

# TAKING A LOOK AT THE WHOLE PICTURE

by JAMES CONNOLLY

Agronomist, Northeastern Region, USGA Green Section

**E**ACH DAY, golf course superintendents work hard to dress, groom, and manicure their courses to provide what they hope will please most of the club's golfers. Too often, though, they fail to consider the total picture.

Everything we do sends a message to everyone who has contact with us and with our activities. In a golf course setting, this could mean that hundreds

of eyes are on the superintendent and the product of his work each day. They include the members and golfers, who pay his salary, and his employees, who look to him for leadership.

Surveys indicate that 55% of what people think we are saying is conveyed in our facial expressions, 37 in our tone of voice, and only 7% in our words. Possibly, what we think we are saying is not actually what they are hearing. The truth is that "deed is greater than word."

Today's golf course superintendent is far more than just the "keeper of the green." The golf course, including every square inch within the property boundary, is an important statement

about him and his attitudes. Each day, people in hope of peaceful escape pour through the gates, leaving the race to the rats, and tee it up. Their expectations increase proportionately from the \$5 per round pitch-n-putt to the \$200 per round Maui-Luna-Exotica, but, of course, there are those who expect far more than they are willing to pay for. Regardless of the situation, though, the superintendent should make sure that his 150-acre advertisement says something positive.

There are three ways of communicating — verbal, written, and nonverbal. Many people make a conscious effort to improve their verbal and written skills, but the most frequently neglected type,

---

RANDY BENEDICT created the illustration above. He is a dedicated golfer (rain or shine) and an architect with the firm of Wyatt Stapper Architects in Seattle.



the nonverbal message, could be shouting all kinds of obscenities! Don't despair, though, for it is possible to control the nonverbal messages being sent out. Following are several areas that play an important part in how golf course superintendents are viewed by their employees and by the people who play their courses.

The maintenance facility is a sore spot for many superintendents. Club officials seldom come begging with plans for building a new state-of-the-art maintenance facility. In many cases, the term "barn" is an understatement. Keep in mind, though, that what you do with what you have is more important than what you have. In other words, an ancient building and fossilized equipment that are kept tidy and in good working order will lure respect and sympathy, and may result in a new facility. Don't allow your building to look like a ruin.

We've all heard the saying "clothes make the man." The following story helps to illustrate the importance of this statement.

A successful businessman was interviewing prospective partners for a venture he was undertaking. After several minutes of introductions, he crawled beneath the table. Emerging several seconds later he shook the hand of an astonished prospect and said, "Welcome to my company. You've got the job!" Later, the new partner asked how he came to be selected without an in-depth interview. The sapient businessman said, "My father always said you can judge a man by the shine of his shoes, and you had the best-polished shoes."

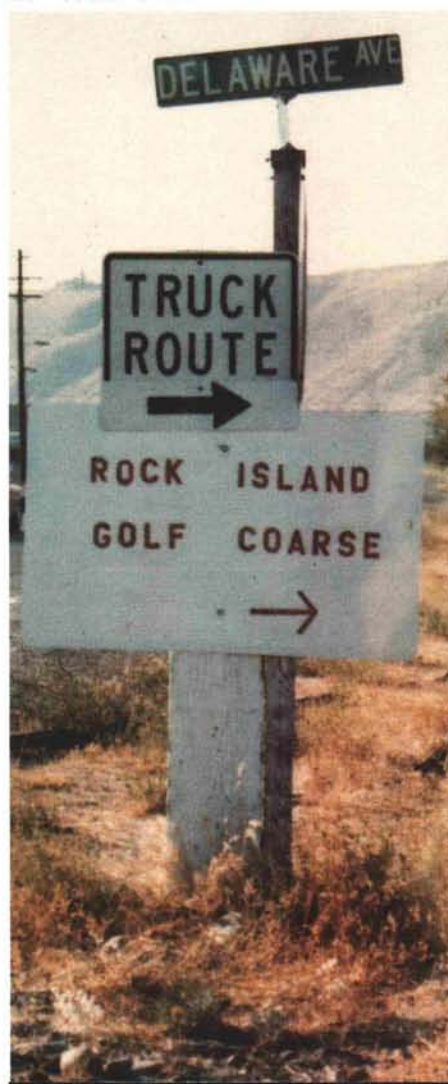
Dress codes for you and your crew show that you are a team, working together in a common effort to provide a service to those who play the course. Uniforms can take the form of golf shirts and work pants, T-shirts with logos, hats, etc. The staff usually appreciates the supply of clothing; it saves them money. Some clubs supply the crew with five sets of shirts and pants, for which they are responsible.

Equipment is a very visible part of every maintenance program. Is it painted? Do the mufflers work? How fast can it go? Perhaps it goes too fast, and the golfers catch a fleeting glimpse of Mario Andretti on a mower. How the equipment is operated sends a message about the degree of competence of the superintendent and the crew. Operators need to be trained to recognize a mower that is out of adjustment, and how to check for a good-quality cut.

Training should include the placement of tee markers, cutting new holes in the greens, raking bunkers, and many other operations, and employees should be taught to judge their work by *your* standards, not their own. Machinery operators should turn off equipment when golfers are within range. Try to arrange mowing and other routine practices so that the same groups of golfers are not regularly disturbed.

Mowing patterns can have a dramatic effect on even the most inexperienced golfer. Like the view of a Midwest farm from an airplane, a straight-lined, symmetrical mowing pattern on a golf course has a pleasing effect. Crooked and wavy lines can lead golfers to suspect the sobriety of the operator and the interests of the superintendent. On the other hand, golfers often comment on a beautiful fairway solely on the basis of a nice mowing pattern. Take the time to show the operator examples of what the finished product should look

*How coarse is this course?*



like. This is an easy method to create a positive visual impression.

Employees are a superintendent's most valuable asset, and they look to him for guidance and leadership. How do they view him? Is his office area neat? If it is not, they may become sloppy in their own work habits. People learn best by example. If a superintendent can't do it, or won't do it, the crew may lose motivation and develop a lack of trust in his ability. Key employees should be sent to educational seminars. It makes them feel important, and gives them a feeling of greater self-worth. It also improves productivity, and makes the superintendent look better in the eyes of the golfers.

Don't belly up to the bar with the membership. Alcohol and job security don't mix, so be cautious about socializing at your place of business.

A short quiz will help summarize some key points about nonverbal communications on the golf course. Score yourself on the following basis: 1 = worst (no), 10 = best (yes).

1. How would I rank the appearance of the maintenance facility?
2. Do I pick up trash and debris as I drive around the grounds?
3. Do I provide comfortable quarters for employee breaks?
4. Do I have a set of clean dress clothes in my office?
5. Does my club have a committee for beautification?
6. Does my budget include a section for uniforms?
7. How would I rate the appearance of the equipment?
8. Do I hold at least two seminars a year for the maintenance staff on proper work etiquette?
9. Do I have posted, written policies on proper employee behavior?

To score yourself: A total score of 80 - 90 = TOPS; 60 - 80 points = Room for improvement; 40 - 60 = Needs more work; less than 40 points = Get going before it's too late!

Finally, don't lose sight of the fact that we all serve the people we work for. The "us versus them" attitude makes for ulcers, unhappiness, and low job security. It is the little things that people notice, including fixing ball marks, replacing divots, and picking up candy wrappers. Attention to these details shows that you care.

When you take the time to evaluate the whole picture, those whom you have worked so hard to please will be appreciative. After all, isn't that our greatest reward?