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## Where everyone knows your name

*"Making your way in the world today takes everything you've got.*

*Taking a break from all your worries sure would help a lot.*

*Wouldn't you like to get away?*

*Sometimes you want to go where everybody knows your name, and they're always glad you came."*

While attending a recent industry meeting, a good friend and I engaged in a conversation about his current position. This individual is a respected professional who has served in a variety of roles in his career. He informed me that his current position was obtained in large part because of his interpersonal skills, not his considerable grass-growing ability. He added that the individual he replaced also had sound agronomic skills, but that person was more comfortable behind the scenes.

The conversation reminded me of a team-building seminar I attended several years ago. The instructor, Kurt Kuebler, started the class with a slide containing lyrics from the theme song to the TV show "Cheers." I recognized it immediately because "Cheers" is one of my all-time favorite sitcoms, with Sam, Woody, Norm and the rest of the show's colorful cast of characters. For those too young to remember, most of the episodes take place in the front room of a bar, and when Norm entered the bar, he was always greeted with a warm "Norm!" and had a beer waiting for him.

With the slide on the screen, Kuebler told us, "You know, ultimately, Ted Danson (who played Sam, the bar's owner) had it right." He then played a few bars of the theme song and asked us, "Why do you go back to a particular restaurant, bar, or, for that matter, any business?" As I thought about the question and my routines, I completely understood. I do frequent the same restaurants, businesses, etc., routinely, and while I don't get a "Darren" or a beer automatically slid across the bar when I walk in, I do always receive a warm welcome and a genuine feeling of belonging. In part, this connectivity ensures my return.

As we all know, golf course management professionals wear many hats, and although judged by the playing surfaces we provide, we are more than agronomists. We are educators, resource managers, and, to be highly successful, we must also have the ability to effectively communicate and possess business management skills. We are key in the success

of our businesses. And, regardless of the type of business, successful owners or managers understand the importance of attracting and maintaining customers.

Obviously, the product we provide must be good, and, in our business, that means outstanding playing surfaces. However, as I routinely say, growing grass is a given. One must also be a valuable member of the facility's business team, and the strength of that team is its ability to attract and retain customers.

This brings me full circle to what I like to call the "Cheers Business Management Philosophy" and how Ted Danson's character did have it right. Several years ago, the National Restaurant Association did a survey that asked people why they returned to a restaurant. The No. 1 response was a "warm greeting." This was closely followed by a "fond farewell." When you combine these two very basic items with the fulfillment of the patrons' other needs, you will attract and retain customers.

The same can be said for a golf course, I believe. Without question, providing quality playing surfaces is the primary reason a golf course superintendent is hired, but if your facility is not attracting and retaining customers, will conditions really matter? As a part of your facility's business management team, are you doing everything you can to make your clientele feel welcome? Do you frequently greet golfers, preferably by name? When appropriate, do you engage in casual conversation with your golfers? Do you provide a fond farewell? These are basic things, but they can make a difference in the success of your facility.

While a "Cheers Business Management Philosophy" seminar will not be offered at this year's Golf Industry Show in San Diego, GCSAA is offering a business management track to help you hone these valuable skills. The association also offers related online education for those interested in the webinars. And whether at GIS or throughout the year at GCSAA-affiliated chapter meetings, I hope you'll take advantage of the opportunities, in both formal and informal settings, to interact with and learn from your fellow golf course management professionals. You never know when a seemingly casual conversation with a peer can make a difference in your life.

Darren Davis, CGCS, is the superintendent at Olde Florida Golf Club in Naples, Fla., and a 29-year GCSAA member.