



Customer Service

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

Customer Service means different things to different people and my Google search for “customer service, definition” netted 10,900,000 results in .34 seconds. At its basic meaning customer service is how we treat customers. It is a concept that sounds easy, but is it really? Providing consistent customer service for a variety of people can be a challenge because every customer has a different opinion of what it means.

Golf courses as a optional recreational activity need to provide what the customers want in order to attract new and return business. Often one bad experience on the links will cause a golfer to swear off a golf course for good, while he tells everyone that will listen about his bad experience. Attracting return business takes offering the customer a good experience from calling for a tee time all the way through to post round refreshments.

Facility leaders should discuss teamwork and the common goal of providing a great end product for the customer. However, the grounds crew has nothing to do with Friday nights fish fry while the dishwashers and busboys have nothing to do with the long grass over by the 13th. Often the rank and file employees are responsible for their portion of the facility exclusively while managers work towards teamwork and a greater understanding of meeting customer needs.

For the maintenance department providing customer service comes down to a few basic principles.

- Consistent conditions on the golf course as the weather and budget allows.
- Treating customers with respect and friendliness.
- Working with the golf shop to avoid conflicts with golf events or even single golfers.

The level of course conditioning is different from a high end private club to a low end daily fee, however every golfer wants good conditions. The limiting factor to conditions is the course infrastructure, weather and budget. In reality, what is considered “good conditions” changes from player to player. The best thing for the golf course superintendent to do is have a set of written maintenance standards to cover course conditioning during normal weather conditions.

Written Standards allows the ownership or membership to be involved in the decision making of what is expected from the maintenance department. It also allows the turf manager to handle requests for increased workload or reductions to budget by showing management how conditions will be affected.

Treating customers with respect and friendliness is easier to define but still open to varying golfer expectations. At some resort or private golf facilities the golfers do not expect to see any maintenance workers and the budgets are large enough the work is done before the golfers reach the golf course. However at most golf facilities the grounds crew needs to co-exist with the players.

Working around customers is a customer service item because the players do not want noise or visual distractions while they are playing. And at the same time it is a safety item as being hit by a golf ball can be dangerous to workers. At our daily fee course we interact with the players quite a bit and the employees get to know the regular players and what their expectations are.



Have experience. Will travel.

If you're looking for some help on your course, consider the Stores-on-Wheels®. We can deliver agronomic expertise, top brands and more straight to your course. Call us at 1-800-321-5325. We can help with whatever job you have in mind. www.JohnDeere.com/golf



Some players want total silence while they are playing so we try to avoid working anywhere near them, while others could care less about noise as long as we are not in the line of play, and we also have some that are just out for a quick 9 and could care less about noise or line of play. Our employee manual expresses "if you cannot keep an eye on the ball you should leave the area when players are hitting as a safety concern. However equipment operation and engine idling can take place to the side or behind players unless they give the employee the "evil eyes" in which case silence is needed."

We also stress not bothering the same group of players more than once keeping in mind the golfers will encounter other employees during their round. Regardless of your policies it takes a great deal of training and experience for maintenance crews to safely work around golfers without causing problems with their game.

Working with the golf shop to avoid conflicts with golf events is a challenge at all golf courses and something we struggle with in the daily fee market. Have you heard the acronym NIMBY? It stands for Not in My Backyard. For example a person may support wind energy as long as the turbines are not by his house. Or I want a new highway to be able to travel the state from east to west as long as the new road does not go through my property. NWIP or Not When I Play could be the motto for golfers who expect healthy turf but do not want cultural practices whether it be mowing or aerifying done while it affects their game.

I have the fortunate / unfortunate job of working on grounds and in the golf shop so I have firsthand knowledge of the challenge of both areas. When our course was expanded to 27 holes the project was sold with the idea 9 holes would be available for maintenance on a regular basis. Unless a regular basis is at night that is not the case. Our goal on most days is to not have players go off the back 9 so our workers can turn there after their work on the front 9 and the 9-hole 9s', but often the customers beat us there.

We ask the golf shop not to send players there and often mark the paper tee sheet with closed or turns only to no avail. It is easy to blame the golf shop but in most cases it is the paying customer who asks to play that 9 holes. Despite a skillful explanation why players should not play on that 9 holes, the customer rarely understands or is concerned by the explanation. They just want to play golf and don't care if workers are out there or the greens are not yet mowed.

This offers a customer service dilemma.

Is it good customer service to allow a player to play when they want, where they want as long as they know they will run into maintenance workers? It seems like a good thing to do for the customer.

OR

Is it good customer service to have players out on a 9 that is full of maintenance equipment and playing on greens, tees and fairways that are half mowed? I would say it isn't a good idea to allow play on a less than perfect golf course when with a short wait the golfer could of played on the other available course where the maintenance is already been done.

This scenario happens all the time at golf courses across the area. Maintenance staffs and equipment fleets are a set by budget limiting how many holes can be maintained at once. From the golf shops point of view allowing the players on the 9 that is supposed to be closed keeps the customers happy. The hidden problem is the few early morning players going through the maintenance staff slows down the scheduled work meaning the players who had a tee time and played the proper rotation catch the employees and are inconvenienced by their work.

There is not a easy answer to the challenge of maintenance versus customer service. I do have a few tips that may improve situation.

1. Written maintenance standards will provide the level of service needed to satisfy customer needs.
2. Proper training of employees on golf etiquette, safety and player expectations will help guide them around customers.
3. A facility wide understanding and agreement on starting times, player rotation and maintenance schedules will reduce misunderstandings and allow for efficient maintenance work.

Customer service is more than a friendly greeting in the golf shop and cold water in the coolers. It requires a understanding of customer needs and demands along with training of all departments. 🌱



Bayer Environmental Science

John M. Turner
Sr. Sales Specialist - Golf
Bayer Environmental Science

Cell Phone: (630) 215-6110
Office: (630) 443-7807
Fax: (630) 443-7839
Email: john.turner@bayercropscience.com