

Things I Wish My Superintendent Understood

Perspectives from the green committee.

BY PATRICK J. GROSS

The relationship between the superintendent and green committee is vital to the successful operation of any golf facility. Superintendents like to think they are in the golf course maintenance business, but they are really in the customer service business. As any successful businessperson knows, an important part of good customer service is listening to your customers. Superintendents usually hear from the very vocal 10 percent of golfers or committee members who are not shy about expressing their opinions. But what is the other 90 percent thinking?

In the article [“The Things I Wish My Green Committee Understood,”](#) Jim Skorulski surveyed several superintendents to identify the key attributes of a successful committee from the superintendent’s perspective. In this article, however, we take the opposite approach and reveal the qualities and skills of a successful superintendent from the perspective of the green committee. This information was derived from a 2012 survey of green committee members in the eastern and western United States. The following questions were posed to this group:

- What does a superintendent need to understand regarding your perception of the golf course and enjoyment of the game?
- What do superintendents do well, and what can they do better to improve the working relationship with the green committee?

The feedback was very revealing. Based on the responses, five broad categories emerged:

- Playing golf and seeing the course from the golfer’s perspective.
- Communication.
- Management.



Green committees want superintendents to “take off their agronomy glasses and experience the course as a golfer” by playing the golf course on a regular basis. In addition to testing the appearance and playing quality of the turf, playing the course allows superintendents to better relate to their customers as fellow golfers.



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- Agronomy/technical skills.
- Personal qualities.

SEEING THE COURSE FROM THE GOLFER'S PERSPECTIVE

This was one of the most common responses in the survey. Green committee members want the superintendent to play golf and have an appreciation of how the course plays. They want superintendents to “take off their agronomy glasses and experience the course as a golfer.” Testing the course with a club in hand reveals much more than just the appearance and quality of the turf. It enhances the ability of the superintendent to relate to golfers and influences his or her performance in the other categories mentioned, i.e., communication, management, agronomy, and personal qualities. As one green committee member noted, “A good chef never lets food out of the

kitchen without tasting it; likewise, good superintendents should test their product on a regular basis.”

COMMUNICATION

The responses stressed that superintendents need to be good communicators. Golfers and green committee members are not always well versed in the complexities and duties associated with maintaining a golf course, but they want their observations and concerns to be taken seriously, and most are eager to learn. Issues most often mentioned include:

- Superintendents should take the time to listen to golfers and understand their vision of the golf course. Whether their opinions are right or wrong, this is a prime opportunity for superintendents to educate golfers about maintenance programs and existing conditions on the course.
- Superintendents should be able to communicate the vision and direction of the maintenance program. Golfers and committees want to know the superintendent has a well-thought-out plan for maintaining the golf course both now and in the future.
- Avoid speaking “turfease.” Using overly technical terms is a turnoff for golfers and committee members. Although superintendents may feel



Committees expect superintendents to be expert water managers, not only for the health of the turf but also the playability of the golf course.



Green committees want superintendents to understand the importance of properly marking the golf course. In addition to being vitally important for playing the game according to the Rules of Golf, proper course marking adds definition to the course and lets golfers know that the superintendent is paying attention to the details.

they are demonstrating their knowledge when mentioning terms like trinexapac-ethyl and *Rhizoctonia solani*, non-technical terms like “plant growth regulator” and “disease” are preferred when talking to committee members.

MANAGEMENT SKILLS

Green committee members were well aware that the maintenance of a golf course involves many moving parts. Superintendents must have good management and leadership skills to guide the staff and efficiently manage resources. Specific areas mentioned in the survey include:

- Proper marking of the course was the most frequent response in this category. In addition to being vitally important for playing the game according to the *Rules of Golf*, proper course marking adds definition to the course and lets golfers know that the superintendent is paying attention to the details. It also adds to the enjoyment of a round of golf.
- Committees want a superintendent who not only knows how to solve problems, but one who can “see around the corner” to predict and prevent future problems.
- Budget management and financial responsibility are critical skills, especially in a down economy. Committees expect that the superintendent accepts this charge seriously and takes the necessary steps to properly manage resources and avoid wasting money.
- The image presented by the staff and having a motivated workforce are important to green committee members. They want to see that the staff take pride in their work.
- Committees recognize the knowledge and talent of superintendents, yet they understand that it is impossible to know it all. Superintendents should not be afraid to ask for help when needed. Committees felt that this was a sign of strength and not weakness.

AGRONOMY AND TECHNICAL SKILLS

It was very clear that green committee members value and admire the agro-

conomic skills of superintendents. There was widespread recognition that the job of the superintendent is highly technical and requires a wide range of expertise. Responses to the survey indicated that superintendents should focus on honing and updating their skills in the following areas:

- Participation in continuing education to stay up to date on technology and information that can help the course.
- The superintendent must be computer literate. It is no longer an option — it is a necessity.
- Responses from both the East Coast and West Coast emphasized the need for superintendents to be expert water managers. Although committee members recognized that proper water management was important for growing healthy turf, they were more focused on the role that water plays in the overall playability of the golf course.

- Although the term “consistency” can be interpreted in many different ways when it comes to golf course conditioning, committee members mentioned the importance of establishing programs that promote the consistency of greens and bunkers.

PERSONAL QUALITIES

An unexpected yet heartening aspect of the survey was the number of responses expressing care and concern for the well-being of superintendent. It was clear from the responses that committee members cared about their superintendents and did not want

to see them overly stressed or burned out. Specific personal qualities mentioned most often included:

- Maintaining a balanced lifestyle. Committee members recognized that it is healthy and important for the superintendent to have a meaningful

discussion with members of the green committee. It was clear that committee members recognized the agronomic expertise of superintendents but wanted them to focus on adapting that knowledge to benefit the playing quality of the golf course. Critical to

this endeavor was the need for superintendents to play the golf course on a routine basis to relate agronomic issues to how the golf course plays and to the game of golf in general. The need for effective communication was another main point of emphasis. Superintendents can have the greatest agronomic program in the world, but if they are not listening to the concerns of golfers and communicating the short-term and long-range vision of the maintenance program, then their efforts will not be effective. Paying attention to the proper marking of the golf course was mentioned



Demonstrating enjoyment and enthusiasm for the job is something committees want to see in their superintendent.

and rewarding life outside the golf course.

- Demonstrate enjoyment and enthusiasm for the job. It was important for committee members to know that the superintendent enjoys his job and fosters that same attitude with the staff.
- Have fun! It was clear that the people responding to this survey loved golf, and they want their superintendents to love it too and have fun performing their duties.

CONCLUSION

The insights gained from this informal survey were very revealing and can be beneficial to superintendents as a tool for self-evaluation and further

frequently as an important detail superintendents need to know that adds to the enjoyment of the golf course and proper playing of the game. Finally, although superintendents can feel weighed down by the many problems and challenges of the job, it was clear that committee members expressed a personal concern for the health and well-being of their superintendents and want to be sure that the job is fun and enjoyable.

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