

Serve and Turf:

Customer Service and Your Crew

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During the March Mini-Seminar we had the opportunity to spend the afternoon looking at customer service skills. At the heart of our discussion was building trust and rapport, the goal of any customer service effort. The result of building trust and rapport with customers is they become more willing to do what you want them to do, such as:

- Return to your club
- Tell others about your course
- Pick up the pace of play
- Respect the work you've done by treading lightly

The flexibility that comes with trusting relationships is what great customer service is all about. So to help you build those trusting relationships, here are five ideas to put into practice today:

Teach Your Crew Why Customers Love Golf

Golf means many things to each player. While some golfers are totally focused on their scores and the execution of each shot, others use hitting a little white ball as an excuse to walk on a perfectly groomed fairway. Although the walk isn't always straight, it can be the best part of golf. Once your crew members understand why golfers are so passionate about the game, they will start seeing their role in meeting customers' expectations.

Encourage Crew Members To Play & To Learn What Golfers Expect

Like falling in love, golf is one of

those "you don't know until you try it" things. You may have a crew that needs to gain a new perspective. Take them golfing and have them look at the course through a golfer's eyes. Ask them what they expect from the tee box, the fairways, and the greens. One of the best ways to stay focused on service is to walk in the customers' spikes for a day. Only by seeing things from the customers' viewpoint do we create an enthusiasm for serving others.

Demonstrate Patience In The Face(s) Of Anger

Being a good example is one of the superintendent's hardest jobs. When players, who are probably lost in a poor round, yell at you about the condition of the course, what do you do? With crew and customers watching, do you keep your cool? Being a good example is tough. Yet the way you respond is seen by your staff as the standard for dealing with anyone's anger. A good thing to keep in mind is that customers are usually not angry at us, they are angry at a situation they can't control. I can think of fewer situations that are harder to control than the flight, bounce and roll of a golf ball.

Show Crew How To Accept Compliments

When golfers share positive comments about your course, every crew member should accept that encouragement with open arms. Too often heart-felt compliments falls on

what seem to be deaf ears. The words hit the ground and even, like a chip shot, roll backwards toward the customer. As a superintendent, you want to know what people like about your course and that you appreciate their willingness to offer some kind words. So, make sure every comment, even critical ones, are received with a genuine "thank you for sharing that" from your crew members. Remember, compliments that are not acknowledged will not be repeated.

Maintain A Positive Voice

Just as in how you respond to angry customers, your example of positive communication with them will become the standard for your staff. Do your customers know you appreciate them? Do they know you want them to come back? Do they know you welcome their comments, compliments and suggestions? Does your crew see a high regard for customers through your words and behaviors? If your answers are yes, then the right standard of customer service is being set daily.

These ideas can help you make the goal of building trust and rapport with customers a reality. Your commitment to leading the way is an almighty important first shot!

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(Editor's Note: Jack Mateffy is the president of Mateffy and Company, a training and consulting firm located in Minneapolis. Mateffy and Company designs and presents employee development and training programs for clients around the nation. For more information on their services, please call Jack at (612) 472-0820.)