

Stay Focused

For proper focus to be maintained, it must first be defined.

BY BOB BRAME

All too often a maintenance program has no agreed-upon prioritization of available funds. When this occurs, the superintendent is forced to make solitary decisions that actually should be made by the committee and/or owner(s) with the superintendent's input. This can produce irregularities such as immaculate bunkers and marginal putting surfaces or beautiful ornamental plantings and poor tees. The end result is poor value as it relates to the play of the game, lack of direction, and less-than-satisfied golfers. The solution is found in the following exercise.

Start by calling a meeting of the committee, bosses, or the general combination of individuals who are responsible for golf course conditioning policy. The superintendent's role is to carry out the bosses' desires, by way of his/her professional input. As such, it's very important to identify exactly what is desired with course conditioning. Once assembled, ask each individual to prioritize the different components of the course. Itemize all components on a poster or marking board so that all participants can work with an agreed-upon list. The possibilities include, but should not be limited to: putting surfaces, fairways, tees, collars, green surrounds, intermediate (step cut) rough, primary rough, secondary or tall rough, bunkers, water hazards, trees, clubhouse grounds, and ornamental plantings. The listing will vary depending upon the makeup of each course, but the intent is to list all agreed-upon components. What's not on the listing is not part of the superintendent's responsibility. Each individual (working alone) should then

develop a prioritized column of the various components.

There really is no right or wrong regarding the individual prioritization of course components, with the exception of greens. Anyone who does not place greens first on his or her list should be encouraged to serve on a different committee. Discuss the prioritization laid out by each person. The diversity in how components are ordered will likely serve to underscore why this exercise is so important, as it exposes the challenge faced by the maintenance staff in trying to please/accommodate committee desires. In fact, if there are any differences at all, it places the superintendent and staff in a very difficult situation. Thus, the next phase of the exercise is agreeing upon a committee-endorsed ordering of components. Though it may require significant discussion, this phase of the exercise is not complete until all agree upon a prioritization that the superintendent will then use as a template. As a side note, neither the superintendent nor any of the staff should compile an individual listing of components. They should be part of the discussion that will be required to compile the individual lists, but the staff should not have voting delegate status. Their job is to carry out what the committee lays out.

To the agreed-upon prioritized listing, objectives should now be outlined under each component so that realistic budgeting can follow. Examples under the category of greens would include the desire to use walk-behind as opposed to triplex mowers and spot hand watering, per weather mandates, to facilitate dry conditioning. The superintendent

and other key staff should be actively involved with this phase of the exercise. The end result should be an agreed-upon prioritization of components and adequate funding to achieve all sub-component objectives. The exercise will take time, but it's time well spent.

The next and final phase of the exercise is to work the plan — stay focused. When weather conditions or other unforeseen issues force the need for more input towards a high-ranking component, the options are to increase the budget or draw from the lowest-priority component, moving up from the bottom until the need is met. An example would be to rake bunkers less often (or eliminate raking completely) to facilitate needed hand-watering of greens during harsh weather. That, of course, is based on greens being the top priority and bunkers being the lowest component. A weather-induced increase in pesticide applications for fairways would result in a similar give and take — increase funding or reduce/eliminate the input on the lowest-priority component.

To stay focused, it is necessary first to establish a focus. This is not the responsibility of the course superintendent; in fact, if a prioritization listing is not done, the committee bears some of the responsibility for less-than-acceptable conditioning.

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