

Cooperating with the Course Superintendent

There is no such thing as a typical day in the life of the golf course superintendent. Each day is unique. The weather is an ever-changing factor, and he or she must expect the unexpected. How do they react to a major leakage in the irrigation system? What about other equipment failures that are critical to the crew's ability to provide the ultimate in course maintenance?

Upon arrival around daybreak, the superintendent's first priority is to check the irrigation system. This includes the pump station, the wells, the water level in the ponds and making sure the computerized control system functioned properly during the night. This is done before the crew arrives. If something has gone wrong, the superintendent must react immediately. This takes priority over everything.

Following that, the superintendent gets his crew going according to the schedule posted the previous day. Projects such as fertilization and aeration are pre-planned. At this point the routine ends. He or she may have some glitches staring him or her in the face. There may be a problem with the pump station or some breaks in the irrigation lines. Prioritizing is one of the main talents a superintendent must possess.

By mid-morning, a superintendent tries to get out on the course and consult with his or her crew and supervise their projects. These include fertilizing greens, aerating fairways or the irrigation person may be performing major surgery on a water line. On a good day, superintendents will get the opportunity to monitor what everyone is doing. On a bad day, they might spend 12 hours in the pump house fixing a broken control valve.

At most golf courses, the crew is divided into sections. Six or seven new workers will hand-mow the greens, rake the bunkers and do all the trim work. Another group, with a couple years experience, will do the slightly more glamorous jobs involving tractors such as mowing the fairways and roughs, around the greens, tees and aerating the greens, tees and fairways. Four or five year-round employees with more experience will spend time on projects such as rebuilding tees, reshaping bunkers, replacing bridges over creeks and other projects.

They can be compared to pieces on a chessboard. Move them around according to their talents and skills in order to accomplish the projects and have the course in top shape. These projects are planned weeks in advance. Most courses do not have enough man-power to buff and polish the course as you see it before a major tournament.

Ninety percent of all golfers are very aware of what is going on and tolerant to such things as the aerating of the fairways or greens. But there is always that ten percent who want the golf course in perfect condition, but they never want to see a maintenance worker or hear his machinery.

Nothing affects the morale of the superintendent's crew more than when golfers complain to them while they are working. The superintendent and his crew are aware of the inconvenience their machinery may cause, and they know most golfers are playing for more than wooden nickels.

These jobs must be done or the golf course will deteriorate. Rather than complain, golfers should be delighted. The superintendents need cooperation and tolerance from all golfers.

It's obvious that golfers are expected to repair ball marks, replace divots, follow cart signs, stay behind directional ropes and display normal golf etiquette. When these laws of golf are abused, it makes the superintendent's job a lot tougher.

A real challenge for many superintendents is preparing the course for the greatest percentage of golfers. Some want the course to resemble a cemetery—green and lush. They don't care how wet the course plays, just as long as they're looking at emerald green fairways. Then there are the hardcore golfers who prefer the course to be firm and fast. That's the toughest challenge for the superintendent. He's got to compromise.

Another problem is planning how much water is necessary for the next 12-24 hours. The superintendent can never predict what the weather will do the next day. He knows how much moisture he's lost on a given day by 7 p.m. when he sets the water programs for that night. But what's it going to do the next day? Will the wind quit blowing? Will it be overcast? Will the wind start up again and dry the course out much quicker? Most golfers want the course to play the same every day. What they don't understand are the many variables that effect how the course will play.

So let's be more patient and tolerant towards the superintendent and his crew.

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