

# Business Tips for the Golf Course Superintendent

A PANEL DISCUSSION

## Budgeting and Purchasing

### IMPORTANT FACTORS IN THE BUSINESS OF GOLF COURSE MANAGEMENT

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**I** BELIEVE WE CAN assume that the majority of American golf course superintendents share equal levels of agronomic skills. It is apparent that the number of highly qualified turf managers in this country is increasing each year with better education and training, but if we are all good turf managers, then what qualifies an individual to be an outstanding golf course superintendent? I believe the answer lies in greater competence in managerial and business skills. In every part of the United States, the most sought-after jobs, the best-maintained golf courses, and, naturally, the highest salaries are going to the superintendent who has skills above and beyond turfgrass management. These business skills include:

1. Personnel Management
2. Public/Labor Relations
3. Budgeting/Purchasing/Accounting
4. Basic Contract Law
5. Public Speaking
6. Business Management

Budgeting and purchasing are important elements in the business of golf course management. Each year as the superintendent prepares his budget for maintenance and improvement of the



*Charles "Bud" White, Panel Moderator, looks on as Superintendent Bruce R. Williams opens the panel discussion.*

golf course, four basic principles in budget preparation should be followed:

#### **1. A Budget Should Be Based on Long-Range Plans**

In long-range planning, look at the condition of the golf course, evaluate what you have, where you want to be, and what it will take to get there.

#### **2. A Budget Should Be Based on a Stated Objective**

A stated objective should be written in the foreword of a budget. It should define the level of excellence a club desires. If you want a top conditioned golf course, state that fact and prepare the budget accordingly. If you want an average golf course, state that fact and prepare a budget and maintenance program with moderation. It is important to realize that, on a scale of 1 to 10, playing conditions of 10 cannot be achieved with a budget rating of 6.

#### **3. A Budget Should Fit into the Fiscal Guidelines of the Total Club Picture**

In most cases, the golf course is only one part of the total club budget. Be aware of all the income and expenses of your club. All departments must work together to achieve the standards desired by the membership.

#### **4. A Budget Should Be Consistent with Other Comparable Clubs in Your Area**

It is difficult if not impossible to compare budgets, but club members try to do it all of the time. Open the lines of communication and discuss your golf course as a business.

Once the needs of your golf course are established and converted into a financial forecast of dollars and cents, the next step in the budgeting process is the presentation.

# Hiring Practices

by JAMES T. SNOW

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## 1. Be Prepared

Know your budget so that you can answer any questions intelligently and confidently.

## 2. Neatness

Your budget should be typewritten so that it can be easily read. A copy should be sent to the necessary members for examination prior to the date of presentation. Use visual aids, slides, charts, graphs, blueprints, etc., to explain items in the budget.

## 3. Personal Appearance

When you are presenting a budget, show your members that you are a businessman in the way you dress.

A good golf course superintendent should be able to stay within 2 percent of his forecasted budget, weather conditions permitting. Labor continues to be the single largest expenditure in golf course maintenance, followed by the purchase of chemicals, materials, parts, and expendable supplies.

By prudent purchasing of these items, we can save our golf courses thousands of dollars each year. It is our job to get the proper materials, to do the proper job, for the best possible price.

The following guidelines will assist you in obtaining the best price:

1. Using past records and current research results, develop a program for the coming year and forecast the types and amounts of material you will need.

2. Be aware of early order and early payment discounts. Be sure that your payments fit into the cash flow of the club.

3. Compare prices. Buy only reputable products from reputable distributors. Send out a list of materials you need and let the distributors quote you a price. Prices for identical products may vary a great deal between distributors and you should be constantly alert to this fact.

Shop around! Spend your club's money as if it were your own! Add to your foundation of agronomic skills and manage your golf course like a business — it is one.

For further help in budget preparation, refer to *The Budget Process on A Golf Course*, available from the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America, Lawrence, Kansas.

**H**OW OFTEN the statement has been made, "a supervisor is only as good as the people he has working for him." How true it is! We all know of golf courses with small crews that seem to accomplish more than other courses with crews twice the size.

While much of the success of a maintenance program rests on the ability of the golf course superintendent to supervise and manage a crew of workers, it is his ability to hire people with ambition and dependability that ultimately makes the difference. Thus, it is to the advantage of the superintendent to develop a sound routine for hiring new workers for his course.

## Establishing a Philosophy

One of the first moves is to establish a hiring philosophy. For example, are you looking for a smaller, better paid, more permanent crew, or do you want a

larger, lower paid, mostly seasonal staff? Will turfgrass or college students be a part of your program, or do you want to avoid seasonal turnover by hiring older, more dependable, and consistent workers? Do you want an assistant superintendent? If so, will he (or she) be a turfgrass student or graduate who will move on to a course of his own in a couple of years, or would you prefer a more permanent assistant who is less inclined to become a superintendent himself?

The answers to these questions depend on several factors. Certainly the background, experience and feelings of the superintendent will have much to do with the hiring philosophy. The needs of the club and its willingness and ability to pay a decent wage and provide some benefits will help determine what can be done. The availability of certain labor types, competition from nearby industries for good workers, and the climatic characteristics of a region are other factors that influence hiring practices.

Although there is no single recommended philosophy to take with regard to hiring workers, most superintendents would agree that they would like to be able to provide decent wages and benefits and thereby attract better-quality workers. With maintenance equipment becoming more sophisticated and expensive and with golfers increasing their demands for perfect turf, it is no wonder that superintendents want to hire more dependable people.

## Developing a Recruitment Plan

Because wages paid to golf course workers are generally low, resulting in a fairly high turnover rate, many superintendents are always searching for replacements. Rather than starting from scratch each time a new worker must be found, the more successful superintendents have discovered that a well-developed recruitment plan can greatly increase their chances for finding good workers. In other words, they have a system.

The premise behind most plans is quite simple: find and cultivate a potential source of good workers. It is easy enough

*The approach taken in hiring new workers . . .*

