

# Make The Most From Your USGA Visit

Communication is key.

BY CHRIS HARTWIGER



*The USGA Turf Advisory Service is a tool to encourage open discussion about golf course conditioning and maintenance.*

**C**ommunication. You know it is important and a challenge. But time and time again, communication arises as the most common problem facing golf course superintendents. As the focal point of golf course maintenance operations, the superintendent is communicating daily with golfers, employees, and managers. Building successful relationships with these groups is as important as understanding the principles of turfgrass management.

Each year the USGA Green Section agronomists conduct Turf Advisory Service (TAS) visits at nearly 1,600 golf courses. In addition to providing technical information, many superintendents use the TAS as a means to enhance communication between important personnel at their course. In

this article, we will share several ways superintendents have used the TAS to improve communications at their courses.

## TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE FULL-DAY VISIT

Whether your golf course is public or private, it is always a good idea to bring course officials out on the golf course to learn more about what a superintendent must do every day. A full-day visit provides the opportunity to discuss agronomic topics in the morning and meet with course officials in the afternoon.

Including course officials in a TAS visit is a great way to build a relationship and discuss important course topics in a non-threatening manner. Too often, meetings are scheduled

between a superintendent and course official only when there is a problem. A TAS visit can be scheduled far in advance, and all parties can look forward to an afternoon on the golf course.

## ORIENTATION OF GREEN COMMITTEE MEMBERS

An ideal green committee is fair, approves a budget in line with expectations, and does not change. In reality, green committees are unpredictable. When your green committee changes, do you have an orientation program for the new committee members? Do not make a mistake and assume that a new green committee member understands the importance of the golf course superintendent's position. It is up to you to educate committee



members and build a relationship with each person.

Including new green committee members on a TAS visit will help get the relationship off on the right foot. They will consider it a compliment to be invited to spend an afternoon on the golf course “talking turf” with you and a USGA agronomist. Making the orientation fun and informative is a great way to build allies should a difficult situation arise in the future.

### AM AND PM MEETINGS

Why are the bunkers so hard? Why are the bunkers so soft? Why do you want to cut those pretty trees around the 7th green? These are questions that arise frequently. As the superintendent, you can give the agronomically correct answer every time, but sometimes you may get the feeling they do not believe your answer! A great way to overcome this problem and educate these committee members is to include the committee on a TAS visit. This could be a tour of the course, a lunch meeting, or a board meeting. Committee members can ask all the questions they want and have a knowledgeable superintendent and a USGA agronomist as sources of unbiased information.

### BOARD MEETINGS

Is your golf course going through renovation of greens or bunkers? The USGA Green Section frequently is asked to make presentations at board meetings regarding the renovation process. While most superintendents may undertake a few construction projects in their career, the Green Section is involved with construction



*Ty McClellan of the Green Section's Mid-Continent Region, during a Turf Advisory Service visit.*

During the meeting, these topics will be reviewed, and employees will be free to ask questions. Having an employee meeting makes a statement to the employees that they are a valuable part of the course. Including an employee meeting during a visit is a great way to motivate and educate your employees.

### CONCLUSION

Advances in technology will lead the way for improved course conditions, but communication will still remain the number-one problem on golf courses. The most successful people in any business are those who effectively communicate and motivate those around them. Your success as a superintendent will rest largely with your

effectiveness as a communicator. There are numerous ways to use the USGA TAS as a means to open the lines of communication at your course. Give us a call — we would love to visit your course.

[Contact the Green Section Staff](#)

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[TAS: An Insurance Policy and So Much More \(TGIF #172061\)](#)

[Turf Advisory Service Information](#)

[Tips on Getting the Most from a TAS Visit](#)

[The Value of a USGA Turf Advisory Service Visit](#)

[How to Subscribe](#)

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projects every year. A presentation at a board meeting is a great way to begin the process and ensure the project is completed to everyone's satisfaction.

### DEVELOP AN AGENDA

Prior to a TAS visit, the superintendent should meet with course officials and develop an agenda for the visit. This agenda will require everyone to think about the most important issues at the course and make sure they are covered on the visit. Typically, a visit is much more efficient and more topics are covered when an agenda is developed prior to the visit.

### EMPLOYEE MEETINGS

Motivating employees at a golf course is a never-ending challenge. Try making an employee meeting part of your next TAS visit. Prior to the meeting, the superintendent and USGA agronomist can discuss topics to be covered.