

THE GREEN COMMITTEE AND THE GOLF COURSE SUPERINTENDENT

by

William H. Bengueyfield, Western Director
United States Golf Association Green Section

As a brand new Assistant County Agricultural Agent (Farm Advisor to those of us in California), fresh from Ag College, I was making my first official visit to a country club. I'll never forget it!

Westchester Country Club, Rye, New York (in recent years host to the prestigious \$250,000 Westchester Classic) is an exclusive, well groomed and famous golf club 50 miles north of the Big City. Actually, there are two 18-hole courses here, one more "championship" than the other. Impressive enough is the entrance to the property, but the expansive English Tudor style clubhouse, the grass tenning courts, the patios with their brightly colored umbrellas and tables, etc. challenges any novice and non-member to even attempt an approach.

Carefully weaving through the Rolls, Cadillacs and Bentleys in an old, black County Agent's Ford, I spotted a sign "Ground Maintenance" leading to a far off group of low, green buildings partially hidden by trees. This was in 1950, before the advent of the title "Golf Course Superintendent." There was only one man in the area. I approached him, identified myself and asked; "Is the greenskeeper here?" "How is that?" he replied. "Is the greenskeeper here?" I repeated. "Son," he said, "you are new and probably don't know any better. But if you are ever going to make a career in golf course work, there is one lesson I had better teach you here and now. The term is 'Greenkeeper' not 'Greens-keeper.' I am the Greenkeeper, Tony Maselin--responsible for the entire golf course and don't ever forget it.' ---- I never have.

Being responsible for the entire course is indeed the assignment of the golf course superintendent. In the Rules of Golf, the term "green" refers to the whole course and not solely to the putting greens. Therefore, the green superintendent and his green committee are, at most clubs, charged with the major operating expense and investment of their entire club. It's a big job and when there is cooperation and understanding between all concerned parties, it can be a successful one.

A golf course program of maintenance and management is an intricate combination of men, materials, timing, climate, grasses, etc. What is good for one course is not always the best for the course down the road. But the new green chairman--the superintendent's boss--may not always understand these facts and frequently not recognize them as "facts" at all.

"Committee responsibilities in a country club" writes Dr. Fred M. Adams, long time green chairman and active in The Golf Association of

Michigan, "have always been an enigma to me. We have a real paradox; the Boards of Governors hire competent and in general well trained club managers, golf professionals and superintendents and then appoint committees composed of poorly trained, thoroughly inexperienced club members who are eager to run the operation. This obvious paradox in many instances leads to undermining the trained personnel with resultant confusion, inefficiencies and utter chaos.

"Human nature being what it is, most individuals when appointed to the green committee wish to make a contribution. Unfortunately for most of us, this contribution must represent change. After all, the new committee member has played golf for many years, not only in his local area but probably throughout the country. Now, with appointment to the green committee he finally has an opportunity to implement all of his experience and can hardly wait for the first committee meeting.

"Now let's stop a minute and objectively analyze our committee's preparedness for this job. While many of us have lawns at home, we still can't consider ourselves agronomists. We probably think Poa annua is a rare, exotic potted plant and dollarspot must have something to do with the Internal Revenue Service.

"Let's face it, we are ill prepared to offer much in the way of constructive criticism to a superintendent's maintenance procedures.

"What then, may we ask, should the green committee's functions be? How can these truly interested individuals make a significant contribution without jeopardizing the beauty and playability of the course, the maintenance practices of a superintendent or the superintendent himself?

"First of all, it becomes necessary for the Board of Directors to choose a chairman who has enough maturity and self-discipline to recognize that he really doesn't know much about agronomy. He will therefore be happy to leave the enormously complex problems related to growing grass up to the man who has been trained for this job--the superintendent.

"It's surprising how much more cooperative the superintendent will be if this philosophy is understood and conveyed to him from the start.

"Of equal importance is the projected tenure of this chairman. Nothing is more devastating to the efficient operation of the green committee than the common practice of changing the chairman every year or two. Just as our chairman has his and the committee's responsibilities in proper perspective--he retires!

"In my opinion, no one should be offered this job unless he is willing to serve at least 5 years and possibly longer. He also should have an indoctrination period of 2 to 3 years as a committee member before being offered the chairmanship. In this way the superintendent will have had an opportunity to make his own observations of the possibility of a potential personality clash. The club president would do

well to consult and heed the superintendent's feelings concerning the appointment of a new chairman."

Dr. Adams goes on to many more points concerning the role of the green chairman and his committee to the golf course superintendent and the maintenance program. His complete paper as well as another one prepared by the USGA Green Section on the subject, "A Guide For Green Committee Members" is available from your USGA Green Section office, Box 567, Garden Grove, CA 92642. We would be happy to send you a copy.

Almost everything written on the subject has been from the viewpoint of the green chairman and green committee responsibilities to the golf course superintendent and the maintenance program. Little has been written of the opposite direction; i.e., the superintendent's responsibilities to his committee and chairman. Perhaps these responsibilities are understood without detailing them. It's a simple employee-employer relationship isn't it? Or is it?

Green chairmen come and go, but superintendents go on forever. Anyone who has been in the business for any length of time will agree. I'm sure, that most green chairmen are understanding, reasonable and good men. Many associations develop into life long friendships. Certainly, most chairmen have been eminently successful in their own field and are good administrators.

On the other hand, all will agree that every now and then--perhaps from 1 out of 10 or 15 chairmen--a domineering, insistent, abrasive and unbending personality comes on the scene. What is the superintendent's responsibility to this man? How does one handle this situation when it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain the proper spirit of cooperation and communication? Unfortunately, there are no pat answers.

"The boss may not always be right, but he's always the boss" is one approach. Every effort to cooperate and meet the demands of ones superior seems essential in this or any job. Having a positive attitude (read the book if necessary) helps beyond belief. Keeping a proper perspective of things can turn a poor relationship into a liveable one. Perhaps the publications mentioned earlier in this article will help. Remember, most job changes are made because of a failure to assimilate and get along with other people--rather than because of technical deficiencies.

But we are all aware of seemingly impossible situations that develop between employee and employer. Even under these circumstances, one must always do his best on the job (if he's going to accept his paycheck) and, in the department of human relations, good counsel calls for an 'easy does it' approach. Review your own position on matters. Are you the insistent, unbending one? Always have an open mind. Direct confrontation can not always be avoided and, in some cases, it is better if it occurs sooner rather than later. At least the ground rules are then established.

As my friend pointed out, I'm the (continued on back page)

greenkeeper--responsible for the entire golf course and don't ever forget it." If you are charged with that responsibility, professional ethics require you to fulfill it. If "The Boss" demands the accomplishment of some unfounded or incorrect procedure (in spite of your pleas), ask him to put it in writing and to accept responsibility for the consequences on the golf course. This request alone will often discourage the pseudo agronomist. In any event, it seems far healthier for the superintendent to give it his very best and, in some way, develop a rapport with the 'difficult to get along with' type chairman. If this is not possible and/or if the superintendent no longer holds overall responsibility for course maintenance procedures--the choice narrows to two: 1) Become the course foreman; 2) Leave.

Dr. Fred Adams summarizes the subject best as follows: "It has become rather obvious that in the years I have served as a green committee chairman my basic ideas have changed as to the true role of the green committee. In any efficiently run, successful business, appropriately trained individuals are given the responsibilities of the many facets of the operation. Why can't our golf courses be managed with a similar philosophy? The green superintendent should be given the responsibilities that are obviously in his domain, without constant unwarranted criticism. The committee's chief functions necessarily should be in the areas in which they individually or collectively have expertise, such as communications, equipment, and labor relations. By coordinating the talents of the green superintendent and his committee--and utilizing other outside agronomic services--a much better and economically sound golf course operation will result.

**GOLF COURSE SUPERINTENDENTS ASSOCIATION
OF NORTHERN CALIFORNIA**

FIRST CLASS MAIL

1233 KANSAS AVENUE
MODESTO, CALIFORNIA 95351

