

Professional Services and what they mean to you & I on an everyday basis.

The topic could lead one to say, "Who needs salesman during these tough economic times? I don't have the time, energy or the money at this time". Or the topic could lead one to say Thank God for outside Professionals to help during these tough economic times.

During the past 3 months I have visited 3 countries, given 16 seminars, and been invited to visit with Golf Course Superintendents, Green Committees & Owners at over 60 golf courses. The response from those struggling is normally the negative response. The successful courses normally have time for outside professionals.

For 45 of my 69 years on this earth I have been in business for myself. ISTRC which I founded almost 20 years ago to provide physical property information to Golf Courses and Athletic Fields is my third business to offer services to professionals. My first company provided Professional services to the medical field [I sold this first company in 1980 and retired, or so I thought] and my second company provided Professional Services to the Hotel and commercial building industry. All of my companies have been successful because I hired good people who could **think** and **assist** in the companies' growth. I have always welcomed outside Professional Service people into my offices as they are the source of information that I never had time to accumulate on my own, and still don't.

Of the sixty + courses that I have had the privilege to visit over the last 90 days, four come to mind very vividly.

The first is a course in Georgia that is as organized as any course in the country. Everyone there knows their responsibilities and when their task for that part of the day is finished they immediately help someone else with their task. They are organized. I started my 11th year there this spring assisting with and supplying physical properties information on their greens. ISTRC is just one of the many professional companies that this course uses. This course is run like and is a **very successful business.**

The second is a complex of five courses also located in Georgia that has been extremely hard hit by these economic times because of their tie in to real estate. Again there was no panic and cuts have been made in an orderly manner. The entire staff is organized and knows their responsibilities. The quality of the golf courses has not changed. I visited all five courses with the director of maintenance during my visit and the quality of the product they are offering to their members and outside golfers is at least a nine on a scale of 1 to 10. This course is run like and is a **very successful business.**

The third course is located in the Midwest and is a fairly new course, just starting its third year. This course is also in excellent condition and could continue to improve if the GM and GCS can come together and work like a team. The GM at this facility feels that he is the boss and everyone on the staff works **for** him. What a waste of assets when there is division of knowledge and a lack of cooperation between responsible parties. The GM & Club Professional scheduled a tournament this fall without taking into consideration the aerifying schedule that they had approved for the fall. If Mother Nature

turns nasty next year and the greens stress, the GCS will be blamed. The course conditions and everything that has been achieved thus far could be set back and as the condition of the course deteriorates the cash flow will follow the same path. Does the GM at this course use outside and internal Professional Services? NO!!!!!! Nobody wins. This course is **not** run like a successful business and is **NOT a successful business**, although it could be.

The fourth course is also a Midwest course. Upper Private Country Club. I have worked with this course for almost 20 years, through five superintendents and an untold number of General Managers. This course was rebuilt a few years ago and is doing very well, both from a course condition stand point and member satisfaction. I had an opportunity to visit in private with the GM who I will refer to as Mr. K. Mr. K had worked in food and beverage prior to being asked to take over the duties of General Manager in 2003. At the time Mr. K took over the duties of General Manager the club was about 1 million in debt. Today the club has a balance sheet that most successful corporations would envy with almost 3 million in the bank. What Mr. K does differently from many General Managers in the golf industry is that he runs his club like a business. Many things were discussed during our visit but four stand out more than the others.

1. [A]. Mr. K got all of the department heads together and said that he wanted their input on a regular basis during their monthly meeting, and that each person would have a short period of time during these monthly meetings to interject ideas that might benefit the club.

[B]. Each department would be asked to do a little more with a little less.

2. Tuesdays were very slow in the restaurant and the suggestion was made to close the restaurant on Tuesdays. Mr. K said let's try \$5.00 hamburger night on Tuesdays. Now reservations are hard to get on Tuesday evenings and while families eat their \$5.00 hamburgers they are washing them down with expensive bottles of wine. [Tuesdays are now very profitable]
3. This is the comment I personally like the most: The members who own the club are entitled to a profit from their club which will be placed in reserve for emergencies instead of assessments whenever the club needs money. Mr. K looks at the club as an 8 million dollar a year business and the members of the club are entitled to a 10% return, just like in any business. Last year the fairways needed an investment of \$170,000 and a new chiller for the restaurant ran another \$250,000 for a total of around \$500,000 with a few other odds and ends thrown in. After the \$500,000 was taken out of the bank account the balance dropped to around \$3,000,000. 6 years from -\$1,000,000 to + \$3,000,000. Bring on next year.
4. **THE GOLF COURSE IS OUR MOST VALUABLE ASSET AND MUST BE MAINTAINED** is the statement that Mr. K. made that had the most impact on me.

Mr. K uses all of his resources to help him make decisions. Professional Services both internal and external are requested and treated with respect. **A Very, Very Successful Business.**

A Golf Course Superintendent from another course said to me that the reason Mr. K. is successful, "Is because he does not fit into the system". What a wonderful and sad compliment in regards to our industry.

David L. Doherty / Copyright 2009

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