

Customer Service Southwest Style

Little touches can make a big difference.

BY PATRICK J. GROSS

Communication is an important part of good customer service. David Lowe, at Big Horn Golf Club (Palm Desert, California), likes having a captive audience at the practice range, which gives him an opportunity to speak with golfers and update them on projects and maintenance activities.



No doubt about it, the golf business in the southwestern United States is competitive, and each golf course is looking for opportunities to enhance customer service and attract more golfers. Though not as visible, the maintenance department serves a valuable role in providing good customer service. This article will highlight subtle, yet important, aspects of customer service from the maintenance side, and will focus on three main areas:

- Attitude
- Organization
- Customer-friendly aeration

THE SIGN SAYS IT ALL

The signs used on a golf course reflect the attitude of the organization. What kind of attitude do the signs at your golf course convey? Do your signs yell at golfers to “Keep off the grass!”? Rich Levine, the superintendent at Foxtail Golf Club in Rohnert Park, California, uses signs to convey a positive message. Good examples are the signs that are carefully placed in the newly established native habitat zones. Instead of warning golfers to keep out of these areas, the signs provide valuable information that these areas use less water, fewer chemicals, and enhance habitat for birds and other wildlife. Golfers understand the message and naturally want to comply by keeping their carts out of the area, knowing they are doing something positive for the environment.

PRACTICE RANGE CONVERSATION

If the golf course superintendent communicates well, he can create good customer service and provide important information about maintenance activities. One of the best places to meet and talk with golfers is on the practice range. David Lowe, CGCS, Bighorn Golf Club in Palm Desert, California, finds that it is easier to talk with several people in a central location, such as the practice range, instead of interrupting golfers while they are trying to enjoy their round. It gives golfers an opportunity to ask questions, learn more about what is going on on the golf course, and have a better appreciation of what the maintenance staff is doing to provide the best possible playing conditions.

CLEAN RESTROOMS

The condition and cleanliness of the golf course restrooms are an aspect of maintenance detail and



The staff at Barona Creek Golf Course (Lakeside, California) uses a gang-tackle approach to fairway aeration. Four crew members work together to core aerate, sweep, mow, and blow the fairway so the surface is clean and playable with less impact on golfers.



Outside tournaments are a significant source of revenue for most golf courses. Designating one staff member to work with vendors and developing a pre-tournament checklist can make sure that details are handled to the customers' satisfaction.

The signs used throughout the golf course reflect the attitude of the organization. "Keep off the grass" may not be the message you want to send to golfers if you want to attract customers. Positive messages about native habitat at Foxtail Golf Course (California) project a positive message about course maintenance activities.



good customer service. Many superintendents throughout the Southwest Region mentioned that they pay particular attention to the women's restroom, which has been identified by various forums, such as *Golf 20/20*, as a major complaint of women golfers. Cleaning the restrooms in the morning and checking these areas throughout the day is a customer service detail that is appreciated by all golfers.

PRE-TOURNAMENT CHECKLIST

Outside tournaments and events are a significant source of revenue for most golf courses. Depending on how these events are organized and handled by the golf course staff, they can be either a mess or a success. Cord Ozment, CGCS, at Callippe Preserve Golf Course in Pleasanton, California, has addressed this issue by developing a pre-tournament checklist that is used by golf shop personnel and the maintenance staff to establish setup requirements and clearly define the various job responsibilities that go along with organizing an outside event. The checklist contains information about closest-to-the-hole contests, long-drive contests, and vendor requirements (tents, canopies, electrical requirements, etc.). Furthermore, a maintenance staff member is personally assigned to escort vendors onto the course so that trucks and equipment are kept out of sensitive areas and so the vendors have a personal contact to answer any specific questions. The ultimate goal is for the tournament organizers and vendors to have a positive experience so they are more inclined to return the next year.

CUSTOMER SERVICE AERATION

It is a fact of life — golfers hate aeration! Although superintendents and the maintenance staff hate this operation as well, they know it is an essential activity to keep the turf healthy and playable throughout the year. To minimize the mess and disruption caused by fairway aeration, Sandy Clark, CGCS, Barona Creek Golf Course in Lakeside, California, has modified his fairway aeration program by impacting only two holes per day. Sandy and his staff use a "gang tackle" approach by staging four staff members on the fairway to be aerated. First, one pass is made along the edge of the fairway with the core aeration machine. Second, the core pulverizer/sweeper follows directly behind the aerator to break up the cores. Third, the fairway mower follows directly behind the sweeper to chop up any remaining debris. Fourth, a blower is used to do a final cleanup of the fairway surface. Although this operation takes a few extra days to complete, there is less impact to golfers and far fewer complaints.

These are but a few ideas regarding customer service from superintendents throughout the Southwest Region. Although subtle, each example is a way for the maintenance department to have a positive impact on customer service. Ultimately, good customer service is good for business and helps keep each course viable and competitive.

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