

# Professionalism

In the strictest terms, a profession is an avowed occupation. Professionalism then becomes an attitude about that occupation. It is a portrayal of your personal integrity regarding the work that you do for pay. Business practices, communications, continuing education, discipline, ethics, environmental stewardship, image, personal conduct, professional association participation, regulatory compliance, turf management, and training are all areas of our occupation that should be executed with the highest professional standards. They are the benchmarks by which we, as individuals, and our profession are measured.

— Joel D. Jackson, CGCS

## A Question of Ethics

I am writing this in an anonymous fashion because I do not want to implicate anyone for wrongdoing, but I sincerely believe the subject that I am about to embark upon definitely needs to reach all of our people in the golf course management industry.

I recently experienced a problem with my putting surfaces at a facility where I was employed. The cause for the problem was beyond my control, but as we unfortunately see all too often, I was asked to resign my position because it is the easiest way for management to save face and calm down the membership.

After leaving, and a few weeks of self-evaluation, I felt that there were things that I could have done better dealing with the situation, and know that at least I have learned a few things from this bad experience.

My reason for writing, however, is not for sympathy, but to tell of a situation that is to me, becoming very alarming in our profession. The number of people that encroached upon my position by calling my manager, trying to be the first to get their foot in the door, before an official announcement was issued, was beyond belief!

My manager was very professional, and denied that there were going to be any changes made, but many he told me of were very aggressive and continued to call him. Many of the job seekers were people looking to move from the ranks of assistant superintendent to their first head superintendent position.

The person who eventually took my place was a former employee of mine. He never had the ethical decency to call me to see what the situation with me was. He interviewed with our management and

accepted the position, all without even calling to let me know he was involved in the process.

I realize that there are many people out there that are graduating from turf school and need to find golf course superintendent positions, but these people need to realize that the GCSAA has a good code of ethics in our business. It is everyone's responsibility to uphold it. I know for fact that my replacement took the job for a much lower salary than I was being paid. I believe he never had any concern for upholding the salary scale for my area. I doubt if he ever tried to find out what the range was.

Before I interviewed for the job, I first called the chapter leaders to introduce myself and to find out about the area salaries and other important information about their group of superintendents. It was very easy to do, and believe me, it helped me in my negotiations. It also helped the existing superintendents to continue to upgrade their salaries.

We all have a tremendous responsibility in our business, and it has taken a lot of hard work by all of us to get the due respect and compensation we are receiving today. I am hearing about more and more superintendents being replaced by people that are coming in 10-15K less than the previous superintendent almost on a daily basis.

These people don't realize the tremendous amount of pressure that is associated with being the head superintendent. It is impossible to imagine until you are in that position. When I left the ranks of assistant superintendent, I fortunately listened to my boss, and although I was very eager to get my first head job, I went to the bargaining table determined to be paid for the responsibility that I was tak-

ing on, and to uphold the salary range of the superintendents in the region.

The kind of cut-throat behavior that I have experienced, and am hearing about, needs to stop. We are all facing more and more responsibility and pressures from the public and media, and I feel that well-educated, ethical, and hard working golf course superintendents will meet these challenges head on.

As we become more and more responsible, we deserve to be compensated well for the great amount of time and effort required to do our jobs to the highest standard. We do not need our own people shooting us in the foot. They will be the ones who eventually will pay the price. — Anonymous

## Getting the Right Man for the Job

Greenskeeper, Golf Course Superintendent, Agronomist, to Golf Course Manager. The role today of the old "Greenskeeper" has expanded and taken on various new titles and responsibilities. The position is one that requires managerial skills, business understanding, accounting and budgeting skills, environmental knowledge and, of course, good grass growing abilities. Therefore, more than ever, there is a strong need for good assistant superintendents/assistant golf course managers. After all, we are only as good as the staff that works for us.

Obviously, the first step to having a good assistant is hiring the right person for the job. One thing that I have found very advantageous is establishing a good internship program. Having the opportunity to monitor a turf student's work habits as an apprentice gives the superintendent a "sneak preview" prior to hiring the intern as an assistant. I personally have employed three of my former interns as assistants and helped two others gain employment as assistant superintendents. If you are not able to view the applicant as an intern prior to employment, it makes the interview process even more critical in order to employ the right person for the job.

The first step in the interview process



is analyzing the resumes. When looking over a resume of an applicant, some of the things I look for are education, past achievements or awards, memberships in turf-related organizations and, most importantly, work history. When I look at work history, I look at several things. Are the clubs the applicant worked at comparable to my operation? did the person show stability in his employment history, or did he change jobs frequently? Finally, are there any gaps in his employment history? Also, if I have the references of the applicant, I look to see if they have included references from ALL of the previous employers. If one or more previous employers were omitted, I inquire to find out if there was a motive behind the omission or if it was just an oversight.

These are all things that can be discussed in an interview. I feel work history is critical in the discussion. The applicant should have several years of good work experience, preferably as a technician or better. Training an assistant superintendent fresh out of school with little work experience is a task very few of us have the time to do. All the formal education in the world can not prepare an individual for a job in the turfgrass profession unless it is combined with work experience.

When interviewing an applicant for an assistant's job it is critical for the superintendent to be prepared, organized and consistent. A prepared, written interview is extremely helpful especially if more than one person is being interviewed.

A past employer of mine, a superintendent, once put me through a three-hour written prepared interview for an assistant in training position. The questions ranged from agronomic, personnel and ethics to personal and professional goals. Needless to say, the superintendent giving the interview was an extremely organized professional. This interview taught me a lot, and I have adopted some of the questions in my interview process.

A prepared, written interview also allows the interviewer to fairly evaluate all the applicants.

Selecting the right person for the job is essential. Often you spend more time with your assistant than you do with your own family. If the fit is not right, it will

create friction and unneeded stress on all parties involved.

The assistant superintendent must be able to relay his and your desires to all members of the maintenance staff. The assistant must also be mature enough to communicate with the youngest and oldest employee regardless of the assistant's own age. This is why I feel confidence (not arrogance) is a key personality trait of the assistant.

The assistant superintendent must also serve as a role model for the maintenance staff. The staff will look to this individual for guidance. If the assistant has bad habits, they will undoubtedly be picked up by the staff. The assistant should look and act at all times like the maintenance staff has been instructed to do.

If the crew members see the assistant breaking a rule that they have been told to follow, it will most likely result in bad work habits or poor attitudes.

Finding and hiring the right assistant superintendent can make you or break you. The assistant is the heart of the maintenance staff. It is this individual that will serve as an extra set of eyes, ears and a nose for you while he is on the golf course. It is for this reason, and others, that you must inform your assistant of all the activities, goals and plans that you, the superintendent, have. The more educated this person is, the easier it will be for him to do his job. Don't forget — the better he does his job, the better the golf course and you look! The hard work that you go through in hiring, training, educating and allowing the assistant to mature professionally will pay off for the assistant superintendent, superintendent, the membership and the golf course conditioning.

— *Darren Davis*, GCS Olde Florida Golf Club, Everglades Chapter

## From School to Assistant

Becoming an assistant after college is a period of transition when several decisions need to be made. The choices decided upon make a definite impact on one's career.

That first assistant's job a person holds

makes such a lasting impression that careful consideration should be placed on all decisions. Several of the decisions include: a suitable location, the type of organization, the superintendent and one's goals.

The chosen location is a lesser factor with some than with others. It is, however, a concern that should be addressed according to the region, climate and type of turfgrass the assistant is looking to gain experience with.

The type of organization can be a difficult decision to make due to the variety of opportunities available. An assistant should look at public, private and municipal courses along with management groups. When looking at these options, one should focus on its reputation, budget and membership in the past, present and future.

One of the most important choices is a superintendent. This person gives an assistant the proper training to eventually become his equal. A superintendent should be experienced and knowledgeable about the different aspects of the industry. His long and short term goals should be realistic and attainable. He must be aware and willing to spend time training an assistant on the most up-to-date products and trends. He should be consciously aware of the environment and, most importantly, he should be able to clearly communicate his objectives.

The final part of deciding on where an assistant's career will begin lies with the goals he sets. These must be attainable goals in order to become successful. Some goals might include developing strong leadership qualities; fine tuning management skills; and gaining, not expecting, the respect of employees.

Graduating from college can be a fulfilling experience just as beginning a career in the golf business. The novice assistant will look forward to becoming involved in the different affiliations of the industry. This transition of graduating from college to becoming an assistant superintendent can be accomplished by setting high expectations and challenging oneself to become a future superintendent.

*Tim Haskins*, Assistant GCS, Olde Florida Golf Club