

Streamlining the Club Operation— A Manager's View

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If ever there was a need for a thorough streamlining of club operations, it exists today! If ever there was a need for sound fiscal policy in club management, it exists today! The economy has been caught up in an inflationary spiral and much concern is expressed at all levels of society as to how we can cope with runaway costs. Public utilities are fighting to raise their prices; fuel and food costs continue to move higher; the prices of fertilizers and chemicals have skyrocketed within a relatively short period. Indeed, I suspect that everyone has experienced real difficulties in staying within 1974 budgets.

The forecasters of doom are out in full force predicting the end to clubs as we know them, and, of course, none of us really believes that. A quick remedy for financial problems advocated by many club people in the past has been a dues increase or an assessment. It seemed a reasonable expediency. After all, if a member couldn't afford it, then he shouldn't belong.

Or should he?

How often have you heard this philosophy expressed in your club?

It is my contention that the management of clubs will find it exceedingly difficult to tag these increased costs on to dues fees. We have arrived at a point where we could well price ourselves out of the club business. We are not alone in facing up to economic difficulties. The problems are similar throughout the business world.

Our basic concern must be to resist irresponsible demands while at the same time we recognize the need to keep financial operations within the bounds of fiscal responsibility. Membership demands are insatiable, both in the clubhouse and on the golf course. Membership desires are frequently falsely equated with membership needs. "Add another waiter to the staff," exclaims an angry member who feels the service is a bit too slow. "Cut the greens more often," growls a golfer who has just missed his putt. "To heck with the cost, keep the men overtime," despite weather or other problems

which may have interrupted planned schedules.

The next five years may bring us the greatest socio-economic change our country has ever experienced. The impact of this change will affect all businesses and people in all walks of life. The manager who is to cope with the challenges of the future will require ingenuity as well as an appreciation of the basic principles of sound management.

Green superintendents, club managers, golf professionals and other department heads responsible for making the management team work properly will be called upon to find new ways of cutting costs. You might be interested to learn how we have attempted to meet the challenge at Tavistock. We considered it an opportunity to serve club members, our community and, indeed, our country. We asked our membership to accept with good grace the sacrifices asked of them in order that the club might lead by example in accomplishing our goals. It is interesting to note that in electricity alone we saved 35 per cent in actual kilowatt hours used. Despite this, our electrical bill is running 50 per cent higher. Just think what it would have been had we done nothing.

Some of the specific measures employed to reduce our "on site" energy requirements were:

1. Temperature controls throughout the club were reduced to 65° during working periods and 50° during non-working periods. Certain areas were reduced even more.

2. Gas operated fireplaces were closed down and we returned to old fashioned wood burning in its place.

3. Cooking appliances were utilized in the most efficient manner possible.

4. Lighting was reduced in all areas of the club and employees instructed in conservation measures.

5. Locks were installed on all heating and air conditioning thermostats to prevent unauthorized persons from tampering with the controls.

6. The practice of shutting down air conditioning units for one or two hours during the peak periods of the day was instituted.

Additionally, all employees were made conscious of the need for proper energy control measures.

7. All mechanical equipment was checked to insure maximum operating efficiency. A side benefit of this was a real savings in repair bills.

8. The width of our fairways was narrowed, which reduced the amount of gasoline needed to cut them by approximately 37 per cent.

9. Employees were instructed to use gasoline-operated vehicles in the most efficient manner possible, turning off the engines whenever the equipment was not in actual use.

10. All openings which could lead to energy waste were searched out and sealed.

In addition, the membership was asked to participate by:

1. Organizing car pools for trips to the club.

2. Using fewer towels in the locker rooms.

3. Spending less time in the showers.

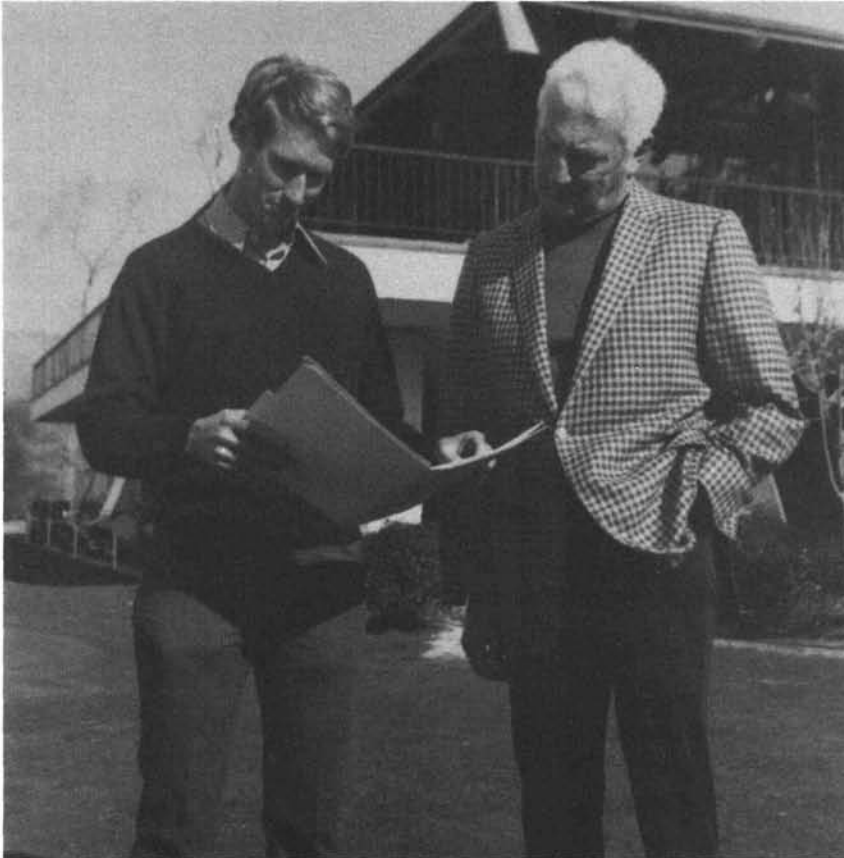
4. Advising management of any leaky faucets or ways to conserve.

5. By dressing appropriately in anticipation of lower winter temperatures.

There is some question as to the membership's reaction to these proposals, but with continued perseverance, we expect to make real headway.

Most important, we must think conservation from the top. We must lead by example. If we fail to extinguish lights or turn off motors as the result of our own negligence, then how can we expect our employees to be energy conscious? It is up to us to educate and motivate them in the right direction. It is up to us to educate our members and keep them informed

Steve Carlton, Superintendent (left) and Ed Haber, President-Manager (right) of Carmel Valley Country Club, Carmel Valley, California, discussing plans for course conditioning in preparation for the 1975 USGA Senior Amateur Championship to be held there in September.



as to why we are changing long held practices and procedures.

We are all well aware that the job can't be done without people. You, people interested in maintenance of the golf course, will be responsible for procuring the very best personnel available. How ridiculous it is to place a person of limited ability making a sub-standard wage on a tractor with the potential of doing thousands of dollars worth of damage if he mishandles that equipment. We must be meticulous in our efforts to attract and employ those with the necessary abilities. Once employed, we must motivate and provide them with the necessary training. The importance of these vital personnel practices cannot be over-emphasized.

Remember, a good manager gets things done through people. Implicit to his success is the ability to make a poor performer good, a good performer better, and the best performer superlative. The result is a highly motivated, highly satisfied and highly productive work force.

The employee's personal development and work productivity are intrinsically related. It is to the club's best interest, therefore, that we devote sufficient time to personnel development. As managers, you must be aware that the success or failure of your employees is your success or failure and as they go, so go you! The future belongs increasingly to those who can teach their employees to manage themselves.

The need for continuing education for both employees and manager alike is obvious. Those who fail to find the time to attend educational conferences, management seminars, etc., must of necessity be left behind. It's essential that we meet with our peers on occasion to see what the other fellow is doing; to learn new methods and procedures through all of the educational sources available to us. This would include, of course, USGA Green Section Meetings, GCSAA Conferences and university-sponsored educational meetings.

Today's green superintendent must be sufficiently flexible to change with the times, and yet strong enough to resist malpractices suggested by well-intentioned individuals unaware of the real problems. He must be a thinker, a doer, a planner. We would all agree that successful managers are not necessarily people without problems, but rather people who have learned how to solve their problems. They manage to control their environment. For the green superintendent, his environment is the golf course, and its playing condition is a reflection

of his ability and organizational capacity.

At Tavistock we are blessed with more than our share of competent people. Our golf course superintendent, for example, is not content with mediocrity, but rather he has a love for excellence and refuses to compromise his integrity. His attitude is positive, his goals precisely spelled out. How delightful to work with one so inspired, whose optimism, confidence and enthusiasm are a daily blessing.

Communication is an essential part of good management. Too frequently a green superintendent will fail to recognize the need for good communication between workers, department heads and the members alike. Let the members know! Take the time to tell them what's happening. Utilize every means of communication at your disposal. You can write articles for the club's Newsletter, use the bulletin boards, speak through the golf professional, the green chairman or club manager. Build a bridge of good public relations with your membership and it will pay off.

Finally, I would suggest that the green superintendent who can't stand the heat should stay out of the kitchen. Every golfer knows the proper techniques of the golf swing. They are all master chefs and, of course, who knows better than the average member how to grow grass? You will be deluged with all kinds of ideas as to what you should do or not do. A good superintendent will certainly keep his mind open to new ideas, but he will also find the means to dispose of those thoughts which would prove of little value or even do considerable damage.

In my office hangs a print of Teddy Roosevelt with a philosophy expressed by him during one of his most trying times. It was given to me by a good friend, and it has pulled me through many difficulties:

It is not the critic who counts, nor the man who points out where the strong man stumbles, nor where the doer of deeds could have done them better. On the contrary, the credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose vision is marred by the dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs and comes up again and again; who knows the great devotions, the great enthusiasms; who at best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement. However, if he fails, at least he fails while daring greatly so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat."