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The Great Communication Divide

One of the most common frustrations of golf course superintendents is the lack of timely communication between department heads, especially with and from the general manager. The boss.

Superintendents may feel there is a lack of empathy for the challenges they face because the super's office is not in the clubhouse but on the golf course. The GM may say that less communication is required or simply out of sight, out of mind.

Also, the need to communicate is such that as long as it's green out there, "green is good," move on to the next issue. No communication is needed. When it becomes brown, that's when the GM feels it's time to pay attention because he's hearing it in the grill room. This is not a prevalent view or approach at the best clubs, but unfortunately, it's a subtext in less than high-functioning management environments.

These common communication failures generally occur because of the lack of a thoughtful, succinct communications plan between stakeholders, especially department heads, that includes formal and informal communication and takes advantage of technology, all of which should fuel a fluid and transparent flow of information.

Cross-departmental empathy may happen organically, but every leader needs to own the concept and the execution. Communication is complex, yet one of the most critical leadership skills is managing up. Critical too is managing up to a leader that is receptive to this approach.

Might you or your green or golf chair learn of these insensitivities?

- The golf professional sends a group off the back nine at 8 a.m. without telling the agronomy team.
- The superintendent doesn't let the golf shop know there was an irrigation leak on the forward tee on the third hole during a women's event.
- The general manager schedules a meeting with little notice for the management team. Because it's "important" to demonstrate huge insensitivity to the challenges in golf ops or golf course maintenance.

Examples could continue, yet we all understand how the movie plays out. All parties get frustrated because of the lack of structured, efficient communication, yet all leaders

own a piece of this decay. We all know the opposite of love is not hate. It's apathy. As consultants, we see this apathy manifest when we conduct team meetings and employee surveys and critically when communication decays to a certain threshold when we are engaged to identify fresh talent for the GM or superintendent roles.

The best management teams create a mutually agreed upon communication plan that works to prevent miscommunication. Here are some simple steps to help you create better communication between the top managers at your club.

Create a best practice communication environment. Is your management team set up to communicate efficiently and effectively? With today's technology, we may tend to forgo communicating effectively. We send a text or an email rather than speak in person. We all have misunderstood the meaning of a text or an email. Texts and emails are important forms of communication, but speaking in person allows for dialogue and understanding.

When looking at club operations, the superintendent arrives and leaves first, the golf professional second, then the general manager, and finally, food and beverage. With the overlap between these teams, it is vital to ensure all teams are on the same page. Schedule meetings at times that are productive for all key managers. GMs with good peripheral vision say the best time to hold a meeting is when the management team is eager to meet. Some of the best times to hold meetings are mid-morning and early afternoon since all are usually present. What about a lunch meeting?

SOME FUNDAMENTALS

• **Listen – Actively.** Many spend more time thinking of a response rather than listening to both the content and the inference. This takes practice. Have you formed your response before hearing the entire concept or point? This prohibits you from understanding what is said. And generally, your response does not address what the person was saying. As they say in the Mountain West, two ears, one mouth.

• **Communicate frequently.** A best practice taught by effective GMs and superintendents is to stop by the golf shop each morning to dialogue with the golf staff. What are their concerns and anticipated pinch points? What do they hear about turf conditions? While a text or an email is es-

sential, you can't replace being there in person. It telegraphs a partnership to the membership. We could apply this approach to a range of departments.

- **Be specific in communication.** Communicating with clarity and specificity avoids confusion. How often have you heard the general manager say one thing in a meeting and team members perceive something else? Clearly stating what you want to communicate and being specific allows your team to understand what you are saying.

- **Make communication as transparent as possible.** Transparency allows other team members to understand the genesis of your thinking, which is critical to mentorship. It helps create and support constructive conflict in meetings. Withholding information creates skepticism. Be diplomatic when views differ. You can be truthful while being thoughtful and an empathetic leader.

- **Be relevant in your communication.** When communicating between managers, watch your body language and posture. How often do you meet someone for the first time who is constantly looking over or around you while you speak? What does this telegraph? Your facial expressions

tell it all. How you behave is a clear indication of your communication style. All behavior is a form of communication.

- **Resolve issues promptly.** Often managers don't want to offend other managers. It is a rare occasion when the problem just goes away. Resolving issues promptly allows you to communicate in a more meaningful way. It shows you respect the other manager and allows you to focus on the issue, not your emotion. Ignoring an issue only ensures that you will bring it up again when you are more frustrated and emotional.

Understand your fellow managers' roles and respect them. Pat has been fortunate to have been a superintendent, director of golf and general manager. Quite the perspective.

Trust that it's critical to take time to work in their environment to understand what various leaders need. When you spend so much time with your fellow managers, you become accustomed to thinking that they understand your every nuance. Slow down and take the time to understand them before you think they understand you. **BR**

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