

gcm

GOLF CLUB MANAGEMENT

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Relationship between club and pro

In part one of a two-part series, Andrew Wilson examines the evolving role of the club professional and the relationship between club and pro.

WE USE THE TITLE 'golf professional' for the PGA person who looks after us at our local golf club, but how professional is the 'pro' allowed to be in creating and delivering top-class experiences for his or her club, members and visitors? How is the role of the golf pro changing and what does the future look like? To what extent are club committees either leading the change or hindering it?

In this series of two articles we take a good look at what is often a battleground – the relationship between club and pro. How can clubs and pros work together to achieve a win/win/win situation? A win for the pro, a win for the committee and, most importantly, a win for the members and visitors.

In the first article we explore *what* clubs should be trying to achieve, and in the second article we suggest *how* to go about implementing a blueprint for future success. Naturally all clubs are different and it would be impossible to suggest a perfect approach that would suit the low-usage country course as well as the high-usage resort course. We are looking at principles that any club can adopt and apply in the way that suits them. We have listened to a broad range of opinions including club pros, members, service suppliers, consultants and committee members.

Build your brand

These days, golf clubs are just as much a business as a branch of Woolworths. Survival is the name of the game, and in order to survive you have to *protect and build your*

unique brand. It's relatively easy if you are the only golf club in the area but if you are in a metropolitan area competing with a dozen other clubs for members and visitors, it is a different matter.

Develop a vision and mission statement

Start off by developing a clear *vision* for your club. What will make you desirable to your target market and where do you want to be in 10 to 15 years time? Then move on to a *mission statement*. What are the things that are critically important to you that will enable you to achieve your vision and are they realistic and sustainable? In developing your vision and mission it is essential to involve your club manager and golf pro as their involvement will increase their commitment.

During this process try to concentrate on adding value to members and visitors rather than numbers. The numbers will come if you can add value. Ask yourself, why should I want to become a member of this club? What value can I get by being a member of this club that I can't get elsewhere? Think of ways to create a club community that goes beyond the four hours spent on the course. Club committees can be excellent at reading spreadsheets and counting rounds, but often find it difficult to address the softer issues of relationships and adding value for members.

The reason for this is that a lot of committees' current structures and constitutions



Atlantic Beach and Theewaterskloof

Craig Nell, club manager of Atlantic Beach Golf Club, and Thys Grobbelaar, club treasurer at Theewaterskloof Golf Club, give their insight on the golf industry and club management. See *GCM's* interviews with Craig and Thys on page 6.

promote short-term thinking. The club captain normally only retains the position for a year and committee members only hold office for approximately three years. This means that the focus tends to be on leaving behind a legacy that can be achieved in a year or two.

Maximise your potential

Golf clubs in the future will only be successful if they fully maximise the potential of all their facilities. The pro should be central in helping the club to achieve this. As golf clubs become more competitive, the need to accumulate reserves for future

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developments becomes more urgent. The days of break-even are over. Revenue comes through involvement and I am not just talking number of rounds. Too many rounds a year can ruin the brand just as quickly as poorly maintained greens. How often do we see club bars and restaurants empty except at the end of the day's play? How often do we see poorly stocked, poorly staffed and poorly laid out pro shops?

Attitude adjustment

So what do we need to do about it? Committees and pros need to take a long hard look at themselves. In analysing the relationship between committees and pros I think of cricket in England in the '50s and '60s, when you had gentlemen and players. The gentlemen were those fine pillars of society who had benefited from private education and a sizeable inheritance. They made the rules, funded the clubs and played the game for the love of it.

The players were from the other side of the tracks. They normally came from a working-class background and played the game because they were good at it and their job was to ensure that the club won. They were paid cash in the boot and that was that; they had no involvement in club matters and definitely no socialising! How many golf clubs today in South Africa have a similar relationship with their pro?

I believe this goes to the core of the problem in a lot of our golf clubs. Committees need to look at their structures, constitutions and, most importantly, attitudes towards the pro and the degree to which they include their pro in club affairs. Has the pro been a part of the process in developing or reviewing the club's vision and mission statements, etc?

The pros also need to do a bit of soul searching. They need to re-examine their role and the skills, abilities and commitment they bring to the club. The PGA is doing a lot of good work in developing future club professionals but is the bar being set high enough? Your club pro should be the executive director of all matters relating to the golf experience.

At the moment the criteria to become a club pro is a matric, a handicap of less than five and a practical apprenticeship linked to the three-year PGA diploma course (NQF

level 5). The current attrition rate is approximately 50 percent, mainly due to the fact that the majority of the intake want to play golf and are not suited to the broad and diverse demands made on club pros.

The PGA sees three main career avenues for their graduates:

1. The sole trader who invests in a pro shop or similar venture and makes it their own business.
2. The golf coach who concentrates on teaching the techniques and finer points of the game.
3. The director of golf, responsible for all matters relating to the golfing experience.

Committees need to look at their structures, constitutions and, most importantly, attitudes towards the pro and the degree to which they include their pro in club affairs.

In the practical world, a golf pro at a club very often spends his or her time coaching as well as acting as a sole trader as both roles complement each other.

The PGA is also looking at developing a three-year degree course (NQF level 6) as well as specialist programmes on subjects such as human resources and finance, which must be the way to go.

If the *profession* wants to be taken seriously it has to be able to attract, retain and reward the highest calibre of people who want to be involved with the game of golf in its broadest context.

What should clubs really look for from their pro?

1. **Operational tasks:** including greenfees, management of the caddies and event management.
2. **Expertise:** including course management, rules and the set-up of the golf course.
3. **Creating theatre:** including member

introductions, range afternoons, short-game/putting competitions and theme competitions.

4. **Community development:** including junior development, clinics and on-range promotions.
5. **Marketing:** including internal marketing to the members and external marketing to generate sponsorships and rounds/events, etc.
6. **Standards:** the overall golfing experience as well as the appearance, knowledge and service levels of staff, particularly in the pro shop.

What should the pro be looking for from the club? There are four main areas:

1. **Knowledge:** to be a part of the inner circle of running the club. To be kept informed of all that is going on in the club so that he or she can lead the golfing experience from the front.
2. **Skills:** to be allowed the budget and time to keep learning, whether it be the game of golf, teaching techniques, rule changes, merchandising and display methods or interpersonal skills.
3. **Status:** to be included in all committees and meetings to do with the golfing experience so that he or she can influence the decisions that are made.
4. **Rewards:** to have a contract that rewards results. The role of the golf pro is not a 40-hour a week job, and therefore to attract and retain the right calibre of person, clubs need to develop contracts that are competitive with the commercial marketplace, if they wish to attract and retain the right calibre.

Communication between club and pro is a vital part of building trust and respect. Some clubs, especially in the Gauteng region, are leading the way in their relationships with their golf pro.

As I mentioned, it would be impossible to create a blueprint that would suit all types of golf clubs, but the points raised are intended to get clubs and pros thinking, to open up debate, and hopefully, to show a way forward.

In the next article we focus on the *how*. We'll look at contracts and reward systems, what to measure in terms of performance, structures and staffing.

Club manager of the future

Bill Taylor looks at how the club manager's role and committees' attitudes have changed in South Africa and why this is good news for the industry.

"HIRE 'EM AND FIRE 'EM!" – this unofficial slogan by the antiquated committee-driven system is a thing of the past. The club manager (or club secretary as it was once called) has been significantly elevated over the past 10 years in South Africa.

Today, the club manager is seldom seen as the personal punching bag of an egocentric committee and club managers are less often the scapegoats for ill-informed committee decisions. This wonderful transformation is attributed to three key factors:

- Training/education/CMASA
- Committee transformation
- The calibre of the manager

Education is power

Today's club manager must be well versed in a host of areas including agronomics, food and beverages, marketing, finance/budgets, labour law, human resources and member relations. Our national body, the CMASA, along with recognised educational institutions, have been instrumental in providing the training opportunities that will jumpstart our new and improved club managers.

Today's manager can also present a comprehensive and definitive plan to the members/committees that ensures a roadmap for the year ahead, which means no more ad hoc irresponsible capital expenditures at the golf captain's whim. With the future potential to tap the volumes of course material via the CMAA (Club Managers' Association of America), I am even more excited about the future of our industry.

Changing face of clubs

I am not chastising the management of years gone by. However, we live in a world that will no longer tolerate a part-time manager who plays more golf and swills more beer than he looks after the business... because clubs *are* businesses. A club that is not run with sound business principles, 'best practice' ethics and a commitment towards good corporate governance will not succeed. The multi-million-rand club businesses, which have ever-diminishing margins and testing labour

issues, must strive for a balanced budget with appropriate reserves. The ever-increasingly competitive market and reduced disposable income of our membership base has meant that solid financial decisions are mandatory.

Positive changes

I am extremely proud our managers' positive metamorphosis and that of our club committees and golf captains. In the past, managers were at one regional meeting, then were gone the next – a revolving door of note! Committees were setting managers up to fail or were hiring weak managers who could act as the fall guy for erroneous committee decisions. Many committee members had good intentions but simply lacked the day-to-day expertise in the club industry.

Things have changed. Club memberships have become astute enough not to just elect the most popular member. Instead, they are appointing leaders of industry who can provide the vision and guidance to a competent

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club manager. They are also smart enough to hire (and finally pay appropriately) a chief executive officer (CEO) who has the experience to implement this vision. The committee is learning not to micro-manage the business.

I am proud of the many committee members who have seen the light and allowed the penny to drop (the penny can now remain in the club's bank account!). By hiring top-gun management and letting them get on with



Bill Taylor, director of operations at Atlantic Beach Golf Club.

their work also allows the committee members to enjoy. Their vision can then become the committee's main ambition and focus.

It is our aim to attract a future generation into the role of club management. Unfortunately I cannot entice them with the never-ending work schedule or with the benefits of being on the receiving end of an inebriated complainant. But I can honestly convey the genuine contentment that one feels when you improve member satisfaction and create a unique spirit within a club.

The future manager has been afforded the educational tools required and a committee system that will allow him or her to flourish. The charge of energy one receives from exceeding member expectations can make for a rewarding lifetime career path indeed.

Bill Taylor is the director of operations at Atlantic Beach Golf Club in the Western Cape and he owns Club Innovations, a club management and consultancy company. He has been involved in the management of 24 hospitality properties on three continents over 19 years and sits on the national committee of the CMASA.

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Different strokes

GCM spoke to Craig Nell, club manager of Atlantic Beach Golf Club, and Thys Grobbelaar, club treasurer at Theewaterskloof Golf Club.

Craig Nell, Atlantic Beach Golf Club

How did you get into the golfing industry?

I began my career in the golf industry at Atlantic Beach Golf Club in 2000. My initial introduction was as the head of department for the food and beverage division at the clubhouse. I come from a food and beverage background and have been in the industry for 18 years.

The experience of dealing with guests and customers in several operations (ranging from five-star hotels to intimate restaurants) has given me the knowledge, skills and confidence to work in a personal environment. I believe the golf industry is perhaps one of the most personal environments one can operate in. The role of club manager is diversified and the manager needs to understand marketing, finance, membership, house-keeping, security, golf operations and course management. Many of these skills and experiences are replicated in the hospitality industry, which does make the transition to golf easier.

What is Atlantic Beach's management philosophy?

We have always aimed to hire good people who want to share in the dream of making the club and course the best it can be. Our management style is open and diplomatic, allowing each of the department heads to share in the enthusiasm of growth and development. New projects that have been decided upon are openly communicated. We encourage the department heads to look at their own departments and run them as if they owned them; on many occasions they are also the authors of their own budgets and they share in the praise and problems we all encounter. As manager I see my role as one of guidance, support and loyalty. I value my staff and each club member, as they have given us the tools to make many of our programmes, ideas and projects work. I would say the key is communication.

What major changes have you noticed in the industry?

Members are demanding more from their clubs, such as better restaurant facilities, championship courses and personal communication, and I agree with those expectations. Of course, this has forced many clubs to reassess the way in which they do business. As the clubs raise the hospitality bar, members will expect the same, if not better, offerings the next time round. Consistency is, therefore, sometimes the most difficult goal to achieve. My most important tools for running my club are my staff, and they need to be empowered to take the required operational decisions in order to make the experience pleasant for our members. Your job as manager is to keep it within the tight budget set at the beginning of the year.

What are the most important management lessons you have learnt in golf?

Communicate and listen to the needs of your members. Keep a history of your events and plot your management strategies across the board. Start with your yearly budget and work your way from there. Constantly motivate your staff and impress your members. You also need to communicate your progress and let your members know that you are aware of the challenges and that you are making progress.

What are the biggest challenges facing the manager of a golf course?

The erosion of the membership base – we are all in the subscriptions game and that must be the driving force of your business. Members have to constantly see the value they are receiving for their membership. You want them to be loyal members who will promote your name in the marketplace, grow your base and allow your business to be profitable.

What advice would you give a new manager at a club located in a more rural area (such as Theewaterskloof) that is also estate based?



Craig Nell

Date of birth: 6 March 1971

Place of birth: Durban

Interests: Spearfishing, road running and reading.

How would a good friend describe you?

Loyal, trustworthy and too scarce.

How would your wife describe you?

Loving!

There is a saying I was taught by my mentor: "Plan your work and work your plan." Set your policies, procedures and minimum working standards early in your tenure as manager. This will ensure that your staff understand what the goals of your club are. Offer them a road map – without that you will not know what you need to achieve. Probably the most valuable piece of information I could offer a new manager in a small community would be to learn your members' names.

In your experience, what are the three most common or mistakes made by club managers?

Lack of communication, not leading by example and not having a road map.

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INTERVIEW

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Thys Grobbelaar, Theewaterskloof Golf Club

Theewaterskloof is somewhat off the beaten track. Describe the challenges and benefits of your course's location?

It's only an hour from Cape Town, but admittedly most guys don't want to drive 100km to play a round of golf, have a few beers and then drive home... over the mountain! Our course has some of the best greens in the Boland and our greenkeeper has taken his job seriously. It is on the edge of the main dam servicing Cape Town so we're in a good spot for water, and we also use recycled water from the estate. As the estate is so far from the city, crime is much lower – houses don't need burglar bars and people leave their front doors open.

What upgrades have you done recently?

We only have nine holes, and the tees for the 18-hole layout were very close to one another, but we recently built new tees which has allowed us to change it around.

How busy is the course?

Our membership has doubled over the last two years, and during December we're packed, but through the rest of the year it's pretty quiet – there's no need to book! You could effectively just pitch up and play. We're happy to have an excellent nine-hole course rather than trying for 18, and we don't have enough rounds a year to support 18 holes.

If you could ask another estate club for any advice, what would you ask them?

How do they manage the relationship

between the golf club and the homeowners who are non-golfers?

Thys Grobbelaar

Place of birth: Cape Town

Background: I lived in Joburg for 27 years, working in commercial property management and have played golf socially for the last 15 years. It's easy to get hooked.

Interests: Golf has been a hobby and now it's become work – I hope I can still play enough. I play about three times a week

How would a good friend describe you?

Probably laid back. I used to be called Mr Cool a few years back.

Look out for pests

Danny Maritz, golf course maintenance director of Turftek, gives tips on how to avoid damage caused by summer pests.

The warm weather has finally arrived, and everyone can now look forward to the Christmas holidays and the endless pleasures synonymous with our beautiful summers.

For greenkeepers, however, there is 'no rest for the wicked'. An eagle eye is needed at this time of the year as conditions become favourable for numerous troublesome pests. They are defined as external organisms that negatively influence the quality of turf grasses. Examples of these pests are fungi, insects, weeds and, last but not least, enthusiastic golfers. For the purposes of this article, the latter will be excluded!

When temperatures are high with increased relative humidity, conditions for fungal growth become ideal – beware Sclerotinia, which is more commonly known as Dollar Spot. The pathogens survive winter in the crowns and roots of plants and when temperatures reach 16°C, the fungus awakens from dormancy. It will begin to wreak havoc at optimal temperatures of 21°C to 27°C, with the distinctive 'scarring' marks becoming visible. Deep thatch left on mown lawns will greatly increase the risk of severe fungal outbreaks.



Unfortunately, Dollar Spot has, over the years, become resistant to many chemical treatments. A programme needs to be followed which involves alternating a cocktail of control products which work either on a contact or systemic basis.

When it comes to insects, the most destructive culprit at this time of year is the Aphodius beetle. The beetle itself is harmless, but the white grub larvae which emerge from the eggs in the grass are far less innocuous. Hatching within a few weeks, they feed voraciously on dead organic matter,

decimating the grass roots in the process. Typical symptoms are patches of dried-out, discoloured grass on your greens. To check for infestations, dig a pitchfork into the grass and lift it up. If it comes away like a sheet of paper, chances are that the grubs have been at work!

The best time to check for Aphodius beetles and grub outbreaks is under lights at night. At the first sign of the beetles, begin spraying immediately. The grass is treated with a pungent chemical which will deter them from settling and laying their eggs.

Planning around public holidays

Andrew Wilson explains what steps to put in place to ensure that your club still runs smoothly over the holiday period.

THE FESTIVE SEASON IS UPON US, which means that your club will be even busier as your members, their guests and visitors decide to walk off their over-indulgence with a few extra rounds of golf. You also have to cope with four public holidays in less than a month. What does the law say about working on public holidays and how can you plan to continue delivering top-class service to your members, guests and visitors during the busy holiday season?

Legal issues

Unless your staff are members of the National Defence Force, National Intelligence Agency or South African Secret Service, their working conditions fall under the Basic Conditions of Employment Act (the Act). There are further exclusions to the section of the Act that deal with public holidays:

- Senior management, defined as those people who have the authority to hire, discipline and dismiss employees and to represent the employer internally and externally.
- Sales staff who travel and regulate their own working hours.
- Workers who work less than 24 hours per month.
- Workers earning in excess of R115 572 per year.

The Act states that you may not force employees to work on a public holiday unless you have an agreement with them. You therefore need to ensure that you have included a suitable public holiday agreement with each employee in their terms and conditions of employment or in your policies and procedures manual.

Simply put, if a member of your team does not work on a public holiday and the public holiday falls on a day on which he or she would ordinarily work, you must pay them what they would have normally earned for that day. If they do work on the public holiday, you must pay them at least double what they would have earned for that day.

If a shift worker works a shift that falls

Key points for the holiday season

- Plan well in advance to make sure you have the right cover.
- Secure public holiday agreements with your staff through either their contracts of employment or the policies and procedures manual.
- Working on a public holiday is by agreement only.
- Workers must be paid extra for working on a public holiday.

partly on a public holiday and partly on another day, the whole shift is deemed to have been worked on the public holiday. But if the greater part of the shift was worked on the other day and not the public holiday, the whole shift is deemed to have been worked on the other day.

Religious holidays and leave require sensitive handling especially in our current climate of appreciation and acceptance of diversity.

Casual staff

Your biggest challenge over the public holiday periods will be to ensure that you have appropriate cover for key positions and can offer the required service standards. Most clubs have a pool of casuals that can be called on to fill vacancies. The ideal situation is that you have a large enough pool of casual staff who you can trust and who are well trained and experienced enough to cover for your permanent staff on public holidays. Building a pool of reliable and competent casuals is first prize as it enables you to allow your permanent staff to take time off on public holidays as and when they occur.

Religious public holidays

Must you give your non-Christian staff leave on their religious holidays? There is no provision in the Act for religiously based public holidays. The fact that certain public holidays have a religious significance for some is pure coincidence.

The fact that Christmas Day, Good Friday and Easter Sunday are deemed to be public holidays may have religious significance for some, but they are statutory public holidays and available to all workers irrespective of religious beliefs. There is therefore no possibility of claims of discrimination on religious grounds.

The Act does, however, allow for what they call 'exchanging public holidays'. This means that, by agreement, a staff member may choose to work on a public holiday that has no religious significance to them, such as Good Friday, in exchange for being allowed time off for one of their religious holidays such as Yom Kippur. This can be a win-win situation as you then have a permanent staff member working a normal day when the majority of your permanent staff are off.

Religious holidays and leave require sensitive handling especially in our current climate of appreciation and acceptance of diversity – it is essential for you to be sensitive to different religious beliefs and allow staff time off, within reason, to pursue their beliefs. This time off can be in the form of annual leave, unpaid leave or time swap.

For comments or suggestions on GCM content, email Philippa Byron on philippa@gan.co.za

Make a plan

Precise planning is a key element in ensuring high-quality course maintenance standards. Darren Berry suggests a step-by-step programme to ensure top results.

A WELL-PLANNED GOLF COURSE maintenance operation is the only way to ensure consistent high-quality maintenance standards. All aspects of the maintenance programme, from fertiliser and chemical applications to labour management, must follow a predetermined structure.

Consistency

Consistent maintenance standards are one of the most important aspects of any golf course maintenance operation. The most professionally managed golf courses produce maintenance standards that do not vary from one day to the next. Each day is regarded as being just as important as any other and the maintenance standards reflect this philosophy.

Consistency can never be effectively achieved without a well-structured, meticulously planned maintenance operation. To reproduce consistent results on a daily basis, the maintenance crew must follow a set plan which details each crew member's responsibilities.

Consistency does not only affect daily results, but must also be viewed as a long-term goal. Consistency over a period of time from one season to the next or from year to year is just as important.

Consistent maintenance standards over an extended period will help to ensure the club's long-term success by encouraging steady revenue and a desire by golfers to play the course.

Proactive maintenance

Taking a proactive approach to golf course maintenance can sometimes mean the difference between success and failure.

Proactive disease management, fertility programmes or attention to detail all assist the superintendent to overcome or avoid problems before they are even noticed. A proactive maintenance programme can only be implemented in a well-structured environment, where cultural inputs are planned ahead of time and implemented on a programmed basis. A *proactive* maintenance operation

produces consistent, predictable results.

A *reactive* maintenance operation is the opposite, producing inconsistent results and unpredictable and uncontrollable maintenance standards, and should be avoided at all costs.

Communication

Communication must form an integral part of the maintenance programme. Effective planning is impossible without good communication between all stakeholders. Golfers and club members must communicate their desires, club managers must communicate instructions and schedules, and superintendents must incorporate all the available information, then formulate it into a working plan and communicate it effectively to the golf course staff.

The planning process must include communication from anyone who is affected by the maintenance standards of the golf course. Not taking all aspects into account could lead to important information being overlooked and not included in the maintenance plan – the drawn-up plan must use all the necessary information available. Formal and informal meetings between all those concerned must take place on a regular basis to facilitate the sharing of information. The flow of information must be maintained at all costs.

Flexibility

The importance of a well-structured and planned maintenance operation cannot be overstated, but it must also remain flexible.

A golf course maintenance operation has to take many variables into account, including unpredictable weather conditions. Flexibility in the maintenance plan is vital to ensure that the superintendent can deal with any curve-balls that might be thrown at him or her by the weather or other outside influences. Contingency plans must exist to deal with any eventuality. Even when you are forced to adjust your maintenance programme, a good plan will ensure that it gets back on track quickly and that the task at hand is dealt with efficiently.

Practical implementation

Some of the most important aspects of the maintenance programme necessary to apply a well-planned approach include:

1. Pest management

A good pest management plan must always be based on a sound Integrated Pest Management (IPM) programme. A sound IPM programme utilises proactive cultural and chemical inputs to manage pest populations so that they do not detrimentally affect the health of the turf or the level of playability. This programme is always based on a good plan that takes the needs of the turf, the golfer and the environment into account.

2. Fertility and cultural inputs

In a similar fashion to the pest management strategy, fertility and cultural inputs must also be made on a proactive basis to ensure consistent, high-quality turf standards. The planning of these programmes should cover more than just the basic application interval, but must include the changing seasonal factors, soil, water and leaf analysis and any other information that may affect this area of the maintenance operation.

3. Staff organisation

To encourage consistent results from the golf course staff, each crew member must be well informed and trained for his or her task, and must also be aware of the overall maintenance plan and strategy. It is vital that all staff members work towards a common goal. This can be achieved by devising a well-structured, well-implemented and well-communicated plan which will ensure that each member of the team is aware of what he or she must accomplish, and how their actions affect other team members and the maintenance operation as a whole.

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