



JOB SPECIFICATION FOR SECRETARY

Stuart Phipps writes about Enmore Park's David Weston, who believes that secretaries should take total responsibility for the running of the club.

Secretary At Work: November 1997 *(reviewed August 2011)*

Skirmishing amongst those who run golf often surrounds the post of Secretary. Stewards seeking a way out of the cellar, golf professionals looking to lose the tedium of trade, sometimes even greenkeepers keen to keep their nails clean: from time to time all view the Secretary's position of authority with a jealous eye. Conversely, some Secretaries feel that, were they given responsibility for the golf course, the steady scream of members' complaints would be throttled back, costs would be reduced and staff turnover would come under control. The grass is always greener.....!

Properly, the boundaries of the Secretary's job are defined by the Club management, and there is a new trend amongst private members' clubs to make it all embracing. In proprietary clubs this is normal, for the success of the operation is judged solely by profitability, (not by members' satisfaction, or whatever), and so the profit responsible Chief Executive will be put in charge of everything. So is the private members' club Secretary to become the General Manager, and will he have to add expertise in agronomy to his other skills? Perhaps, but for many clubs this would mean a break with tradition.

Logically, it must make administrative sense to put one person in charge of running all aspects of the club, rather than splitting the responsibility between a full time employee and a part time volunteer. As David Weston, Secretary/Manager at Enmore Park and a lecturer at the GCMA Training Courses, put it: "We need to remove Committee members from day to day routine".

Terms of Employment

The Secretary's Job Description invariably lays down the principal objective as: To implement policies laid down by the Management Committee.

Why should the course be excluded? Traditionalists may give two reasons:

- ⌘ cost control: the club pays nothing for the services of the Chairman of Green
- ⌘ the Secretary knows nothing about agronomy.

Cost Control

The evolution of clubs from the days when all work was done by the members has been slow. Spurred by a spirit of altruism and club loyalty, (and sometimes by egoism!), members have given of their time and expertise to run the club without charge, thus keeping annual subs to a

minimum. Employing paid staff in any position erodes this shoestring principle, and control of the course is generally the last voluntary post. If the Secretary takes it on, he will demand more money and should be paid it, since he will be taking on extra responsibility.

Knowledge of Agronomy

Certainly it is unusual to find a Secretary with a background in agronomy - but the same can be said for all but the rarest Chairman of Green. (Experience of agriculture is not the same: farmers grow grass to harvest, not to preserve.) But the secret of taking responsibility for any activity lies in delegation and supervision, and the competent Secretary should have no fears about running the course if he has faith in the greenkeeping staff. If he doesn't trust them, then his primary task is to replace them with better people - and the legal side of this is in every Secretary's terms of reference anyway.

Some knowledge of agronomy will definitely benefit the Secretary, and if serious about their job, they will seek out a course on the subject (look to STRI or BIGGA for advice). With this under the belt, discussions with the Head Greenkeeper will be more useful and helpful, for nothing leads to bad staff relations faster than a suspicion that the expert is deliberately trying to confuse his superior - unless it is a lack of appreciation by 'the boss' of genuine problems.

Maintaining the course in tip top condition does not require the Secretary to know the difference between dollar spot and red thread, or even between Rovral and Vitesse: that is the job of the head greenkeeper. (If the Secretary is in doubt about the greenkeeper's technical competence, he should call in an agronomy consultant with a good reputation.) But scheduling work on the course so that it fits in with the demands of competitions, keeping an eye on expenditure and labour costs, etc, are supervisory tasks which the Secretary can and should undertake. Indeed, much of this is essential regardless of whether or not the secretary is given specific responsibility for the course itself. A look at our GCMA model Job Description for a Secretary/Manager shows what may be included.

Course

- ☞ Assist the Chairman of the Green Committee in identifying the key improvements to be made to the Course in order to support the attainment of the budget and business plan.
- ☞ Control and oversee the day-to-day working tasks of the Greenkeeping staff in conjunction with the Course Manager/Head Greenkeeper.
- ☞ Ensure all course equipment is in good working order, properly stored and annually serviced.

In depth knowledge of agronomy is obviously not necessary to carry out these duties though an understanding of what does happen on the course is very important. It is interesting to note that David Weston's club, Enmore Park, has no Green Committee at all, but does have a comprehensive Course Policy Document which has been approved by the club members at an Annual General Meeting. It is David's job to follow the policy thus laid down, and he is answerable to the Management Committee for so doing. Consideration of major course developments falls to a special Working Party.

Although he does have a Green Committee, Eddie Robertson, Secretary/Manager at Ferndown (host to the EGU's 1997 County Championships) agrees that a detailed technical knowledge of agronomy is not necessary. His method of supervising the condition of the course is to look at it through the eyes of the golfer, not the greenkeeper. His monthly course appraisal is directed to each individual on the Green staff and covers that part of the course for which each is responsible.

Typical items listed for attention are:

- ⌘ “trim round bunker on 16th”
- ⌘ “replace ball washer on 17th”
- ⌘ “grass cover is weak on back of 18th Tee”

This last remark is revealing in that it pinpoints the problem, not the solution. How to improve the grass is a technical decision, and so is the responsibility of the Green staff. (This is not to say that Eddie is without knowledge of what should be done: he originally attended a greenkeeping course at STRI, and now has 7 years' experience to draw on.)

Both David and Eddie can monitor day-to-day activity from the staff time-sheets since they give details of the work done and the machines used. (Comparison of the hours claimed on time-sheets and those clocked up on the machine meters enabled David to snuff out a dangerous scam when he first took on the job.)

But the most important facet of supervisory work is the regular face-to-face communication with the greenkeepers and, in particular, the Head Greenkeeper: this is where mutual respect and trust are built up. The Secretary is the link between the Committee and the staff, and as such he must tell the staff what the golfers want, and learn from the lads on the job' any difficulties that make this hard to achieve. (When asked whether he sides generally with the Greenstaff or the Committee, Eddie is emphatic: the greenstaff, every time.)

The Greenkeeper's View

But what do the greenkeepers think of the idea? The views of Mark Ford, Regional winner of the 1997 Toro National Greenkeeper of Excellence Awards competition in the South West, are interesting.

“No matter whether the Secretary or the Chairman of Green is in charge, what I most want to see is total commitment to the quality of the course. This will give us a common aim, and go a long way to making sure that our personal relations are good. I would also like to find that he (or she) has taken the trouble to work for a short time with a greenkeeper out on the course, to find out what the job really entails. I don't expect him to be qualified in agronomy and machinery, but if he is to be the liaison with club and committee members, I think he should talk with some personal knowledge.

For instance, he should appreciate the significance when fusarium is found on the greens, and what it means in expense and manpower to treat it. He should understand what the various types

of grass cutting machinery can and cannot do, and how much time it takes to do each job properly. He need not know how to set up a mower and sharpen the blades, or the type and amount of fertiliser to be applied - that's my job.

We will need to prepare work programmes together, but I expect him to understand that schedules prepared a week in advance may have to be altered because of the weather. Similarly, I would want him to agree next year's budget with me, and to fight for it in committee if necessary!"

Summary

- ⌘ There are sound reasons for including supervision of the course in the responsibilities of ALL Secretaries.
- ⌘ Detailed knowledge of agronomy is NOT essential.
- ⌘ An eye for what makes a good golf course is necessary.
- ⌘ Man management skills are vital.

NB: David Weston is now retired as Secretary from Enmore Park. Eddie Robertson is retired as the Secretary at Ferndown, he is the GCMA Regional Secretary of Wessex.

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