

THRU THE GREEN USGA

If They Want It Purple, Give It To Them Purple!

By: Mike Huck, Agronomist, USGA Green Section - Southwest Region

After Traveling the Southwest with The USGA, I can honestly say that the experiences of this job would help make me a better superintendent if I were ever to return to the profession. Everyone I visited in my travels over the past three years are to thank for that! However, it would not be because of knowledge gained from viewing turf problems and their related solutions; it would be from observing the interaction of superintendents with their members, committees and owners. Having been on "both sides of the fence" so to speak, and now being the outsider looking in, I often see problems that others don't realize exist.

It is commonly known that the most talented grass growers can struggle to hold their positions if they don't also communicate well with their superiors. It is important that a superintendent is not always hiding in the maintenance shop. You need to get out on the golf course, be seen, speak with the players and by all means be a good listener. Make it a point to be visible occasionally on Saturdays and Sundays and take the opportunity to interact with golfers who don't often play other than weekends. Weekend players are usually the younger "up and coming members" who will be more involved in club operations as time passes. Establish relationships early on with these people and always keep in mind that the person you just spoke with may someday be your green chairman!

A huge mistake often made by superintendents is that they treat the golf course like they own it themselves. Now, I'm not suggesting you stop caring about your work

and the conditions of the course, but I often hear golfers grumbling that the superintendent acts like he owns the place, is uncooperative and won't listen to the membership's desires. Once a large enough segment of the membership feels this way, you can almost guarantee yourself a trip to the unemployment office. To avoid this from happening, don't take criticisms by golfers too personally. Respond to their requests when possible - after all it is their golf course.

On a related subject, superintendents who make the change from public or single owner facilities to equity membership clubs often struggle with the differences of management and spending philosophies. One superintendent who had made this change commented to me that his green committee wanted him to spend money like a drunken sailor, wasting it on ridiculous things in his opinion. I reminded him that it's their golf course and their money. Private clubs are a place where the bottom line is not necessarily measure monetarily, but by customer or member satisfaction. They're never going to praise you for saving money if they also didn't get the golf course conditions they were asking for!

Personality conflicts between individuals cannot always be avoided, but management philosophies and programs can sometimes be adjusted. However, there have been, and forever will be occasional cases where turf problems are created because the superintendent delivered exactly what the membership requested. Superintendents must recognize if a member request can pose significant risks to the turn. If you can

predict potential problems, the "powers to be" must then be notified in advance, but remember the final decision is still theirs to make. In such a case, I offer the same advice often quoted by Larry Gilhuly, originally stated by Milt Bauman, retired superintendent of the Seattle Golf Club, "If the golfers want it purple, give it to them purple, but if it is going to hurt the grass, then get it in writing!"

The most successful superintendents communicate and listen well, take golfers' criticisms and suggestions seriously, yet constructively, and always remember that the golf course isn't their own personal property. In other words, the successful superintendents give it to them purple as often as possible without harming the grass.

Just a bit of news - the Western Region has been divided into the Southwest and Northwest Regions. Pat Gross is now the Southwest Director, so congratulate him on his new position and responsibilities the next time you talk to him! Also, please be sure to mark your calendars for our upcoming regional conferences in your area:

Wed	Mar 4	Holiday Inn	Missoula, MT
Fri	Mar 13	Lakewood CC	Lakewood, CO
Mon	Mar 16	Industry Hills Resort	Industry, CA
Tue	Mar 17	Castlewood CC	Pleasanton, CA
Wed	Mar 18	Phoenix CC	Phoenix, CA
Wed	Mar 25	University Park Hotel	Salt Lake City, UT
Mon	Apr 6	The Reserve	Portland, OR
Mon	Apr 20	The Hawaii Prince Hotel	Honolulu, Hawaii

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