

Early Cultivation Techniques for Successful Teamwork

Just as with turfgrass, careful preparation helps yield success in club operations.

BY DAVE CHAG



The professional staff at every golf course must work together to provide the leadership that sets the tone for all staff on how to best deliver the desired product and services.

The ultimate goal of any club is to hire professional staff and build a cohesive team that delivers the desired product and services. This requires strong and consistent leadership with proper vision. Every club is different, from public, to one owner, to multi-member-owned facilities. Each provides a different challenge for its superintendent, golf professional, and general manager, yet the goal is for this team to work together in harmony with

owners and staff. These professionals have advanced with different skill sets, backgrounds, and knowledge to come together at last in one environment to succeed. It simply does not just happen, and what we do as a team today will influence member behavior and the development of future professionals.

Our professional working relationships are much like a marriage, where individuals must work hard for positive and rewarding results.

- Professional growth and the desire to be the best at one's trade are imperative. It inspires others to rise equally to any task. And just as important is the interest of each professional to learn another's trade at an adequate level to be supportive.
- The importance of proper and frequent communications cannot be overemphasized, and it must be directed at members, fellow professionals, and all staff in many different forms and

frequencies. These include Web sites and emails, and, of course, there is no substitute for person-to-person communication.

- Teamwork is just that. It is not the individual's success as much as the team. Be humble and give credit to others.
- Respect for one another comes from the heart and mind. Disagreement does not mean disrespect, and defining those moments will strengthen the relationship.

Many of us who have worked in this industry for years understand these basic concepts and what it takes to succeed. Add a few influencing factors to our relationship, like the golfers' expectations from arrival to departure, balancing the busy golf calendar between member events, revenue enhancement, agronomic practices, sharing the constraints of annual budgeting, and, of course, whatever Mother Nature decides to blow our way, and we develop a further appreciation for just how stressful the club environment can be.

Grounds superintendents, golf professionals, and managers currently navigate the politics of new member orientations and new committee or chairman assignments as well as developing training programs for aspiring young professionals. And to that end we have an obligation to cultivate future supportive behavior and receptive attitudes in each of these respective groups. There is a payback for future generations if we focus on a few factors now.

MEMBER CULTIVATION

The club's governance structure ultimately influences the culture and traditions within the membership. Members who aspire to serve on committees or boards have a responsibility to learn of existing programs and established processes before accepting their assignment.

- New committee members need proper orientation and clear definition of their responsibilities. This includes an understanding of existing golf and agronomic programs, club rules and regulations, current communications, and course conditions, to name a few.
- A new committee chairman should meet with the professional team, as a team, to better understand his or her ability to assist the team's efforts.
- Let us not forget that golfers have a responsibility to be aware of more than their impending match or leisurely round and should be knowledgeable of course conditions and current agronomic practices by reading all communications and announcements.

These subjects confronted in advance at new member orientations and new committee assignments, as well as before golf events or casual rounds, will inevitably prevent many future problems and promote a better team environment.

The Rules of Golf devote Section I to etiquette and behavior on the course. It is "The Spirit of the Game" to demonstrate courtesy and sportsmanship at all times. The game is about honesty, integrity, and respect. And these same characteristics apply off the course as well. The existing team of professionals works within this spirit as well as the club structure to be successful, and much depends on member cooperation. A few team examples might include:

- We want to solicit constructive member feedback but discourage improperly delivered criticism.
- We want to avoid comments targeting one professional of the team as the reason for the complaint.
- We want to be proactive with communication to diminish the unrealistic expectation that the golf course conditions will be the same every day.

It is the off-the-course behavior and attitude that contribute greatly toward team success.

INTERN CULTIVATION

Young professionals generally learn their trade with hands-on experience and a positive mentoring relationship. We want these future talents to learn how to work with their fellow professionals as well. A few team examples might include:

- A grounds intern should work in the golf and clubhouse operations. (And this rotation applies to golf and management interns as well.)
- It would benefit interns to attend all three local association meetings. What better insight into our professions than to learn of current issues from our peers?
- Any opportunity for each departmental intern to meet the senior department heads, individually and as a team, and cultivate future opinions and attitudes for working harmoniously together, is extremely worthwhile.

As successful professionals working well together, we might devote more time and resources to cultivating these subtle practices within our membership and staff. It may possibly lead to a more respected and productive future team effort.



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