

# Perfecting a Good Relationship with Your Green Chairman

At Merion Golf Club, as at all clubs, the rapport between superintendent and chairman is critical.

BY WILSON GREENWOOD, JR.



Golfers will surely notice this effort to eliminate coarse-textured tall fescue from the bunker bank. Make sure your green chairman knows why this is being done, as he will be the one who fields questions from golfers.

**T**he history of most clubs is that a committee is appointed, they make mistakes, and just as they are beginning to learn from their mistakes, they resign office and are replaced by others who make greater mistakes still, and so it goes." This statement was written about 1930 by Alistair Mackenzie and is referred to regularly on Web sites and in articles as the reason for the growth of restoration projects, tree programs (out, not in!), and many other capital projects at clubs throughout the country.

At the Golf Industry Show this year, Dr. Joe Duich of Penn State University received the Old Tom Morris Award for service to the industry. His comments were enlightening and educa-

tional about the history of turfgrass education and tie directly into Dr. Mackenzie's quote. In 1930, the same year in which Mackenzie was bemoaning the problems with managing by committee, the basis for turfgrass education at Penn State was created during a visit to the campus by Joseph Valentine, the greenkeeper at Merion Golf Club. He recognized the need for a formal educational program for turf management, and look where we are today!

Is Alistair Mackenzie's quote still accurate? Sure, but not nearly as much as it was then because of the success of these programs. Can it be better? Absolutely, and the key ingredient is the relationship between the Green Chairman and the Superintendent.

## DOES THE SUPERINTENDENT NEED A GREEN CHAIRMAN? YES.

You need an advocate on the Board, and the Board wants a contact person. The members want their questions answered and everybody wants to know what's going on. The superintendent wants feedback from the membership, his eyes and ears in many ways, and finally, you need someone to talk to. This is a high-stress responsibility in every way, typically under-funded and interfered with by Mother Nature. You need a Green Chairman and, for both of you to be successful, you need to manage this relationship as effectively as you do your employees.



Superintendent Matt Schaffer shows Green Chairman Bill Greenwood the bermudagrass contamination that needs to be eliminated from this bunker bank.

management, and training programs all rolled into one. You're *not* finished! How about your boss?

He comes to your office on the way to play golf. He wants to enjoy the club, the course, and his interaction with fellow members. He doesn't speak your language, but he's more likely to be asked a technical question by a member than you are. And many times he's been put into the job *after* all of the planning for the current year. How do you get your relationship up to speed, and quickly?

### PLAN TO COMMUNICATE

He comes to your office; you don't go to his. Keep your office clean and neat. Make it as inviting as you can. Make sure there is a dry-board or chalkboard handy where you can discuss concepts, agronomic or otherwise. Be certain that the seating is clean and comfortable, and that includes your cart. Provide the Chairman with a mail bin where he can pick up mail, memos, or articles of interest. Keep interesting things in sight, like seed samples, drawings, or plans. This can stimulate conversation.

How do you make your "boss" aware of the breadth of your responsibility? To start with, I suggest an inventory, but of the real estate and people, not bags of fertilizer.

Example:

- 4.5 acres of greens
- 3 acres of teeing ground
- 22 acres of fairway
- 60 acres of rough
- 4,796 feet of stream bank
- 1.7 miles of roadside
- Over 100 bunkers
- 290 rakes

Plus 46 Green Department

Employees:

- 7 full-time employees
- 14 seasonal
- 18 temporary
- 7 interns

Agronomic program management, landscape management, human resource



Make sure your chairman knows about your efforts to be a good steward of the environment. Here, clippings and other debris are removed from the wash water and are degraded. The water stays in the system and is recycled.



An occasional tour of the course allows the green chairman to learn more about on-course activities. In this case, two sand storage platforms are being built in key locations to facilitate easy replenishment of sand for topdressing fairways.



Your green chairman likes to know a little about the club's equipment and other facets of the maintenance program. Take him on a tour of the maintenance facility sometime.

## REMEMBER THAT HE'S THERE TO PLAY GOLF

Before getting started, ask what his time schedule looks like. Don't start something that you can't finish. Likewise, let him know if there is anything on the course or around the clubhouse that is less than perfect. Somebody is going to ask, so give him answers to the likely questions.

## GREEN CHAIRMEN DON'T DO HOMEWORK

It is a non-credit course! Present situations or problems for discussion with some prepared alternatives, even if you think they might not work. This will help quicken the pace of the discussion.

## HE DOESN'T SPEAK YOUR LANGUAGE

Every business has its own acronyms, and turf management is no different. Educate your Chairman about some of your favorites. Discussing weed identifi-

cation and cutting height is an excellent way of sharing the scope of your responsibility and the technological advances of your industry.

## HELP THE CHAIRMAN DEFINE HIS ROLE

Everybody wants to be successful. Help your chairman understand what you need. You are the only one getting paid.

- Ask for clear, understandable goals.
- Show your Chairman how you manage members of your department.
- Ask your Chairman to help you with the evaluation process.
- Ask your Chairman how the Committee will evaluate your performance.
- Ask your Chairman what he or she needs.
- Follow through on promises.
- Use e-mail, the phone, or even regular mail to communicate.
- Start discussing next year's goals in August, not January!

## HELPFUL HINTS FOR MANAGING UP

Whenever possible, give credit to others. Make your Chairman a winner, and at that critical budget meeting you'll have a seat at the table. Communicate to your members through the Green Chairman.

Make sure that your résumé is kept up to date and that your Chairman has a copy. It's the easiest and most complete way of letting him know who you are. Likewise, ask him for his résumé or at least a verbal discussion about who he is. The more the two of you know about each other and how you got there, the more likely the chance for success. After all, your relationship will set the standard for you, your employees, and the entire membership.

*WILSON GREENWOOD, JR., is an account executive with Altus Partners, Inc., and First Vice President, Board of Governors, and Green Chairman of Merion Golf Club, in Ardmore, Pa.*