Reality Check or Stating the Obvious
The net number of golfers is not increasing anymore. Many reasons why.
Standards Are High and Everything Costs More!
No catalyst for budget increases. Clubs do not have pricing power. They are competing for a shrinking pool of golfers.
A great time to be a golfer.
Reducing Budgets

• All USGA Green Section agronomists contributed.
• All items may not apply to southeastern golf courses.
• Most effective when paired with a USGA Green Section visit.
• Communication is the key
Saving Money vs. Cutting Costs

- Saving money means spending less than normal without changing quality.
- Cutting costs means reducing expenses and reducing quality. Impact may be immediate or long term.
Putting Greens

• Reduced frequency of changing holes.
• Holes changed by individual mowing the greens. Hole changer mounted on triplex.
• More growth regulation
• Higher mowing heights to reduce stress, apply fewer fungicides, and have more margin for unusual environmental extremes.
Putting Greens

• Alternate mowing and rolling.
• Less frequent double mowing.
• More triplex mowing with walker for clean up pass.
• Less expensive fertility program. For example, use urea plus iron for spoon feeding instead of specialty programs.
Bunkers

• Reduced frequency of raking all the bunkers and an increased frequency of touch up or spot raking.

• Increased frequency of mechanized rakes and reduction of hand raking for clubs that historically have hand raked bunkers.

• Elimination of excessive or unnecessary bunkers. Mounding or depressions installed instead. Requires some investment in time and resources initially.
Bunkers

• Treat perimeters and banks with growth regulators to reduce edging/mowing frequency.

• Extend the life of bunker rakes with fiberglass handles with the installation of plastic sleeves from vinylguardgolf.com.
Fairways

• Decreased frequency of fairway mowing.
• Increased use of growth regulators to reduce clippings and support reduced mowing frequency.
• More reliance on fertigation. Nitrogen applied in small amounts frequently is more efficient than granular applications and a pound of nitrogen can be stretched farther with fertigation.
Fairways

- Elimination of all nutrients except nitrogen for one season or so.
- Reduction of total nitrogen applied.
- Use more iron instead of nitrogen.
- Increased use of large pull behind gang mowers.
- Implementation of the most efficient mowing patterns to save on fuel and time.
Fairways

- No collection of clippings.
- Use of generic herbicides.
- Less expensive herbicide program.
- Take advantage of early order program for fairway and rough products.
Rough

• Less frequent mowing of rough.
• Lower total fertility in rough or fertilize only high traffic zones.
• Fewer herbicides applied.
• Skip preemergence application if weed seed bank is minimal and weeds have been controlled successfully for years.
Rough

• Eliminate intermediate cut.
• Lower cut of primary rough and mow less frequently
• Maintain a wide band of (low) primary rough around each fairway. Have a higher cut (4-6”) and less frequently mowed area of rough farther away.
Rough

- Create no mow areas if they are out of play.
- Decrease intensity of herbicide applications and labor in natural areas.
- Mow with gang mowers instead of self contained rotaries.
- Take out mulch, install more shade tolerant grass.
Tees

- Eliminate topdressing for a season or two.
- Eliminate walk mowing.
- No overseeding.
- Abandon square tee configuration and round off edges with a triplex.
- Move tee markers less frequently.
- Reduce fertility.
- Mow less frequently.
- Eliminate overseeding bermudagrass in winter.
Course Amenities

• Elimination of on course water coolers. Inform golfers of the need to buy water or fill their own water bottles prior to play.
• Eliminate landscape plantings and flowers on the golf course.
• Shrink landscape plantings at the club house.
Budgeting and Planning

• Conduct time and motion studies to quantify what it costs to do everything on the golf course. Be sure to include materials. This information is invaluable for planning.

• Consider gap maintenance to increase productivity through less disruption by golfers.

• Begin workweek on Saturday. Better able to manage hours and avoid overtime.
Trees

- Remove trees that are a hindrance to turfgrass health.
- Do not trim trees that need to be removed.
- When removing trees, hire a land clearing company. They are often 1/3 the price.
- Root prune to decrease water use in rough.
Water Hazard Maintenance

• Maintain to the margin of the hazard. Eliminate string trimming inside the hazard or reduce it to once per season.
Maintenance Down the Middle

• Keep the focus on the middle of the course. Commit to having fantastic tees, fairways, and greens even if it means lowering standards in the rough, the woods, and the bunkers.
Labor

• Hire fewer summer employees.
• Eliminate or reduce special projects.
• Borrow or share equipment for unique situations.
Labor

- Study the zone maintenance concept. Employees are all cross trained. Each zone leader can mow greens, change holes, rake bunkers, change tee markers, empty trash and replace water jug. This is more efficient and burns less fuel.
- Implement the buddy system where two workers ride in one cart to reduce fuel consumption.
- Eliminate overtime.
Golfer Control Issues

• Control golf carts more strictly to reduce wear and the need for nitrogen and water.
• Reduce shotgun starts unless an outing is generating revenue for the club.
• Delay opening the course in the spring by a week.
Equipment

• Keep blades sharp.
• Know the clip rate of every mower and optimum speed of the mower to produce the best cut.
• Determine fleet management option (lease vs. purchase) that provides best cash flow.
Irrigation

• Reduce total amount of water applied. There is a partial kilowatt hour behind every drop of water applied.

• Understand how the electric utility charges for power and then operate the pumps in the most efficient way.
Miscellaneous

• Contact local electricity provider and schedule a commercial audit for the maintenance facility and clubhouse.

• Evaluate the golf cart charging protocol and be sure this is the most cost effective way to charge the golf carts.

• Be sure to apply to the IRS to claim the Off-Road Fuel Tax Credit for unleaded gasoline used in golf course equipment.
Miscellaneous

- Install motion activated light switches in restrooms and break room.
- Keep maintenance facility two degrees warmer in summer and two degrees cooler in winter.
- Evaluate the number of phone lines entering the clubhouse and maintenance facility. Reduce if possible.
Miscellaneous

• Modify uniform service. Consider purchasing two pairs of pants and shorts each year for employees. Install washing machine and dryer in maintenance facility.

• Do not provide Styrofoam cups in the breakroom. Buy each employee a thermal mug one time only.

• Study the most effective way to store equipment to minimize time spent in morning getting equipment ready to go.
What Can You Do?

• Option 1: Battle and get frustrated that “they don’t understand.”

• Option 2: Step up and ask what can you do to alleviate the stress that is afflicting those you work for.
Attitude is Key.

• The golf superintendent has the most working knowledge and ability to influence golf conditions than anyone else.
Keep in Mind That Ultimately, It's About Playing the Game and Having Fun.
Thank You!!