

Service with a Smile — from the North (and West) Region

Customer service begins with a well-trained staff, but there are ample opportunities to serve your customers in a variety of positive ways.

BY LARRY GILHULY

The game of golf is played on the golf course, yet when one thinks of the term *customer service* in relation to the game, the image of a golf professional or clubhouse personnel comes to mind. This does not necessarily need to be the case, as those who work on the maintenance crew of the golf course are just as instrumental in providing good service to the customer as those who have one-on-one contact in the pro shop.

For example, can you name the two easiest ways that a golf course maintenance staff member can provide the least expensive and yet effective method of customer service? A smile and the wave of a hand — two simple gestures that are sometimes forgotten. Although a well-trained and interested maintenance staff represents the easiest way that the customer (golfer) can be serviced during a round of golf, there are many other good (and a few bad)

examples viewed over the past 25 years of visits on behalf of the USGA Green Section. Let's look at a few on both sides of this topic.

HAVE A BALL ON US!

Over the past 40 years of working in the golf industry, there are three irrefutable facts that have been observed:

1. Golfers occasionally hit errant golf balls.



Extra mowing patterns in the areas viewed from the clubhouse greatly enhance the “wow” view for the members and their guests at the Broadmoor Golf Club, Seattle, Wash.



The use of Nelson the dog as the ghost writer for the monthly newsletter at Manito Golf & Country Club (Spokane, Wash.) is a great example of providing a unique perspective with a touch of humor.

2. Golfers sometimes lose said errant golf balls.

3. Maintenance personnel find a lot of golf balls, therefore . . .

Have your maintenance staff toss a golf ball to a player if they see the player lose a golf ball. This simple example of customer service really costs nothing to the staff member, but it provides the player with a great and lasting memory of this act of kindness. It also is a great way for your maintenance staff to interact in a positive way at a time when the player may not be in the best of moods. The result reported by numerous golf course superintendents over many years has always been positive with this simple program.

PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR CUSTOMERS

Although a well-trained staff that produces quality results is the foundation of the type of service that is provided to your customers, the exact opposite can occur if they are not paying attention to the golfers on the course! Though seldom seen in travels across the western United States over the past 25 years, an example of what would be considered less than desirable customer service where two staff members

decide to discuss a topic with both maintenance units on the green while a player in the foggy background waits to hit his shot. Even if moving to the side may slow down the job, the player should have the right of way as a fundamental part of good customer service.

PRODUCE A SHOW WITH HOW YOU MOW!

Good customer service can come in many different forms. For example, Sean McDonough, superintendent at the Broadmoor Golf Club in Seattle, Washington, uses his 10th and 18th fairways to create dramatic “wow factor” mowing patterns. Though the remainder of the golf course also is in wonderful condition, McDonough knows how powerful this visual form of customer service affects the members who sit in the clubhouse for lunch, after a round of golf, or when entertaining their guests.

Distinct definition of playing areas through mowing practices is a visual effect that generally is well received by players, and customer service also can be enhanced by how certain golf

course areas are mowed based on the type of grass. For example, during the past several years, seashore paspalum has shown many positive virtues in Hawaii while displaying one major problem — it is “sticky” around greens when it is mowed too high (golf balls do not release toward the hole easily). Robert Mederios, superintendent at the Kiahuna Golf Club, has led the charge of several golf courses that are simply addressing this negative and turning it into a positive with lower mowing heights extended 10-15 yards around the greens to get his surrounds out of a “sticky” situation. This also has had the added advantage of making this grass more competitive against invading weeds, and the cleanliness is exceptional at mowing heights in the 0.250-0.350" range. Finally, golfers now have multiple options on their short shots instead of the previous wedge shot that is seen so commonly on most golf courses.

NELSON — A DOG WITH A SENSE OF HUMOR

There is no question that one major portion of customer service is com-



The desired location of bunker rakes is just one of many player etiquette topics discussed in the short DVD produced for the entire membership at Meridian Valley Country Club, Kent, Wash.



An interested maintenance staff looks on as Stephanie Kono wins a 23-hole match at the 2007 U.S. Junior Girls at Tacoma Country & Golf Club, Tacoma, Wash. Great customer service comes from a maintenance staff that is well trained and interested in the playing surface they provide.

munication. Many forms of communication are used around the clubhouse, with one of the most common being the course or club newsletter. Tim Ansett, CGCS, Manito Golf and Country Club (Washington), changed his format of delivering some upcoming golf course news to the membership by asking his border collie (Nelson) to “write” the newsletter. Nelson obliged with one of the most memorable articles ever written by a dog about his many observations in his first few years as the golf course goose dog (http://www.usga.org/turf/regional_updates/regional_reports/northwest/08-30-2007.html). Several months after Nelson’s exposé, this type of innovative and humorous communication was still discussed in a very positive way and offers another effective way to service your customers.

GOLF COURSE ETIQUETTE, MERIDIAN VALLEY STYLE

Meridian Valley Country Club in Kent, Washington, had a dilemma noted at many golf courses with the influx of new players to the game — less than desirable player etiquette and care of the course. Golf Course Superintendent Craig Benson and his Green Committee decided to do something about it. With the help of one of their talented members, they created a low-cost, yet effective DVD that demonstrates the club’s policies in regard to checking in at the pro shop, the practice facility, golf cart driving, pull cart usage, ball mark repair, divot repair, proper use and placement of bunker rakes, and broken tees. What started as a few copies for new members soon turned into a copy for every member. It wasn’t long before this effort made a

major difference at the golf course, as members are now far more cognizant of providing their own service to their fellow members.

There are numerous ways to serve your golfing customers, including some of the previous items and many more. In summary, the maintenance staff inevitably has a great impact on how your golfers may or may not enjoy their experience. Enjoying the outdoors, time with your friends, and hitting that seldom-seen sweet spot are certainly all part of the experience, but sometimes it is a simple smile and a friendly wave of the hand from the superintendent or the staff that is the most appreciated.

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