

Building Successful Professional Relationships

Golf Course Superintendents Association of America

(Editor's Note: The following are excerpts from GCSAA's guidebook: Communication: The Cornerstone to Professional Relationships.)

To obtain a copy of the complete "Communication" guidebook at no charge, please contact the GCSAA career development department at (800) 472-7878, ext. 655.

Few vocations demand such a wide range of knowledge to ensure professional success as does that of the golf course superintendent. Employers take it for granted that you know the technical side of turf management. Increasingly though, employers expect you to also be proficient in communication. Communication may be the single most important contributor to employment longevity and enjoyment.

Communicating With Employers

Play golf with your employer, golfers, and other golf course managers at your facility. Point out improvements, problems and planned solutions and general turf management practices that your playing partner/s may not be aware of. Ask for and listen to their input.

Golf with your employer at other facilities; he/she usually becomes your biggest supporter after seeing other courses. If your course is better managed, you look like a star. If your course is not as well managed (you should know that before going there with your employer), use your visit to illustrate similar improvements you would like to make on your course.

Be sure your employer, green committee members and/or board receives copies of Golf Course Management magazine and Leader Board, the GCSAA newsletter targeted to golf course decision-makers.

Attend green committee and/or board meetings. Develop an agenda for green committee meetings, publish meeting minutes and distribute promptly.

Provide committee members or board members with an attractive binder. Encourage them to place long range plans, progress reports and meeting minutes in the binder. Distribute timely articles, reports, Leader Board, etc. to be inserted into the binder.

Send appropriate agronomic and golf management articles to your employer and attach a handwritten note with a few brief thoughts related to the article. Stay up-to-date on turf management research. Share what you learn with your employer and explain what the findings mean or how it could affect your course.

Hold employer meetings in the maintenance facility. Host periodic tours of the golf course and maintenance facility. Be sure to highlight turfgrass research areas and discuss the value of maintenance equipment.

Hold an annual orientation for green committee members.

Invite new board or committee members to tour the course and the maintenance facility with you. Take him/her to lunch.

Invite your employer to GCSAA related-events such as educational seminars, chapter meetings and the annual conference and show.

Write thank-you notes to your employer and other managers at your facility when appropriate. For example, send a note after attending conference and show or education seminars paid for by your employer.

If you are emotionally upset about an issue, wait 24 hours before discussing it with your employer. You will be much calmer

and more rational after a cooling-off period.

During meetings with your employer, write down all the important points discussed. It shows professionalism and serves as a reminder for later reference.

Communicating With Golfers

Learn and use the names of active golfers at your course.

Create a "Superintendent's Section" on your course's web site.

Place comment cards in the pro shop, golf cars or restaurant. Design them with your name and title clearly visible so golfers know you are asking for course-related input. Include a line for the golfer's name so you can send a letter thanking him/her for the input and addressing the concern or compliment.

Post a long-term calendar with regular maintenance activities clearly noted in a prominent spot for all golfers to see. Let golfers know what you are doing on the course, when you will be doing it and how it will affect play.

Post daily updates in a visible location to communicate current course conditions. Use photographs to better illustrate what you are describing.

Document changes on the course using before and after photos to remind people "what you've done for them lately."

Contribute to your facility's newsletter by writing a regular column. Sign it and use your photograph. Be sure to discuss what's happening on the course and why it's happening. This lets your golfer know why a green was slower, why a tree was cut down around the ninth tee box and why water was standing on the fifth fairway.

Publish monthly lawncare tips in your facility's newsletter.

Present a workshop for your golfers on home turf care.

Maintain high visibility on the golf course. Eat lunch in the clubhouse daily. Maintain a high profile in the clubhouse. Talk to golfers to get first-hand input. Post your name and title in the clubhouse or restaurant and print your name on the scorecard. Note your title on your turf utility vehicle so it's visible to golfers.

Write every new club member a welcome letter and invite each to lunch. Offer to play golf with your golfers and keep a sign-up sheet in the clubhouse.

Write a letter of congratulations to the new club champion every year.

Attend member meetings and annual meetings; present a "State of the Union" slide show at the annual meeting describing activities that have resulted in improved golf course conditions or budget reduction. Attend tournaments and other events at your course. Take your spouse (if applicable) to appropriate functions.

Conduct a seminar for your golfers or members focusing on course etiquette. The seminar could include proper repair of divots and ball marks, raking a bunker, golf car rules, a discussion of alternative and metal golf spikes and other topics.

Sponsor a golfer outing early in the season. Point out wildlife and improvements made over the winter, show how to repair a ball mark, how to rake a bunker, etc.

Host an open house at your maintenance facility. Get your employees involved. In cold weather climates, offer coffee and hot chocolate in the maintenance facility during the winter. This invites golfers into the maintenance facility to see everything you do during the winter.