

SHOOTING THE BREEZE

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STRI

Confucius say

In life there are two universal truths...

1. No-one else can scratch your own itch better than you!
2. You can't tickle yourself!

Treat this article as light relief. It's about the role of an agronomist.

We come in peace

In general I don't think that greenkeepers really get the idea of an agronomist until they experience a good one. To the unacquainted there is seems to be a natural reluctance to let an agronomist in to review the situation. To quote a greenkeeper friend "there's always the chance that he'll turn out to be either a preacher or a prat!". Or both. It may be worse, they may actually know what they're on about! Be sure of this, a good agronomist just aims to help. No other agenda. What's the future in making enemies?

The tweed jackets?

STRI agronomists are a particular brand. We rely on a tradition of observation backed up with scientific learning. We view the truth as a good starting point. On visits we observe, discuss, review progress, make recommendations and then go away to write the report. Our aim is to agree the future objectives necessary to bring improvements and then outline the strategies best suited to achieve them. The report should make the plan clear to all interested parties. Our recommendations use tried and tested methods and we steer clear of snake oil miracle cures. We all know that greenkeeping is about doing the work.

Part of the process

The process of a visit is quite interesting and it should not be feared as a test. I will need to know the details of the existing plan to get up to speed but this is more about breaking the ice. If I can get everyone talking openly then we'll get somewhere. Free and open-minded discussion between interested parties can reveal far more than the individuals on their own ever could. We need to get to the truth of the matter. Good visits reveal more because they tap

into everyone's knowledge. It's called "shooting the breeze" and all you've really got to do is buy in. There is no value in me behaving like a preacher but we do need to stick to sound principles to retain a level head. Your agronomist should be suitably qualified in matters of the mind.

The answer is you

So, what about the two universal truths? Something about scratching and tickling. During the visit, your job as the greenkeeper is to tell me what it is that bugs you. Not the run of the mill stuff, the something about the course that really gets under your skin. My job as the agronomist is to find both the cause and solution to the problem and quite often this means tickling it out of you! You're the one who knows the course better than anyone but maybe you can't see the wood for the trees. Maybe you're a part of the problem. Not in a bad way, but in a way that makes clear sight cloudy. A fresh eye, a different perspective and a little tickle may be just the thing!

Talk is cheap

When I hear of a greenkeeper bragging that he "doesn't need any help from an agronomist" or claiming that "the report simply wrote down all the things I said", I feel disappointed. The agronomist has failed. The greenkeeper may have experienced a bad agronomist but he may also have ignored the value of a good one. I bring all my learning as well as the experience of 15 years and hundreds of different courses to the visit and if I can't clearly show my value then I have wasted all our time. I am too busy to waste time. Life's too short to waste time! I probably didn't give enough credit.

Fixing a hole

Forget your ego. All we do is talk about *your* pride and joy (the course) and try to help you make it better. There's nothing to worry about if you choose your agronomist carefully, indeed you have everything to gain. The visit should inspire you and the report should enlighten everyone else. When your greens chairman, the committee, the owner and golfers understand the maintenance/development plan they are far more likely to support you and value your efforts. With progress comes praise and with praise comes respect. Understand the merit in someone coming in and telling the club how good you are. Credit where credit's due. Also, as time goes by and relationships build the progress begins to accelerate. Trust me.

Greenkeeping is a skilled profession that can be easily dismissed by the ignorant. We don't let them. The STRI advisory service was established over 75 years ago to help golf greenkeepers and we are still as passionate about good greenkeeping as ever. Remember, you can't tickle yourself!

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