

A favorite topic of conversation among superintendents at times is discussing the pros and cons of management groups operating and sometimes owning country clubs.

Tampa Palms Golf and Country Club was purchased in December of 1992 by a management group, and I have been a part of their organization ever since. There are a couple of things concerning management groups that I would like to point out.

First of all, Tampa Palms was opened for play in 1987 at the height of a sluggish real estate growth period. The developer had many problems early on, and membership sales for the club were few and far between. People feared the club was unstable and the press in the Tampa area did a lot to back up those fears. The club being a fine facility with a great golf course struggled for years using different management groups, each with different philosophies. Every time a change came, I wondered if I would be part of that change.

Finally in December of 1992, the club was sold for a cash price

to the management group for whom I am now employed. I was scared to death during Christmas that year in fear of being let go, and my resume was quickly updated as I prepared for the worst. I was soon surprised at the group's professional mannerisms and then realized that they needed help in being brought up to speed with the various operations of the club. They assured me that my position was not in danger and to keep up the good work that my staff has always done on the golf course. The course was one area that they were not worried about.

Changes in club operations were definitely made. Some faces also changed, but in my opinion, all for the better. The club now has a vision and a means by which to focus on that vision with all department heads having responsibilities that will allow the club to grow and prosper. Membership is now flourishing and the facilities at Tampa Palms are a most popular spot for business gatherings and weddings.

The management group in place at my club has definitely helped make Tampa Palms what I always thought it would be — a great club where I am proud to be employed.

In this case, one can easily see that ownership and operation by a management group at my club is for the better. This group is strong financially, service oriented to their members and provides a good working environment with long-term benefits for their employees. They have been in the business for years and are well-respected.

But what about those other groups that are out there chasing contracts, you might ask. We all know horror stories exist about management groups moving in and shutting off the cash flow, and with it goes the conditioning of the golf course. This will continue to happen, for not much can be done about such radical decisions. But let's hope most groups realize where dollars can be made, and that's in golf! Their biggest assets are the courses they amass and there's no denying it! If they destroy their courses, then they destroy themselves.

Superintendents will always be important to these management groups. We are the meat and potatoes of their operations. We will be asked to maintain our courses on a tight budget, do more with less labor and possibly work for a wage less than what we might consider fair. But let's face it — we are professionals and we will always try to find a way to maintain our courses in the best condition that they can be. As one might say, "It's a superintendent kind of thing."

Some superintendents might have to "suck in their gut" a little if a management group takes over operations at their clubs. Some will cope with the situation and be successful, and others will fail. Some will be happy and others will not. Some will take new jobs and others will remain. What's good for one is not necessarily good for the other.

This trend of management groups taking control of club operations is not new, and it appears as if it is kicking into high gear. For this one individual, it's been a good ride so far. I just don't want to crash and burn anytime soon!

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