

Committees: Their Role in Course Economy

by DR. FRED M. ADAMS

In the past 12 years as Chairman of the Green Committee at Orchard Lake Country Club, a family club of 600 members in Michigan, and for the past six years having served in a similar capacity with the Golf Association of Michigan, I feel that I have made enough mistakes to qualify as an expert. I would like to share with you some of my observations regarding this Committee's functions, malfunctions, pitfalls, trials and tribulations both from the Committee's and the green superintendent's point of view.

Committee responsibilities in a country club have always been an enigma to me. We have, in general, a real paradox; the Boards of Governors hire competent and generally well-trained club managers, golf professionals, and green 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.

This reminds me of a parallel situation involving parents and their children's education. All parents, and more recently the students, believe they are born educators, and they don't mind letting the teachers know it.

Similarly, all golfers seem to be born agronomists and have no reluctance to let the superintendents and the Green Committee in on all their knowledge.

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, and, therefore, he's had an opportunity to play most of the different courses in his area, as well as many of the fine courses throughout the country. With these experiences he has drawn conclusions of what he personally thinks makes a great

golf course, both from the architectural point of view and from the maintenance procedures he has seen. Now, with appointment to the Green Committee he finally has an opportunity to implement all these long sought after changes, and he can hardly wait for the first Committee meeting to express all his ideas for improvements.

The Green Chairman's Lawn

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 fertilize regularly, water irregularly, occasionally spray for weeds, and mow about once a week with surprisingly good results, we still can't consider ourselves agronomists. The chances are we have no concept of plant morphology in relationship to what the fertilizer requirements might be; we have never heard of the types of subsoils or their makeup in relationship to maintenance procedures; 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, we may 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.

A Green Chairman's Tenure

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. The confusion that arises from this frequent changing of the guard can't help but disturb a smooth running operation. It takes at least two years for the Chairman to begin understanding the complexities and uncertainties of managing turf. Therefore, just as our man has his and the committee's responsibilities in proper perspective he retires — a sad state of affairs.

In my opinion, no one should be offered this job unless he is willing to serve at least five years and possibly longer. He also should have an indoctrination period of two to three 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 prospective new Chairman.

The superintendent should take it upon himself to introduce his entire crew to the Green Committee, and the committee members should familiarize themselves with the crew's names and their jobs. Nothing motivates a man to do a good job more than recognition. If he has previously been complimented on his work, he is much more likely to tolerate criticism for a subsequent mistake.

Advisory or Supervisory Role?

This committee should act primarily in an advisory rather than in a supervisory capacity.

Even the best trained superintendent needs help with many problems related to turf management.

Communication is one area that should be the prime responsibility of the Green Committee. It should act as a buffer between the membership and the superintendent, thus saving him valuable time and thereby increasing the economy of the operation. In addition to



DR. FRED M. ADAMS

planned construction projects, many unforeseen problems arise that inhibit the playability of the course. Unless the membership is appraised of these contingencies as they arise, they will be all over the superintendent, making his life miserable.

If, however, information is given to the membership, it will soften the blow. Most people when presented with the facts will accept the inconveniences, recognizing that the end results could further their enjoyment of the game.

The superintendent must initiate this flow of information to the Committee so that the word can be properly disseminated. Nothing is more embarrassing or frustrating to a Committee member than being asked why certain procedures are being carried out when

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

As past President of Orchard Lake Country Club, Orchard Lake, Michigan (1962) and Green Committee Chairman for 12 years, Dr. Fred M. Adams is well versed in country club administration. A pediatrician by vocation, golf has become his avocation. He has been a member of the USGA Green Section Committee for the past eight years and Green Committee Chairman of the Golf Association of Michigan for the past six years.

he himself doesn't realize what they are or why they are being done.

He should also be reminded to advise the club manager and golf professional staff of his plans. It is very important that these three departments coordinate all their activities, preferably in writing. How ridiculous it looks to have the greens aerified the day before a special tournament is being held, simply because the superintendent wasn't notified of the event.

It is becoming increasingly more important to have a Committee member who has had experience in personnel management and labor negotiations. While all costs are constantly rising, the biggest increase in green budgets have to do with the labor force. In order to forestall union activity, country clubs had better be aware of competitive wage scales and be prepared to include fringe benefits of health and life insurance, plus pension plans for the green crew. Most superintendents are generally unfamiliar with the complications and ramifications of these plans and they welcome help from the appropriate member of the committee.

Similarly, it is logical to have an individual very familiar with machinery to aid the superintendent in making an inventory of all his mechanical equipment and prepare a long range plan for an orderly and sensible replacement of these items. Such planning obviates having to go before the Board of Directors with the ridiculous request for four new green mowers, two new tractors, and one seven-gang fairway unit, all in one year. Silly as this statement may seem, it is all too common a practice.

Elevate the Superintendent

Continuing with the philosophy of elevating the status of the superintendent in the membership's eyes, it is a good policy to have him periodically appear before the Board of Directors at their regular meetings. Doesn't it make good sense when attempting to obtain Board approval for a major capital expenditure either for equipment or renovation procedures to have the man most familiar with the ramifications of the proposals make the presentation? Valuable time too frequently is lost by the inability of the Green Committee Chairman or his appointed representative to answer pertinent questions relating to this expenditure. However, if the green superin-

tendent makes the presentation to the Board, all questions can be promptly and correctly answered. Further, by appearing before the Board his status will be enhanced. He will then be, in fact, the boss of the operation.

Built into the framework of the organization and primarily to protect the entire club membership from either an overzealous Green Committee or an equally ambitious superintendent, I would like to recommend that every club take advantage of some of the other services that are available.

The USGA Green Section

First is the USGA's Green Section Visiting Service — a truly great contribution toward improving golf courses. To be able to take advantage of on-the-spot evaluation of problems by the real experts in the field is rather obvious.

Complementing the Green Section activity and equally as important is the turf research done at many universities. Attendance at turf conferences sponsored by these institutions should be mandatory for all superintendents, and Green Committees. Through these educational opportunities the Green Committee members soon learn what a complex, but fascinating problem growing grass is. It is interesting to watch them become more humble and less dogmatic in their attitudes toward the well-trained superintendent.

Of equal importance when considering built-in protections for the membership is for each club to consider seriously having a registered golf course architect on a retainer basis. More money is wasted and more golf holes are ruined by amateurish attempts at renovation by Green Committees than I care to think about. One of the greatest insurance policies a membership can have is the services of a good architect.

In summary, it has become rather obvious that in the years that 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 criti-

cism. 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 and supplementing the talents of the Green Superintendent and his

Committee with the consultant and educational services made available through agronomy centers, along with the USGA Green Section Visiting Service and retaining a golf course architect can't help but lead to a much better, economically sound golf course operation.

Labor on the Golf Course

by JAMES L. HOLMES

Keeping labor expenditures in line, increasing labor productivity, and still maintaining playing conditions without player inconvenience is to be expected of the modern golf course superintendent. Today's maintenance programs have to be precise. Firm decisions must be made and expedited. Final results must be constructive and any errors corrected immediately.

Demands made by the golfing membership often either hamper, prevent, or delay necessary programs. Therefore, continuing long range programs are necessary to cope with existing problems before new ventures are attempted. Thorough knowledge of budgets, personnel, equipment, and communications are key factors in understanding expenditures. The responsibility, organization and facilitation of these programs is the business of the golf course superintendent.

Labor is the greatest expense in each golf course operation; polls report that labor accounts for between 60 and 75 per cent of the cost. In order to keep this large expenditure within reasonable limits, the golf course superintendent has to think as an owner and perform as the chief administrator, regardless of the size of his operation. Productivity through manpower then is the most important facet of any golf course operation.

To receive the most productivity from an employee, the workman must be aware of what is expected of him. He must know how to do the job in question. He must know the standards that are set for each particular job. It is important that he carry out his duties because he wants to, and can take pride in accomplishment.

Train the Employee

When an employee starts work it is important that he complete the job the way it should be done. Perhaps this is the first time the man has worked on a golf course. Work patterns, as they are first developed, are relatively easy to alter. If bad or wasteful habits are developed over a period of time, they are harder to break. Considerable effort is necessary to train competent employees.

The employee's job is "production oriented," while the superintendent's job is "people oriented." The superintendent must create an environment in which his men can reach maximum production. The superintendent must provide all the equipment and facilities that are required to complete a job, and he must pay a reasonable wage.

In that labor management and communication are the greatest challenges to a successful superintendent, these challenges must be conquered before other phases of turf maintenance and management programs fall into line. The superintendent must continue to educate himself, his employees and his membership.

Other pertinent phases of "labor on the golf course" must also be considered. How many men are required to maintain a normal 18-hole golf course in the "cool-grass" region of the United States and Canada? Obviously, this will vary from course to course, depending upon many factors, such as size of the layout, demands of the membership, and demands of the superintendent himself. However, regardless of the number of employees, if they do not have the desire to work be-