



Good communication with the superintendent is an important responsibility of the green chairman so that mutual trust and respect can be established.

# The Role of the Green Chairman

Lessons learned while being on the green committee for more than 30 years.

BY DR. PAUL ROWE

**T**he green committee is charged with the responsibility and given the privilege of maintaining and nurturing the golf course property. Those asked to be the chairman of the green committee must be up to the task. It's not an easy job. It's not a high-paying job. But it is a job that can be very rewarding. I have enjoyed being a part of that process for more than 30 years, and during that time I have accumulated some ideas that may be helpful to others.

## THE COMMITTEE

Basic considerations for membership on the green committee are:

- Who should be on the committee?
- How many people should be on the committee?
- How long should these members serve on the committee?

A small committee seems to work best. One should consider not more than seven. The committee members should represent variation in handicap, gender, and age. Most important is the committee member's ability to communicate the concerns of the membership *to* the committee as well as *from* the committee. In other words, appoint members who are well respected and approachable.

The tenure of the members should be long enough to allow them to acquire a basic knowledge of how the property is maintained. It is important to acknowledge that mistakes are part of the process, and committee members should be afforded the benefit of learning the process, making mistakes, and learning from the experience. In addition, the superintendent should not be expected to educate a new

group each year on his role in maintaining the golf course. His time is better spent with a core of knowledgeable members concerning long-range planning and current operational issues. With these factors in mind, I would suggest terms of not less than five years, and the chair should serve at least that long.

## DEVELOP A MISSION STATEMENT

The mission statement should be fashioned from input and reviewed by the green committee, governing board, and management, and should be published to the membership. It should reflect a broad yet definitive image. It should become the focal point and benchmark of any considered modification to the golf course property. Staying focused on the statement will



lessen overzealous “personal preference” discussions.

## DEVELOP A POLICY

The common thread in good policy is *consistency*. The best way to be consistent is to establish a written standards manual for the golf course. The goal of the policy should be to fulfill the obligation of the committee to the property, to the membership, and to the game of golf by creating the intended image set forth in the mission statement. The golf course should reflect that *image* in its *substance*. An effort should be made to allow the membership to enjoy each round while giving them every opportunity to improve their game. Keeping this in mind, the committee should strive to produce a course that can provide a good test for the better player and allow ample opportunity for the higher handicapper to enjoy every round.

## THE BUDGET

The budget should reflect and support the desired level of maintenance and conditioning. As a starting point, 65%

of golf membership dues and net profits related directly to golf (i.e., green fees, carts, range, etc.) should all be allotted to the operations and capital budget of the golf course property. The golf course is the most important asset of any club; therefore, it should receive the lion’s share of fiscal investment.

Within the operational budget, the payroll should hover at 65% of the total budget, as the upkeep of golf course property is very labor intensive. Keep in mind that the *quality* of the labor should come before the *quantity*.

## AGRONOMY

It is not necessary for committee members to know all the scientific names, nuances, and uses of the various chemicals and agents employed by the superintendent. Keeping pace with changes in the areas of golf course applications and agronomic practices would require unusual time and talent, and it is simply not necessary. In my opinion, there are three simple things one needs to know about agronomy that will aid in understanding the majority of turf-related programs:

1. Water
2. More than eight hours of sunlight
3. Drainage

**Water:** When observing an area of turf that is not doing well, one can ask, “Is this area getting too much water? Not enough water? Is the water quality good, bad, indifferent?”

**More than eight hours of sunlight:** Is the area getting at least eight hours of full sunlight? If not, why not?

**Drainage:** If water or sun exposure is not the problem, then find out if the area has adequate drainage.

If you find that these basic questions can be answered satisfactorily in the affirmative, then the problem must be elsewhere. My experience has been that the solution to the majority of problems can be answered by first asking those simple questions.

## COMPLAINTS

The pecking order for complaints is historical in nature. The progression is typically greens, fairways, roughs, bunkers, tees, and so on. Establishing standards in these areas is tantamount to reducing, if not resolving, many



Above left: Water has a memory like an elephant; it will tend to go where it has always gone. The importance of adequate drainage is a key issue that the green chairman and committee need to understand. Above right: Bunkers should rank fourth in the pecking order for complaints. Establishing realistic maintenance standards for bunkers and other areas of the golf course is tantamount to reducing and resolving many disputes.



disputes. The following is a brief summary of some of the standards we have established at my home club that may serve as a guideline for the development of your own standards:



Turf requires eight hours of sunlight for healthy growth and development. Prune trees anytime; remove trees any other time when no one else is around.

## GREENS

**Pace:** Establish a minimum variation in the Stimpmeter readings. As an example, my home course has a standard of 10 feet +/- 3 inches as measured by the Stimpmeter. Be sure that your practice putting green is consistent in pace with those on the golf course. Remember that the Stimpmeter was developed to compare the grooming of the greens so as to make them consistent in pace. This information is best left unpublished.

**Smoothness:** Probably more important than pace. Achieving a goal of smooth-rolling greens is possible through many methods: brushing, rolling, frequent topdressing, etc. Keep in mind, golf is played on the surface, not in the rootzone. Do not confuse the agronomic condition of the turf with good playability.

**Hole Placements:** The slower the green pace, the more hole placements

are available. Watch diligently for traffic patterns on and off the green complex. Wear patterns can effectively be reduced by frequent changing of hole placement, and the more place-

ment areas there are, the better! The USGA has published guidelines for pace and slope as they relate to fair hole placement that can be very helpful in this regard.

## FAIRWAYS

**Rollout:** The distance a ball rolls once it lands on the fairway is a function of the fairway firmness, height of cut, and moisture content. Somewhere in the vicinity of 15 to 25 yards is ideal.

**Height of Cut:** As well as affecting rollout, height of cut can vary ball spin. Smooth, tightly cropped fairways can give the illusion of having the ball "sit up" and also produce a more controllable ball flight. Higher heights of cut appeal to some players; however, ultimately they produce a compromised playing condition.

**Width:** Utilizing the architectural design of the course is primary to fairway width. A pleasing bilateral

sightline should supersede any width requirements.

## ROUGH

Allow for definition between the fairway and rough. Try to avoid grass length that lends itself to frequent lost ball searches.

## BUNKERS

Remember that these are hazards. Try to maintain some consistency with like sand and proper depth. By placing rakes outside the bunkers, less foot traffic disturbance occurs.

## TEES

Establish turf that is of apron texture and height of cut. When establishing the direction of tees, stand approximately 20 to 30 yards behind the tee to sight the fairway line, and then determine the direction of cut. Remember that par-3 tees quickly mound in the middle due to frequent divot filling. Leveling should be a constant concern.

## THE SUPERINTENDENT

The green chairman should communicate frequently with the superintendent and make written notes of items to be discussed. There are certain tenets that I believe to be universal. The most important golfer to the superintendent is the one who is playing *today*. This idea translates into fixing problem areas *now!* I want our superintendent to use a white line around a problem area. This practice indicates two things to me: 1) the superintendent has seen the problem, and 2) he or she intends to *do something* about it! The superintendent should see the golf course through the eyes of the golfer. Sound agronomic practices can be appreciated only if they favorably affect the quality and "texture" of the playing surfaces.

Establish trust and mutual respect with the superintendent. Get to know his or her personal side. Keep up with events in his or her family life. Try never to disappoint each other. Advocate publicly; criticize privately. Never



surprise the superintendent in a green committee meeting. Allow him or her to preview the agenda. Continue to remind the superintendent that *awareness* can easily give way to *routine*. Make certain the superintendent has all the tools to succeed, such as equipment, budget, and time, and be willing to support the things that are needed. Enjoy your relationship and, most importantly, have fun.

## THE CREW

Aspire to convert the technician into a skilled worker. A basic knowledge of golf is the key ingredient to understanding why chores are performed in specific ways. A good way to develop this understanding is to give the crew golf lessons and allow them to play “their” course. Keep the maintenance facility clean and healthy — it is the crew’s *home away from home*.

## THE ASSISTANT

It is my general feeling that an assistant who strives to become a superintendent should be employed not more than three years. After all, this period of employment should be a learning experience. During this time, the superintendent has to be a teacher, which in itself is a good exercise for the superintendent. Keep in mind that it is more important for the assistant to ask the right questions than to know any of the answers.

## CONSULTANTS

Good advice is never cheap and cheap advice is never good. Outside consultants are very helpful, especially with issues related to water, tree problems, irrigation, and special projects. The USGA Turf Advisory Service and many of their publications are wonderful resources. It also is important for the superintendent to actively maintain continuing education activities and certifications.

## PRIVILEGE VS. POWER

The members of the green committee should provide stewardship and leader-



The green chairman and committee members should keep abreast of vital environmental issues that affect the club, such as opportunities to eliminate turf in out-of-play areas to reduce water use.

ship by being aware and keeping abreast of local activities, such as water requirements and other vital environmental issues. They should attend local and regional meetings and seminars related to all issues concerning the golf course property.

Finally, the reward for your service to the green committee will come from the satisfaction of being a good steward to the land *and* to the game of golf. If you develop a parental concern for the property, you will have done a good job!

## ADVICE TO GREEN COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Being on the green committee for more than 30 years has given me an interesting perspective on our golf course and what it takes to have a functional, productive green committee. Over the years I have collected what I refer to as *truisms* that apply to our golf course and being on the committee. Some are mine, some I have heard along the way, and I hope that current and future committee members can benefit from these simple truths:

- Most superintendents over-water and under-fertilize.

- Water has a memory like an elephant; it tends to go where it has always gone.
- Mother Nature is no lady.
- We do not play golf in the trees; we play it on the ground. Prune trees anytime; remove trees any other time when no one else is around.
- If someone complains about the lack of shade on the golf course, tell them to take a cart with a roof on it!
- The only “color” on a golf course should be flowers and flagsticks.
- Sodding is rarely a solution.
- Golf is played on the surface, not in the rootzone.
- Agronomy is science; green keeping is an art.
- Try on your hat once in a while; make sure it still fits.
- Good greens make the hotdogs taste better.
- When in doubt, do nothing.

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