the cut may cost clubs more than they gain by not realizing the far reaching setbacks of eliminating this valuable asset.

The obvious cost to reducing education is a reduction of new ideas and methods to produce the playing fields we provide. No matter how long we have been in the business or how many classes we have taken in the past, as professionals we need to keep growing. A tight economy it is not the time to reduce education, but it is the time to increase education. The more we learn, the better prepared we will be to make sound financial and agronomic decisions to improve our clubs.

A prime example is the recently held WTA Field Day. Yes it is a day away from work and it comes with a small admission fee but the

research presented is up to the minute cutting edge. Research on plant varieties and species, fungicides, shade, wetting agents and soils are just the beginning of what this event has to offer. From the plots and research it is easy to go back to your club and modify your programs to reduce costs in product and labor.

Another example would be the regular monthly golf events the WGCSA hosts. You or your accountant may ask how you can learn anything from a day playing golf. On the surface the meetings have speakers covering a variety of timely subjects. However important the knowledge we obtain from the speakers is, the ideas and

knowledge we receive from viewing another golf course is just as important.

I can honestly say I have never played a course where I have not learned from the superintendent by viewing their playing surface and surrounds. In rare cases I learn what not to do, but usually I see and learn a valuable method of operation or feature on the golf course that will work at our facility.

For members facing financial cuts to education you may need to look at lower cost opportunities to improve yourself. Free or low cost events sponsored by vendors provide a way to keep up with the latest trends and information

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while saving the facility funds. Just keep in mind that some of the information presented may be slanted to increase sales for a particular product. Not that the information is incorrect or wrong but it just requires a watchful eye and additional time as you compare what you were told with independent research.


GCSAA offers many online courses and on-demand webcasts that can be used at a time and place convenient to you. These sessions are a great opportunity to increase your value to the club and share this knowledge with your staff. As our positions as turf managers change and expand we also need to look at classes outside of the agronomic field. Classes at a local college or tech school can be taken on topics such as human

interaction, communication and business. Most superintendents realize we spend more and more time managing people and facilities not just maintaining the links.

Recently the WGCSA has been recognized by our national association as a leader in the number of continuing education opportunities we offer our members. One of the hidden costs of cuts to continuing education is the potential loss of opportunities. As attendance at regularly held events shrinks because of budget cuts or lack of desire to learn new things, fewer events will be offered. This change will affect us all for years to come.

Continuing education is similar to infrastructure. If your club goes year after year of using equipment and buildings without upgrading and maintaining one day your

equipment or building will no longer be serviceable and will need a total replacement. It is the same for us as turf and people managers. To cut education out for a year or two probably will not end our careers but if we stop bettering ourselves for too long soon we will be obsolete.

There is no easy answer to budget cuts and the deeper they go the harder they are. If the funds are not available there is no money tree to go borrow from. Regardless if you are the final decision maker or just a salesman selling your budget requests to someone else, keep in mind the importance of continuing education for yourself and your staff during the upcoming budget process. 

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