

The Not So Rare Conversation

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"Chris, these greens are awful - they're just terrible, can't you do something about them?"

"Awful greens? that's not good, Bill, what's the problem?"

"I told you they're awful."

"Bill, that's certainly not what we like to hear. Anything specific?"

"Yeah, Chris, they're slow, like playin' on shag carpet."

"Well, that's never any good. Hey, do you have a minute?"

"Yeah, I suppose."

"Let's take a ride out and look at a green or two. Which one was particularly slow?"

"Oh, well, ah, OK, 18 was terrible."

Reluctantly, Bill takes a ride with Chris to #18 green where they stimp the green.

"You know, Bill, it looks like they're runnin' about 9'4". Our standard is 9 - 10 feet, we're at the low end here, but still within our range, don't you think?"

"Well, ah, yeah, I guess so. I suppose that's right. But, you know I had a beer a coupla weeks ago that didn't taste right."

Club members, like Bill, from time -to - time may subjectively critique many aspects of the club. What General Manager Chris did was to take the subjective golf course critique and reframe it objectively. Members can still argue over the objective, but it's much easier to defend the fact that 9'4" is within the set standard of 9 - 10' than that the greens are *not* "awful". And in the end a rational person will understand that it may have been some problem other than the playing surface for their putting struggles. Chris had confidence in the superintendent's skill and consistency of the course conditions; however, even if the reading was less than the established standard Chris could have easily admitted that they were below standard and assured Bill that it would be corrected. Either way, there will be added confidence in the program. Bill would spread the word that he was right about the greens being slow, but that he had gotten Chris to make sure that the speeds were corrected. If the greens were up to speed it's likely that the conversation would have ended right there, but Bill will know that consistency was met and he is likely to support the staff should the conversation within his group drift to course maintenance. Of course, Bill took back his territory by subjectively referring to his taste for beer - not much Chris can argue about one person's taste over another.

Standard operating procedures are ages old and successful for many reasons. Consistency, be it the speed of a green, height of fairway cut, bunker depth or any of the other measurable areas of the course is very important to the success by which a course is measured. By quantifying the

standards we are allowing ourselves to take the very subjective and move it towards the objective, which is more easily defensible and understood. In fact, once the standards are known and publicized very few issues tend to arise in a questioning manner.

Most superintendents and managers have produced their own operating procedures. The process of quantifying the procedures is an exceptional experience for members if they are encouraged to participate. Asking members to help determine the standards makes the final product far more important to the club. Members who participate in the decision making for the standards will be wonderful advocates for the club and will be highly loyal when questions arise. Of course, the superintendent has to be able to maintain the standards, so ensuring that the final product is reasonable and attainable is important.

Try to re-frame your standards into the objective. The USGA is a *the* source for research, ideas or the standards themselves. Please look to your association when creating manuals and standards, you'll find the sources enlightening.

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