

Being A Green Chairman



Ain't Like Raising Mushrooms

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The longer I'm involved in any enterprise, including my own job, the more I equate managing people to raising mushrooms. A mushroom farmer must keep these budding delicacies in the dark and feed them a lot of fertilizer. Too frequently this is the way many people supervise their job, green chairmen included. We often keep everyone in the dark and try to get by with a lot of manure.

When I was appointed Green Chairman, I was determined to shed some light on the responsibilities of the job. I found job responsibilities such as labor relations, budgeting and planning fairly well defined. But to whom I was responsible was not as clear. To me, a green chairman is responsible to four distinct groups or individuals—the club members, the board of directors, the superintendent, and the grounds employees. His every decision should be based on his obligations to these four masters. Here's what I mean.

TO THE MEMBERS

My obligation to the club members heads the list because they own the course. They pay a healthy price to belong to the club and deserve "a bang for their buck." This includes a course that is always in the best possible playing condition, regardless of weather, one to which they can be proud to bring guests.

Little touches, such as flower pots around the course, trimming around an especially attractive entrance, a good-looking practice tee and an exceptionally good-looking first tee help make the course enjoyable. The proper placement of benches, water fountains and steps on steep inclines add a touch of convenience to the course. (Incidentally, railroad ties make effective steps; they're cheap and can be placed by the grounds crew.)

Bearing in mind there is no perfect course, the green chairman should constantly look for changes that would improve the layout of the course. Improvements, regardless of how small, tend to make the course more interesting. On our course, 10 of our 99 traps have been removed, thus reducing expenses while improving the course layout. Such efforts to control expense enable members to see and feel that their money is being used judiciously.

Communication with club members is an

other aspect of my obligation to them. When the course is under repair or there is an unusual ground or grass condition, they deserve to know the who, what, where, when, why and how of the situation. I do this through the members' bulletin, a regular publication at our club. We try to have an article about the course in each issue; an ounce of explanation has proven to be worth a pound of alibis.

The other side of communication with members is listening to them. I must be receptive to their comments. It's tough for a green chairman to come off the course after a 95-degree day and have someone hit him with the comment, "The course looks like a goat ranch." Or, from one of the older members, "It certainly isn't what it used to be."

However, we still have an obligation to the members to listen to them, look for constructive comments and react positively to them. A good receptive ear here is better than a lot of manure.

And finally, a most important part of my obligation to members, is to be certain the green committee represents a cross-section of the club's membership. It needs older members, younger members, good players and poor players. The older members can be invaluable in providing historical background . . . what's happened; what's been tried and failed or was successful.

In addition, some club members have special talents that would be extremely useful to the green committee. I have one committee member who, as a biologist, is an expert on trees. Another owns and operates a large cemetery which has many of the same problems our committee faces. By including these people on the committee, the members will have confidence that they are not only represented but well represented.

TO THE BOARD

My second obligation is to the board of directors, which in turn is responsible for the overall management and welfare of the club. Foremost in my obligation to the board is to manage the financial resources it provides me in the most effective way possible. Realistic budgeting and well planned spending are essential. I've had experience with green chairmen who did not submit realistic budgets. That's not fair

to them or the board. You'll find the money is easier to get if the budget is realistic and spending is well planned.

I would like to make a special point here about capital budgeting. Grounds folks often overlook the capital needs. Unfortunately, not all of these needs can be forecast. Much of our equipment doesn't have a definite term of life and could clunk out at any time. A decision must be made whether to replace an item or repair it. If money is not set aside either through a depreciation account or some other means, you're always going to the board with a surprise about a new mower, water pump or other piece of equipment.

As the financial condition of the club changes, it is up to the green chairman to change his budget as needed to conform. This flexibility is important because it is difficult to forecast an entire year. Changes occur due to large unforeseen expenditures, bad weather conditions or tight money situations. This short range planning is vital.

I also owe the board a look at long range planning. I have to forecast what's in the future, 5, 10, 15 years from now such as the available supply of water, drainage and long range possibilities for the club.

Overall planning by the green committee should be the same kind used in business, i.e., forecasting equipment needs, budget and manpower requirements, investigating possible use of labor saving devices and other means of increasing productivity—planning improvements, preventive maintenance, and personnel planning. Business management techniques can be put to good use and will return many benefits.

A good job of planning will also allow the green chairman to provide invaluable assistance to the board by volunteering the services of the ground crew, particularly during the winter months, for many maintenance projects around

the club. This might include painting the swimming pool, building a backboard on the tennis courts, or maintenance around the club proper. Wages for these projects can be cross-charged to help the grounds budget, and it helps keep club expenses down by not hiring outside contractors to do these jobs.

While we're discussing employees, the board also deserves uniform personnel administration. Salary treatment, pensions, disability and sickness benefits, vacations and overtime policies should be applied in the same way for all employees . . . waitresses, maintenance people, swimming pool attendants, tennis and golf people. My responsibility is to know the club's personnel practices well so that grounds employees are not treated with any disparity.

TO THE SUPERINTENDENT

My third obligation, to the grounds superintendent, is particularly important. He is the paid executive for managing the course. To do the job right is difficult at best. To him I owe my complete support. I am his friend, advisor, supervisor, motivator and follow-up man. He should be free to make technical decisions as long as they meet budgetary and policy guidelines . . . or unless we mutually agree that there is a better way to do something. Care of the course is his specialty. A beautiful lawn at home doesn't make me an expert groundskeeper.

Superintendents have their hands full on the day to day job and find little time to keep up with current information on new technology, management techniques, maintenance methods and myriad other items. A green chairman with a general administrative job in business can be extremely valuable to the superintendent by sharing some of the current business techniques and methods with him.

My business experience is helpful in assisting the superintendent with budgeting, expense

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control and setting priorities. After setting the budget, we check ourselves monthly. Staying within the budget is important only if it is realistic, allowing for the tools to do the job and no more. Labor expense must be watched closely. It escalates rapidly. The superintendent and I work together to find new or existing mechanized procedures that can increase efficiency. This equipment can be purchased, leased or cooperatively bought with other clubs. Careful consultation is required to be sure we aren't "gadget happy" but still take advantage of labor saving devices.

There are two basic rules about spending money that I strongly recommend to all green chairmen and superintendents.

1. Never contract for work with others that your own employees can do.
2. All major purchases should be put out for competitive bidding.

It is my job to represent the grounds superintendent to the board. The green chairman is the liaison between the board and the superintendent. In that capacity, I can save both the board's time and the superintendent's time. To carry out this obligation, requires preparation and a knowledge of all the facts pertaining to the grounds job. It may be necessary to invite the superintendent to a board meeting on occasion if there is a special project that requires some technical information that only he can provide. But he should not attend board meetings regularly.

On the other side of my obligation as liaison is to represent the board to the superintendent. The board's instructions should be given to him in writing along with a full and complete explanation of their reasoning.

Complete communication with the superintendent is vital. If there are problems, if members are complaining, if changes are being planned, if there are budget problems, the superintendent should know. He has a demanding job, particularly during the summer months when his work days are very long. Keeping him informed will allow him to plan his work better and will let him know he is important to the club's operation. Of all the people who should not be kept in the dark, it's the grounds superintendent.

I also owe the superintendent a golfer's view of the course. He often sees it from a maintenance view and may not consider the effect changes like scalloping or trimming around greens would have on the playability of the course. Tree trimming goes in this same category. It may be healthy for the tree but could become a serious handicap for the golfer. To this end, my committee and I tour the course two or three times each summer with the grounds superintendent and his assistant.

TO THE EMPLOYEES

Finally, last but equally important is my obligation to the employees of the grounds crew. To them I owe fair wages, good working conditions, and job security benefits comparable to those of other employees of the club. As with employees of any other business, fair treatment and interest builds pride, dedication and longevity.

When I'm around the club, I seek out the grounds employees, stop and talk with them, ask about their problems, see what they're doing and why. I show a sincere interest in them and their work. This provides an outlet for their problems and builds a sense of proprietorship. A few other examples may help explain this point.

Last year, for the first time, the green committee had a Christmas party for our grounds crews. After dinner the crew members were given tokens of our appreciation. It was a good informal evening of camaraderie and fun. We let them know through impromptu speeches how much they were appreciated; and it definitely worked to the benefit of both the committee and crew members by improving attitudes and communication.

Another example is our club's arrangement for the grounds crews' meals. At our course we have a dormitory where many of the ground employees live. For their convenience, we made arrangements for them to get meals at the club. We learned we could feed them for little or no additional expense. Employees really appreciate this sort of benefit. Uniforms, hard hats and other such articles go far in motivating employees and giving them a feeling of belonging.

Looking at the green chairman's job from the point of view of his obligations to the club members, the board of directors, superintendent and grounds employees puts the job in a different perspective. A green chairman can begin to measure his performance by how effectively he is serving these four masters. It's not a snap! The job will probably take twice as much time as anyone thinks it will.

I'm reminded of the wag who told the old but appropriate story about the Leaning Tower of Pisa. He said, "I understand they're putting a clock on the Leaning Tower of Pisa." His friend asked, "Why are they doing that?" "Well, the Italians find that it is no use having the inclination if you don't have the time," was the reply.

As green chairman, no matter how inclined you might be to accept the job, you can't take it unless you are willing to devote adequate time to the job. Done right, it can be the most time consuming and challenging of any committee chairmanship at a club.