



The role and responsibilities of the assistant superintendent...

Long hours caught in the crossfire

They come to the work place brimming with facts and figures fresh out of turf school, only to find out quickly that growing grass is the easiest part of their job.

BY JOEL D. JACKSON, CGCS

The assistant superintendent... the understudy... the partner who covers your back... a superintendent-in-waiting in most cases. In any case he should be qualified to step in and run the operation when the superintendent isn't there.

It is a role that requires energy tempered with patience, initiative coupled with obedience, and asks the eager and youthful sometimes to manage those who are older and set in their ways.

They come to the work place brimming with facts and figures fresh out of turf school, only to find out quickly that growing grass is the easiest part of their job.

Nobody taught them how to referee a dispute between crew members, or deflect criticism from veteran operators and not take it personally. They haven't been caught in the crossfire between members wanting different playing conditions on the same day, or balancing a budget between reality and expectations.

These are our assistants for those lucky enough to have them... apprentice superintendents whom we work long hours and hopefully mentor so that one day they may assume the mantle of leadership on their own.

Ten superintendents from six different chapters and from courses ranging from private to public answered questions about the role and responsibilities of assistant superintendents.

In many cases their answers are similar, which I suppose offers validation to some of the expectations of the position.

In a sidebar, Larry Gilhuly of the USGA offers his view of the changing role of assistants, and a national survey of benefits for assistants is provided to compare

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with those reported in the following responses.

1. What qualifications and experience do you look for when hiring an assistant? What are your expectations?

WHEN I LOOK for an assistant, I look for a person with a professional appearance, a stable employment history, and with longevity at each position held. This person should be ambitious and creative on a reasonable level. This person should be able to do anything the

superintendent can do on a short-term basis. After a three-to-five year training period, this person should be ready for a full time superintendent position.

- Tad Altman

IF ANY ASSISTANT has a goal of being a superintendent, he must first have a good education. From what I have seen lately, a turf program alone is not enough for a soon-to-be professional to become well rounded enough to perform in our world today. The most important qualification is common sense.

- Buck Buckner



AS OF THIS date we have just completed the hiring process of our new assistant. Our criteria for hiring was based on the management's request that we have an assistant in place that they felt would be capable of running the golf course in the event that I was indisposed. We were looking for a candidate with a recognized turf degree at either the associate or bachelor degree level, coupled with practical experience including supervisory skills.

We wanted the assistant to have a desire to improve him/herself through continued education and hands-on training. The suitable candidate had to look towards taking over the role as superintendent here or to look at moving on to a superintendent's position within the next two to three years.

- Geoff Coggan, CGCS.

I LIKE TO BASE assistant hiring on a combination of education, experience

and overall knowledge. People-management skills are a must along with being flexible. I would like this person to be committed to becoming a superintendent when they feel ready.

- Steve Hritsko

WE LOOK FOR experience. We want someone with knowledge of the game who has worked in all aspects of turf maintenance. Education is a benefit, but experience is more important to us at this level. I'd love to have a candidate with a degree who has worked their way up through the ranks on a course.

- Bill Lanthier

THE SELECTION process for an assistant superintendent is not an exact science and contains many pitfalls. I have a tendency to look for someone who has a college education and at least two years' experience on the technician level. I want an assistant who is capable of assuming

the responsibilities of the superintendent and has the desire to assume this position some day.

Each assistant must have a pesticide license and a thorough knowledge of the safe usage of each and every pesticide. They must be able to calibrate and do the job as proficiently as the technician. I expect the assistant to be able to recognize symptoms before they become problems. They must also investigate the symptom to determine if the problem was caused by some practice that we performed.

- Greg Pheneger

A TURFGRASS management education is preferred. If not, then certainly someone who has come up through the ranks and has a lot of experience. Above all I look for someone who is intelligent, can communicate well, is assertive, hungry for knowledge and not afraid to work. I prefer an assistant who has the goal of



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becoming a superintendent. I expect the assistant to learn people skills by managing the crew and dealing with management.

- Bill Plante

I LOOK FOR the following qualifications and character traits when promoting or hiring an assistant. While all are not necessarily prerequisites, in time all will be expectations:

- 1) Strong work ethic. A must for the assistant to set the example for the staff.
- 2) Dedication and commitment. Must be very flexible to work long hours and be committed to high quality course conditioning.
- 3) Turf management skills. Have a sound knowledge of fertilizers, chemicals, irrigation, etc. A turf related degree is definitely a bonus.
- 4) Professionalism. Understands proper conduct around peers and staff.
- 5) Management skills. Understands how to manage subordinates tactfully.
- 6) Plays golf. Should have some knowledge and interest in the game.
- 7) Good observation skills. Must be able to "see" the course through the eyes of a golfer and the superintendent to prevent problems and stay on top of details.

- Kevin Rotti

I LOOK FOR someone who can help me run the golf maintenance operation and perform as much of the routine supervision as possible. They must be able to perform all the duties on the golf course. I would hope that this person will want to and be capable of becoming a superintendent themselves. I feel very strongly that my assistants should play and understand the game.

- Jim Walker

I LOOK FOR a particular attitude or demeanor that will be compatible with the operation. Experience and education go hand in hand, because I value them as

being one in the same. Education is vital to success. Without practical experience, education isn't of much use. I think one advantage in our industry is that turf schools require some experience or internship as part of their educational process.

- Terry Wood

2. Do you have a formal training program for your assistant? How do you document his/her performance? How often do you give guidance and feedback on performance?

WE DON'T HAVE a formal training program for the assistant's position. Oral feedback on performance is almost daily. Documented written performance appraisals are conducted annually.

- Buck Buckner

• Formal training has to be tailored to the individual, I will assess them over the first few weeks as they become adjusted to their new surroundings and we will develop a program with goals and time frames accordingly. The program will start out with the most important thing to me which is the irrigation system as this also includes the fire hydrants located throughout the resort. We will concentrate on the day-to-day running and scheduling of employees and the daily reporting.

As time goes on, the assistant will be responsible for scheduling employees, purchasing and new employee orientation. Feedback and guidance will be given as needed. Staff meetings between the assistant, second assistant, mechanic and myself take place weekly to assure everyone is on the same page and working together. Formal evaluations are done twice yearly.

-Geoff Coggan

A NEW ASSISTANT'S training would begin by simply riding the course with me talking about expectations — mine and the club's. Generally, I like to do this playing the course so we can see everything tee to green in a relaxed atmosphere. A written evaluation is provided

every six months and guidance and feedback given daily.

- Steve Hritsko

WEDON'THAVE a formal training program. Feedback is given daily. We discuss what tasks are to be performed and evaluate based on their completion. I am on the course all day and involved in training and evaluation constantly.

- Bill Lanthier

IDON'THAVE a formal training program. I just try to develop an assistant by feeding him/her as much information as I can. I try to give feedback every day. Formal performance evaluations are done annually, although I try to evaluate them informally frequently.

- Bill Plante

WEDON'THAVE a formal program, but I encourage my assistants to take classes at our local junior college and to

attend the USGA and local superintendent seminars. I also like them to attend an IFAS Extension program yearly. My assistants receive a yearly performance evaluation.

- Jim Walker

THEFIRSTTWO or three weeks are spent going over course conditioning and basic practices that are in place. Then we get together daily to plan special events or procedures that need to be scheduled or modified. Guidance and feedback is fairly regular.

I try to give praise when due and correct situations or problems before they get out of hand. We do an annual review to show what progress has been made and identify strengths and weaknesses that need attention.

We are trying to get away from using the annual review as the only means for a pay raise.

- Terry Wood

3 & 4. What type of duties is the assistant expected to perform? What is his/her work schedule? Does the assistant perform a supervisory or working role?

ALONG WITH PEOPLE management skills, they also need to know what level of maintenance is expected from the club management. They need to have the ability and experience to do all the jobs in the golf course maintenance department.

Some mechanical ability is also often needed on a daily basis. They should have to have a good handle on irrigation system operation and repair, and current state Restricted Use Pesticide license that has been in use for at least one year.

The assistant will have to be a supervisor and helper to anybody that is in need of assistance.

- Tad Altman



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THE ASSISTANT'S position is a combination of supervisory and working. The assistant's primary duty is to manage the labor. He also supervises and participates in pesticide and fertilizer applications. He continually trains and re-trains the staff on all jobs.

-Buck Buckner

THE ASSISTANT is required to work approximately 46 hours per week. This includes starting before the rest of the crew arrives and leaving after everything is closed up. Weekend duties are rotated among the assistant, second assistant and myself.

The assistant can expect to spend their time roughly 50 percent or their time supervising and 50 percent working.

- Geoff Coggan

60-70 PERCENT supervision and scheduling, 30 percent working on chemical and fertilizer applications and other work requiring detail and perfection.

- Steve Hritsko

OUR ASSISTANTS handle a combination of supervisory and working duties. Most working tasks allow them to be

mobile to observe conditions and employee performance. They understand our goals and pitch in when needed. They are expected to perform any task necessary to make Mariner Sands better. They make out the daily schedules and supervise their execution. Assistants are on call and average 45 hours per week.

- Bill Lanthier

THE ASSISTANTS at John's Island are supervisors. When needed, they do pitch in (as we all do): setting cups, mowing, or whatever is needed. A major task each day is scheduling of employees. This is an important task that many assistants overlook. The proper management of labor hours is critical since membership is always looking for ways to trim a budget.

Assistants at John's Island must have the next day's schedule on the task board prior to leaving. This practice allows for a smoother operation, considering changes inevitably occur. Jobs need to be done on time, properly, and with minimal lost time due to scheduling conflicts.

- Greg Pheneger

MY ASSISTANT is expected to direct

the crew by assigning daily jobs and then follow up on the work. He makes sure safety rules are followed and he acts as another pair of eyes for the pest control and irrigation technicians. He also helps out with new employee training.

- Bill Plante

AT EASTWOOD our assistant wears many hats. Some of his duties include: course set up; equipment operator; irrigation repairs; landscaping; fertilizer and chemical application; overseeding and running projects. He is the spray tech and foreman as well. After a year of training, I will delegate daily work scheduling to him/her. Work schedule is Monday - Friday with every other weekend off. Hours range from 8-14 hours per day Monday - Thursday. 4-8 hours on Fridays. 4-5 hours on weekends. Weekly hours vary seasonally: 50-60 hours/week April - November. 40-50 hours/week December to March.

- Kevin Rotti

MY ASSISTANTS have always been working assistants. They perform many spray and fertilizer duties. How much work time versus supervision time de-

The Changing Role of the Assistant Superintendent

As the superintendent's role at the golf course has expanded, the responsibilities of the assistant have also evolved.

Role: The assistant is much more involved in the day-to-day operation of the golf course. Fifteen years ago, a golf course superintendent may have gotten by with just a foreman.

Changes: The increasing responsibilities of the golf course superintendent in regulatory compliance, personnel and financial and business management keeps him or her in the office. Much of the golf course operation falls to the assistant, who acts as the eyes and ears of the superintendent, deals with sophisticated irrigation systems, and supervises and trains the crew.

Importance to the golf facility: Without an assistant, the golf course becomes top-heavy in labor and the quality of course conditions may suffer.

Responsibility of the golf facility: Support the superintendent's programs for assistants, including:

- Approve budget allocations for continued education and training.

- Endorse participation in GCSAA and local chapter associations.
- Welcome attendance at management meetings and require participation at green committee meetings.
- Appreciate the opportunities provided to the assistant to play golf, which enhances an understanding of golf course maintenance practices from a golfer's perspective. Encourage the assistant to play with the ladies' and the men's groups and give on-the-course presentations about maintenance practices.
- Acknowledge the assistant's value to the golf course.
- Support the golf course industry by advocating advancement of the assistant to a head position when your superintendent recommends it.
- Treat your assistant with respect.

Source: Larry Gilhuly, Western Region Director, USGA Green Section, Gig Harbor, Wash. in GCSAA's September/October 1997 Leader Board.

depends on the time of year and crew size. My assistants usually have the weekends off because I am always at the course to play golf anyhow.

- Jim Walker

THE ASSISTANT spends most of the time managing the crew and attending to the finer details of chemical and fertilizer applications. It helps if the assistant can set the proper example by working along with the crew to show they already know how to do the job and what is expected of their subordinates. Basic schedule is Monday - Friday 6 a.m. to 4 p.m. and the weekends are rotated among the superintendent, the assistant and the equipment technician.

- Terry Wood

5. Is the assistant able and encouraged to seek continuing education and to join and attend professional association meetings?

TIME PERMITTING, we encourage our assistant to seek continuing education and attend local meetings.

- Buck Buckner

AS PART OF OUR search for an assistant we wanted a person with drive and the desire to move forward. We make continuing education a requirement. Opportunities will be afforded to them to join the GCSAA, the FGCSA and the local chapter. I have a long-time experienced employee on my crew that has been given the title of second assistant.

It is my desire to see that each employee take classes and put himself in a position to move up with the new assistant should the assistant take over here. It was made clear during the hiring process that the assistant will seek to encourage and aid the second assistant to move forward.

- Geoff Coggan, CGCS

ABSOLUTELY! WITHOUT question! We try to rotate attending chapter meetings depending on the work load. We all attend the FTGA Conference and Show. It's mandatory! My rule!

- Steve Hritsko

OUR ASSISTANTS ARE FGCSA and GCSAA members. They are encouraged to attend meetings on a rotating basis so they are not both gone on the same day.

- Bill Lanthier

EACH ASSISTANT IS a member of the national association and the local

chapter. They do attend meetings when available and have attended the seminar for superintendents concerning supervision that the Treasure Coast sponsored at Indian River Community College.

- Greg Pheneger

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Typical Benefits Provided to Assistants

Based on information from GCSAA's Employment Referral Service and the 1995 Compensation and Benefits Report, superintendents indicate that the following benefits are offered to their assistants. Number in parentheses is the percent of Assistants who receive it.

Golfing Privileges.....	(95%)
Life/Health Insurance	(90%)
Vacation	(87%)
GCSAA Dues Paid	(77%)
Sick Leave	(75%)
Educational Reimbursement	(67%)
Pension	(42%)
Meals	(40%)
Trans./Vehicle Allowance	(10%)
Clothing	(8-9%)
Dental	(8%)
Housing	(5%)
Disability	(1-2%)
Stock Options	(1%)

Average salary of an assistant superintendent is \$26,062.00

From: GCSAA's September/October 1997 Leader Board.

education and association meetings are on an "as-much-as-possible" basis.

- Bill Plante

HIGHLY ENCOURAGED to read as many turfgrass magazines as possible. When time allows, I try to send my assistant to as many seminars and Central Florida meetings as possible.

- Kevin Rotti

MY ASSISTANTS have always been encouraged to grow professionally. Continuing education opportunities and association meetings are avenues to achieve this.

- Jim Walker

IT IS ABSOLUTELY essential that the assistant be well informed on all current issues. It is also important for the assistants to be trained to present them-

selves as professionals. Superintendents need to set the proper example for their assistants.

-Terry Wood

6. What are some of the benefits available to your assistant?

THE TEAM MEMBER benefits for our course are: 401k plan offered; paid medical, optional dental at their expense; two weeks vacation annually; six paid holidays; uniforms supplied with a \$250.00 pro shop clothing allowance; lunches in team-member area at the clubhouse; golfing privileges when tee times are available; flex time during non-busy periods. Salary range should be from \$25,000 to \$35,000.00 depending on talent, experience, budget, and attitude.

- Tad Altman

BENEFITS FOR THE assistants position include: Salary-\$30,000-\$32,000; 21 days total vacation, sick time and holidays; 401K; uniforms; limited golf privileges; membership dues paid for local and national superintendent associations.

- Buck Buckner

OUR ASSISTANT POSITION is an hourly paid position which will be around \$26,000 plus an incentive bonus of approximately \$1,300. Benefits include: paid medical coverage; dental plan; 401k and profit sharing plans; uniforms.

Personal time off (combination of vacation, sick and holiday pay) 136 hours in the first year; 176 hr. thereafter. 80 hours can be carried over to the next year. Golfing privileges are available and encouraged.

- Geoff Coggan

USING FGCSA WAGE & benefit survey and comparing types and location of facilities: salaries range from \$23,000-\$28,000; membership dues: FGCSA and GCSAA.

FTGA is at their expense; seven new golf shirts provided each year; one week vacation for one year or less, two weeks

after two years and three weeks after five years.

- Steve Hritsko

OUR ASSISTANTS are in the upper end of the salary range for our area. They get two to three weeks vacation and are expected not to get sick. They have six holidays although one assistant is on duty every holiday except Christmas. They receive uniforms, meals, and limited golf privileges.

- Bill Lanthier

BENEFITS FOR ASSISTANTS are the same as for the hourly employees. These include: sick/personal days, vacation, holidays, clothing, golf privileges and a 401K program. The club also pays their dues for the various associations.

- Greg Pheneger

BENEFITS: SALARY RANGE - \$23,000 - \$26,000; vacation - one week after one year, two weeks after two years; sick leave - six days per year; six paid holidays; 401K plan; meals; golf privileges. Association dues: state and local only.

- Bill Plante

BENEFITS: SALARY RANGE - \$18,000 - \$25,000; 2 weeks vacation for 1-3 years service; three weeks vacation over 3 years service; sick time: three days/year; six holidays/year; uniforms; 50 percent off lunch; golf: immediate family plays free. Friends pay cart fee. Merchandise: 10 percent over cost. Association dues: state and local only.

- Kevin Rotti

BENEFITS: SALARY: \$20,000 - \$30,000; 2-4 weeks vacation depending on years of service; sick leave: 10 days/year; 13 paid holidays; uniforms; golf privileges.

- Jim Walker

BENEFITS: SALARY: \$26,000 - \$30,000 at this time; paid holidays; sick time; medical insurance; uniforms and golf privileges.

- Terry Wood

Other comments.

ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENTS have a tough job to fill. The person has to have the ability to take charge of the entire operation in the superintendent's absence. That is a lot of pressure and responsibility. People management is the most important part of the assistant's job. They need to know who can do the job and operate special equipment to produce the desired results. They also need to know the club's level of expectations for the course maintenance department.

- *Tad Altman*

I'M VERY PROUD of our assistants and I rely on their dedication to Mariner Sands.

- *Bill Lanthier*

I HAVE BEEN MOST successful in hiring assistants through word of mouth, friends in the industry or hir-

ing an individual who is already on staff. The latter of these three methods is my preference. The obvious knowledge about your operation that the applicant who was hired from within has is invaluable.

I have used the GCSAA job referral service without much success. I received approximately 75 applications in response to several different openings. Seventy-five percent of those applicants did not meet the specified job qualifications or their resumes were of very poor quality.

- *Greg Pheneger*

ASSISTANTS ARE VERY important and quality ones are becoming very hard to find. Superintendents must stress the importance of their jobs to them and allow them room for error so that they can grow and become much more valuable to the industry.

- *Greg Pheneger*

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