

Evolving Maintenance Standards

As new technologies impact our golf course maintenance operations, it's important to evaluate our maintenance standards and adjust them often. Golf course conditions and a consistent product start with well-defined and realistic maintenance standards. This is not a new concept, but is often one that seems to stay relatively stagnant at many clubs.

Maintenance standards are essentially goals. Most of us are familiar with SMART goals and how important they are in achieving success. As a quick recap, SMART goals are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound. Let's look at this a little more in depth.

- *Specific*. I would say most maintenance standards are very specific and define clear objectives. Each year we see superintendents meet with the greens committee or others to define these standards. Examples of this include detailed mowing heights and frequencies of certain tasks.
- *Measurable*. Our maintenance standards are easy to measure. We can measure greens speed, we can observe mowing frequencies and equipment technicians check mowing heights frequently to measure our standards.
- *Achievable*. The maintenance standards we create are achievable, but often under perfect circumstances (fully staffed team, equipment operating properly, based on a defined budget at the beginning of the year, etc.). Taking this into consideration, it is not uncommon to see maintenance standards that are not being met (equipment failure, lack of labor, financial challenges / budget cuts).
- *Relevant (Realistic)*. Going back to Achievable, how realistic are some of the maintenance standards? Are you adjusting the standards throughout the year to keep your goals relevant and achievable as your facility evolves? This is where many courses have opportunities for great success. Very often we "stick to our guns" and want the same product produced even though there may be a shortage of key resources.
- *Time-Bound*. Our maintenance standards often have specific times associated with them. We know how long it takes to do specific tasks and the importance of providing a quality product ahead of play to insure a good golf experience. We also consistently look for more efficient maintenance standards.

There is no doubt you could interchange the words "maintenance standards" with the word goals. In order to successfully achieve these goals, we need to make sure that all areas of SMART goals are taking place. Maintenance standards are often created to compete with other golf courses in our specific markets. Are these always realistic (relevant)? Are they achievable based on the current status of our club? This does not mean we have to re-invent the wheel every month, but we should take a hard look at our maintenance standards and where we can continue to tweak them for a consistent golfing experience while continuing to gain efficiencies.

New technologies can have a positive impact in providing consistent maintenance standards. As technology continues to rapidly impact the golf industry, continue to not only look at new ways of achieving your standards, but also change your standards frequently and adjust them as needed to ensure success at your facilities.