

For Whom Do You Manage?

A Message to Golf Course Superintendents

By DAVID M. LILLY

"For whom do you manage?"

The obvious answer is: "For the club or the park system that pays my salary." But like most obvious answers, it does not tell the whole truth.

To discover who your real bosses are, let us translate your job into business terms. The position of golf course superintendent is equivalent, in a business, to one of the officers of a corporation. You are part of the management team and, as such, answerable to the stockholders, the true owners of a corporation.

Stockholders, as long as the dividends keep rolling in, are very pleasant people who remain discreetly away and make an appearance only at the annual meeting. The stockholders may also be customers for the products or services offered by the corporation, but generally they form a very small if significant portion of the customers.

Let's see how your situation compares with that of the usual corporation officer. Your stockholders are the members of your golf club; your customers are these same members. This is one case where the customer is always right. You know he is because he also is your boss.

In one way, this is a desirable arrangement. In a corporation the stockholders are interested in a healthy profit on their invested capital. To make sure of the good health of the profit, they insist on the lowest possible operating costs. The customers, on the other hand, want the best product they can obtain—for the lowest possible price. Management is caught between these two opposing forces.

For you, however, the stockholder

and the customer are one and the same. If he wants new or extra services, he knows it will cost him more money.

There is, then, for the golf course superintendent no real conflict of interest. At least, there should not be. Your job is to develop and maintain satisfactory turfgrass. How you do the job is your concern, as long as you remain within the confines set by club policy. How well you succeed is the concern of your customer-stockholder, the golfer.

In order to manage turf for the golfer, we ought to recognize that he appears in a variety of forms. Dr. J. M. Adam of Detroit recently described one type of golfer whom you know very well and have probably met most often in your nightmares.

Needless to say, that type is not familiar with the superintendent's problems. He expects, when he steps on the first tee, to find tees, fairways and greens cut perfectly, traps raked, and everything in top condition. He does not care what fertilizer is used; he is unaware that there are fungi and insects that attack grass. He does not even realize that an organism known as a nematode is lying in wait to destroy all the grass on the golf course.

Our golfer does not realize that greens have to be aerified and spiked or topdressed. But he does know that each time he has an important client or valued friend out for a game, the greens invariably are being torn up by a machine that punches them full of holes, and then covered with a dark soil mixture that sticks to his feet and makes it impossible to putt accurately.

He may not realize or care that you

are on a strict budget, but he is convinced that he pays enough in dues to have the finest of playing conditions. His list of complaints is long and includes: lack of water in the ball washer; absence of a score card or towel, or presence of a dirty towel; workmen watering or mowing on a green or fairway; no bench at the tee; limbs, paper or other trash on the course.

Many of these "beefs" are little things, but they add up to a substantial part of the golfer's picture of his course. That is a point we are apt to forget. It is his course. He is a stockholder, and the whole point of the operation is to keep him satisfied and playing golf.

The purpose of this discussion is not to tell you how to manage; rather, it is to highlight areas peculiar to your profession and to emphasize the uniqueness of your position as a manager of an operation in which owners and customers are one and the same. This is true whether you are employed by a private or a public golf course.

Perhaps another way of looking at your position is to place yourself in the shoes of the sole owner of a private or semi-private course. As an owner-operator, you must compete with all other clubs in the area for business, for customers, for golfers. This must be done in such a manner that you produce a reasonable profit—first, as salary for your time; secondly, as a return on your investment. Efficient management and improvement of your assets is mandatory.

As O. J. Noer has so often said, "The golf course is no place to save money." Such a philosophy automatically would lead you to certain decisions. For example, you would purchase equipment and materials on the basis of their quality and known per-

formance. You could not afford to risk the purchase of inferior products or products of doubtful benefit. You would purchase as economically as possible just as long as the cheaper product or material was consistent with the quality demanded. The key here is that you must *know*.

Similarly, you could not afford to experiment on your greens. If experimentation were necessary, this would be done on a nursery area. Even better, you might let the producer prove performance and the state experiment station evaluate.

Many other examples might be cited to illustrate the viewpoint of the owner-operator whose very livelihood depends on attracting and serving customers with a satisfactory product—a golf course in such a condition that it is the first course the customer wants to play.

The advancement of golf course maintenance practices over the last 10 to 15 years has been revolutionary. Today's golfer expects, in fact demands, a degree of conditioning or manicuring that would have been virtually impossible to attain a decade or so ago. The fact that you have kept abreast of developments and still hold a position as golf course superintendent is, in itself, a tribute to your managerial abilities. When it is also recognized that *many of the management practices you apply are in direct conflict with sound agronomic principles*, it is easy to understand why you hold an important position on the golf course management team. Unfortunately, your customer may not recognize or appreciate this cardinal point.

As a customer, he does not recognize or care that bluegrass fairways or tees demand a height of cut of 1 1/2 inches. He wants to play from a tee cut at 1/2 inch, and he does not expect a cuppy lie on the fairway. He wants his

fairway cut at 1/2 to 3/4 inch. From an agronomic standpoint, this simply means substituting bentgrass for bluegrass on tees and fairways.

It is your responsibility, as manager in charge of maintaining turfgrass, to take the steps necessary to provide weed-free turf that plays in accordance with the golfers' demands. Further, it is your responsibility to advise those for whom you manage (through their duly elected representatives) what will be the consequences of subjecting bluegrass tees and fairways to a 1/2 inch height of cut. This involves a presentation of why a grass like bent must be introduced, what this will mean in terms of additional maintenance, and how this will require an increase in budget. At this point, the "owners" must decide whether, in order to play at the height of cut which as customers they have demanded, they are ready to provide the additional capital required to support the project.

It is equally important that you study and evaluate your entire operation in order to ensure that every phase is being accomplished in the most efficient manner. It may be opportune to prepare a careful cost analysis to determine if now is the time to automate your irrigation system and to purchase hydraulically operated mowers and other equipment that will cut more acres per day per man.

The point is that it is your responsibility to keep the *owners* apprised of the impact that the *customers'* demands have on the over-all operation. Certainly, you should not permit the continued low cutting of bluegrass, nor should you permit reseeding of these areas with more bluegrass and fescue without calling the situation to the attention of those for whom you manage.

You may think that such a situation would not occur in this day and age—yet, Dr. Smith, reporting in a survey conducted by Charles Chapman, of Detroit, wrote: "The study showed that in spite of the well-known fact that bluegrasses and fescues do not thrive with short cutting heights, or 40 clubs surveyed in one of the major metropolitan areas, 10 with substantial percentages of bluegrass and three with fescue on their fairways cut them at 3/4 of an inch or less. One course, with 100 percent bluegrass fairways, was cutting at 1/2 inch. Two courses who cut their fairways at 3/4 of an inch reseeded them in 1961 with bluegrass. The same paradox exhibited itself on tees, where 10 clubs with major proportions of bluegrass were cutting their tees at 1/2 inch to 3/4 inch."

Another case in point has to do with play in late fall-early winter and late winter-early spring. From an agronomic standpoint, play at such times may be quite damaging, especially if frost is present or if the ground is partially frozen. All of the damage may not be visible immediately. Some, such as that resulting from soil compaction, may not become apparent until midsummer.

Prevention of all traffic during these periods would eliminate any problems, but there are some who like to play then. Again, you as the golf course superintendent have certain responsibilities and obligations in this respect. You should (1) thoroughly acquaint the owners with the potential damage from uncontrolled traffic; (2) budget funds to provide for additional maintenance required to correct injury and to bring this course into top playing condition in as short a time as possible the following spring; and (3) prepare and present programs for diverting play to temporary greens (where such are feasible), for absolute

control of traffic during periods of adversity, and for re-routing traffic to avoid damage to critical areas.

Once such information is made available to the "owners," they must make the decision affecting themselves as players. You, as manager, must then abide by the owners' decision and do the best with what is available. For even if you were the owner-manager, as we discussed earlier, you still would have to decide whether you could risk denying good customers the privilege of playing in order to protect your turf.

In summary, always remember that the customer is the "King of the Marketplace." Continued customer preference for a service or for a product is the key to a successful business—

whether it be a golf course or the manufacture of automobiles—recognizing, of course, that the product of service must be satisfactorily produced at a profit.

The golf course superintendent is unique in the respect that the customers he serves also are the owners. There are both advantages and disadvantages in such a situation. As customer, the golfer does not care how you do your job. As owner, he expects the maximum benefit from his investment. But first of all, and most of all, he expects to play golf under the best conditions possible.

Because you know "for whom you manage," you must know that your job is not to provide the best turf but the best *playing* turf.

Bermudagrass in the Northeast

By **HOLMAN M. GRIFFIN**, Northeastern Agronomist, Green Section, The United States Golf Association

Since 1938, U-3 bermudagrass has found favor and has been used more and more as a fairway and tee grass in the transition zone of the Northeast. This grass is adapted to the northern extremes of the bermudagrass region where other bermuda strains winter-kill, and it works well in the southern extremes of the bluegrass-fescue-bentgrass region where cool-season grasses do poorly in summer.

Although climatic factors handed U-3 bermudagrass a severe setback in many areas last winter, this grass remains a good answer to the difficult problem of what to grow where winters are too cold for warm-season grasses and the summers too hot for cool-season grasses.

Because of increasing interest in U-3 bermudagrass, it might be well to consider the maintenance program it requires. U-3 is not unlike other ber-

mudagrasses except for its cold hardness and medium texture. It makes its maximum growth during the hot summer months when crabgrass is a serious pest in the cool-season grasses, and forms a dense, vigorous turf that discourages weed invasion of any type.

U-3 is seldom damaged by insects or disease and is highly resistant to damage from herbicides, fungicides, and insecticides. Occasional attacks of grubs, cutworms or sod webworms are easily controlled with standard insecticides on the market.

Most serious of the U-3 problems is the thatch condition which develops if this material is not removed. Cutting heights above 3/4 inch tend to cause a fluffy condition and encourage thatch.

Removal of thatch is a time-consuming and laborious task but results are rewarding. The vertical mower and the thatching machine are most fre-