

On A Personal Basis:

Public Relations for the Superintendent

Many golf course superintendents question how much they can do individually to gain the respect, recognition and news coverage they rightfully feel they deserve. Some people firmly believe they can do little, others have proven just the opposite and have gained tremendous coverage for their operation, their profession and themselves. In the final analysis, the success or failure of a venture into personal public relations seems to depend upon the approaches used by the individual. ("Approaches" is used in the plural form because single, one-time efforts, will seldom result in real success.)

Belief in yourself is probably the basic requirement for any successful program of this nature. If you are uncertain of yourself, or what you are attempting to tell others, chances are you won't be successful. Norman Vincent Peale convinced a lot of people on the, "Power of Positive Thinking," and this should become a motto for all golf course superintendents. The stronger you believe in what you want others to believe, the more successful you will probably be.

Another aspect of this problem concerns the news media's own situation. Most sports, business or news writers are assigned a story by their editor, they may have little opportunity to explore a potential story on their own, although they can, and do, present story ideas to the editors for possible assignment and coverage. There must be a realization that intense competition is taking place between several factions for the availability of personnel time and publicity space.

On a personal basis, the golf course superintendent must determine his goals and fix his sights on the approaches he feels appropriate and comfortable with in an attempt to gain the publicity he desires.

Of top priority must be the existence of some publicity or news worthy event which would be of interest to a particular news medium. Without such a basis, the superintendent will only be wasting his own and the writer's time. Although the range of possible events is rather endless, you must also consider the public that is normally reached by the medium you are considering in your approach. For example, an educational television station would be interested in an event quite

different from that which would interest the local news program or a noon-hour talk show.

Once the sights have been set and an appropriate topic determined, the individual superintendent must then take what is perhaps the hardest, but most vital step, contacting the media representative.

Obviously, each member of the mass media personnel team is an individual, with likes and dislikes. While one approach may be the beginning of a long and productive relationship for one individual, the same approach could totally backfire on another individual. One major point to keep in mind is that media personnel usually tend to shy away from the old concept of "payola," or what might be seen as a bribe, yet in pursuit of a news story, they would probably not turn down a round of golf at your course, or some other innocent "gift," such as a club cap, lunch or a drink or two.

In breaking the ice with the individual, that is making the initial contact, make certain you know exactly who you want to talk to and that you have your story idea well in mind prior to contacting him. Because of the press for time these individuals suffer, keep your conversation directly to the point, yet giving sufficient facts to gain his interest. Also, don't give up if you don't get an immediate acceptance, and remember that many, many people have been working on this writer for a long time, in an attempt to have their story told.

If your story concerns some aspect of the course, invite the writer to your course, at his convenience, and then stick

to a tight schedule for him. Give him the highlights of the story, show him what you want him to see and let him take it from there through questions, additional touring, etc. Constantly keep in mind that some valuable time is being invested in even a preliminary exploration of your story, and that if in fact a story develops from all of this effort, it still may not see the light of print, nor the air-time you personally feel it deserves.

As with all public relations activities, you should not wait until you really need or want something to start building your rapport with the media personnel. Utilize every opportunity you have to meet as many of these people as possible, and without becoming a pest or nuisance, keep in touch with those you know by offering them some information, without the string of a story necessarily involved.

If your course or chapter has a press day, participate as fully as possible. Invite someone you may know, or better yet, want to know, and then do everything possible to see that the individual receives a good return on the investment of his time. Nothing will kill your approaches faster than wasting this person's time.

As the old saying goes, "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again." If the publicity game was extremely easy, there would not be a need for public relations and publicity professionals, everyone in the world would be getting everything they wanted into the public's attention. While at times the entire operation is filled with frustration, the successes, even if small, will out weigh all else and provide fuel to continue and strive for more.

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