

Becoming a More Effective Golf Course Superintendent

Editor's Note: These ideas on becoming a more effective golf course superintendent were presented at a monthly meeting a couple of years ago by Thomas J. Coyle and Associates. The list of leadership skills was set up for a workshop format but might be helpful to use as a reference.

1. **Who are the customers of the golf course superintendent?** In addition to listing the obvious answers, who else might be considered a "customer"?
2. **What do your golfers/members/guests (customers) really want?** In addition to listing the obvious, they are paying for, what else do they want from you?
3. **What business is the golf course superintendent really in?** In addition to the obvious answers, what are your golfers/guests (customers) seeking to satisfy?
4. **What do you think of when you think of the term "Excellent golf course service?"** What are some of the important elements?

How to say "NO" when you must:

Saying "NO" is every person's prerogative, and it need not seem harsh or unkind.

- Listen all the way to the end, even though you "know" your answer will probably be "no."
- Make a cushion statement. "I wish there was something we could do!!!" "...I'm sorry..." "...I'm so glad you asked..."
- Decline. Use the words "we" and "can't" or "unable" or "not able"
- Explain why. Give the reason — when it is not self-evident.
- Phrasing your turndown in a positive fashion can avoid hurt feelings. "Right now" or "for the time being" leaves the door open a little.
- End with multiple alternatives or suggestions designed to be helpful.
- Practice "Broken Record" technique.

Try some of these ideas:

- "I'm so glad you asked. I really admire your organization, but my schedule just won't allow me to accept your offer."
- "There's no one I'd rather have lunch with"
- "Jim and I always have a wonderful time at your golf outings, so I'm really sorry we can't make it."
- "That's an excellent offer, but we're not in a position to take advantage of it right now."

- "Good idea, but I'm afraid we have to pass on it for the time being."
- "Let me think about it"
- "I'm going to need some time on that"
- "I'd love to say yes, but I can't right off the bat. Give me some time to see if I can work something out."
- "I'll get back to you in 15 minutes." Then say "no."
- "It just won't work for us."
- "I just can't fit it in right now."
- "If I say yes, it might not be good for you, so I have to say no."
- "That's not something I do."

How to get agreement with your suggested solutions:

- Use some form of the word "suggest." Never say, "you'll have to..."
- Where possible, present options for the other person to choose from.
- Always present the suggested solution in terms of the other person's benefit, not your own convenience.

How to handle the complaints and anger that a golf course superintendent might get:

1. **Create an appropriate environment.**
 - Perception of privacy
 - S-O-F-T-E-N*
 - Practice the Three Conversational Guides
2. **Practice postural echo** _____
3. **Listen to the entire complaint without interruption.** ...Listen, allow the other person to ventilate completely...
4. **Make a brief statement of regret — a brief "I'm sorry..." statement.** "I'm sorry about this problem..." "I'm sorry there has been an inconvenience, situation, delay, etc..."
5. **Use the golfer/customer name, then make an empathy statement.** • An empathy statement is an "I understand" type of statement. An empathy statement has three components:
 - The "I understand" sentence stem
 - A **paraphrase** component, which means a brief restatement of some of the content.
 - A **reflect** component, which means a brief restatement of some of the feelings.

(Continued on Page 28)

Effective Superintendent—

(Continued from Page 27)

6. **Listen for those elements you can agree with, and then say so.** "...I can certainly agree to that..." + *Fogging and Sorting*
 - The M.I.T. studies demonstrated that you cannot maintain anger with someone who is making an "I agree" response to you.
 - Do not try to explain, ask for understanding, argue, correct, apportion responsibility or invoke sympathy.
7. **If you need to ask questions to fully understand the problem, do this first.** Before you ask questions, do these three things;
 - Explain why you want to ask "...a few questions"
 - Ask the person's permission to ask your questions
 - Take notes as they talk, or tell the person you are if you're on the telephone.
8. **In your suggested solution talk only about what you can do. Do not talk about what you can't do.** If the golfer/customer has not asked if a certain solution is available. Discuss the multiple options that are possible.

— TWO EXTRA STEPS —

1. Thank the person for coming or calling in.
2. If appropriate, call them back several days later with a follow-up contact after you have taken care of the initial situation or challenge.

* How to use the S-O-F-T-E-N Formula

Research confirms that when meeting someone for the first time, how you say something and what you look like when you say it may be much more important than the words you actually speak.

If people aren't quickly attracted to you or don't like what they see and hear in those first two to four minutes, chances are they won't pay attention to all those words you believe are demonstrating your knowledge and authority. They will agree with you or resist you, want to believe you or not, find your client guilty, buy another product, or change vendors.

During your first few minutes of interaction with others, their attention span is at its greatest and their powers of retention highest. Their eyes and ears focus on you and tell their brains what they see and hear.

First, people tend to focus on what they can see. In fact, there is a specific order by which others process information about you. While social scientists disagree on the precise sequence, that order generally appears to be:

- Color of skin
- Gender
- Age.....*We can't change these*

These are less important than the items below, which we can change

- Appearance
- Facial expression
- Eye contact
- Movement
- Personal space
- Listening.....*We can manage these*

So let's focus on these social bonding behaviors that are so important and can be managed. (Changed when necessary.)

The six most powerful social bonding behaviors can be remembered according to an acronym invented by social psychologist Dr. Arthur Wasmer in his popular book, "*Making Contact*," called the S-O-F-T-E-N Formula.

Common errors in greeting behaviors are:

- Not smiling
- Speaking too loud, too low—too fast, too slow
- Avoiding eye contact
- Offering a "twitch" instead of a smile
- Asking a question but not waiting for an answer
- Offering exaggerated behaviors that appear insincere during initial meetings
- Approaching too fast — offering no approach at all
- Touching too much

The 14 Skills and Traits of the Excellent Golf Course Superintendent

These leadership skills are based on the 14 traits and skills that have been shown to be characteristic of successful managers. These items were identified through extensive research done by Dr. Eugene E. Jennings of Michigan State University. The traits are:

The Successful Golf Course Leader

1. **Communications Skills.** Gives clear work instructions. Keeps staff informed about the organization's plans and goals.
2. **Motivation Skills.** Gives positive feedback. Praises others when they deserve it. Understands the importance of positive acknowledgment.
3. **Maintains the group's respect.** Practices good Ethical Modeling Behavior.
4. **Expects good work from everyone.** Has positive expectations of people and personally works to make those expectations come about.
5. **Manages anger well.** Can give constructive criticism skillfully. Maintains emotional control. Doesn't take actions or make decisions while extremely angry or stressed.
6. **Listens well.** Is willing to take time to listen to others. Understands the powerful effect of good listening for building cooperative relationships.

(Continued on Page 33)

Skin Cancer Prevention:

It Could Save Your Life

By Henry Nehls-Lowe and Patrick Femington, MD, MPH
Wisconsin Division of Health — Madison, Wisconsin

Summer's bright sunshine brings out more than beautiful lawns and gardens. An increasing number of people are working and playing in the sun. Many of us are familiar with the discomfort of sunburn. But there is a looming cloud more ominous than sunburn, particularly among those of us who burn easily or work outdoors all day in the sun. It is skin cancer.

Each year an estimated 10,000 Wisconsinites are diagnosed with skin cancer. Skin cancers are the most common type of cancer and its rate increases each year. The most common type of cancer is basal cell or squamous cell carcinoma. Although these cancers are easily cured if treated early, they are still responsible for the deaths of several thousand Americans each year.

Of greatest concern is malignant melanoma skin cancer, because it can appear quickly and spread to other parts of the body. Fortunately melanoma is not as common as basal cell or squamous cell carcinomas in Wisconsin. About 300 persons are diagnosed with melanoma each year. However, the rate of melanoma is increasing at a rate of 3% to 4% per year, faster than any other cancer in humans. In Wisconsin, the death rate from melanoma appears to be increasing for men, but not for women.

Excessive exposure to sunlight and fair skin are significant risk factors for all types of skin cancer (dark-skinned individuals should also avoid excessive sunlight exposure). Halting unprotected exposure to sunlight will

decrease your lifetime risk of skin cancer. It is very important for children to avoid severe sunburns because this is linked to melanoma developing during adulthood.

Wearing a hat and a long-sleeve shirt is the best way to keep the sun off your skin. Wide brimmed hats provide the best protection. Baseball caps can provide good protection for the face, but leave the back of the neck exposed. Some baseball caps come with a loose piece of cloth that covers the back of the neck. These caps were found to be practical and easy to use in a study of skin cancer prevention among farmers, conducted by the Marshfield Medical Research Foundation.

Sun screen lotions are very effective at filtering out ultraviolet light — the most damaging part of sunlight — for those parts of the skin that cannot be covered by clothing. Sun screen ratings between 0 and 15 allow a varying degree of tanning. A sun screen lotion with a rating of 15 and above filters out almost all ultraviolet light. Sun screens should be applied liberally to any exposed skin and reapplied if washed off by water or heavy perspiration.

If you spend much time outdoors or are fair-skinned, you should check your skin regularly for the appearance of skin lesions or mole-like growths. Also, you should regularly examine existing lesions and moles for changes in color or size. Consult your physician if you notice either of these or if you have concerns about skin cancer.

— Wisconsin Turfgrass News

Effective Superintendent—

(Continued from Page 28)

7. **Confident and self-assured.** Knows what he/she knows and doesn't know. Won't hesitate to ask for others' advice, suggestions, input and participation.
8. **Knows what work results are required.** Has enough technical knowledge of the work being supervised to make those judgments. Uses knowledge to evaluate rather than for getting involved in the "doing" of the work (unless he or she is a "working manager.")
9. **Empathy for the group's problems.** Demonstrates a caring attitude.
10. **Fair and consistent with everyone.** This is demonstrated through patterns of work assignments. Consistent enforcement of rules, policies and procedures.
11. **Gains the people's trust.** This is demonstrated by the leader's willingness to represent the group to "higher management."
12. **Goes to bat for the group.** Will work for the best and fair interests of the work group. Will not shrink from approaching higher management when necessary.
13. **Maintains a relationship of friendliness while remembering he or she is not "one of the boys."**
14. **Approachable.** Easy to talk to. Wants and seeks input from the work group.