Learn from your mistakes

Fired superintendents should resolve to first set their own house in order, admonish colleagues who have lost their jobs.

"I've been trying to correct the things I was doing in my 'previous life,'" said Jim Gilligan of Richmond Country Club in Staten Island, N.Y.

Gilligan, who several years ago was fired after 22 years at his former course, said: "My current job is stronger because I've learned from those experiences. That's true when you're able to make the change. Some people can't do it. I talked to a lot of superintendents who have been fired and did not evaluate themselves."

Books on career changes and outplacement don't address self-evaluation, Gilligan said. "They point you toward the future, stress your accomplishments, and put the negatives and failures aside. But they're [failures] still there."

Spot personal weaknesses, accept responsibility for those mistakes and work to improve, Gilligan recommended.

Although he has a degree in business management as well as in agricultural biology and turfgrass management, Ted Horton said most superintendents have very little personnel training and few management skills.

Horton, vice president of resource management at Pelican Beach Co. in Monterey, Calif., said some schools are working to rectify that by adding personnel courses into their two- and four-year curricula.

"Jim McLooughlin [of McLooughlin Group in Pleasantville, N.Y.] 15 years ago started a club management course at Manhattanville College. All the superintendents in the area rushed to take it. But all the club managers avoided it. And because they did not participate in the program, it fell on its face. I think it was a very well-intentioned program that should have gotten support of the whole industry," Horton said.

Gilligan said many superintendents feel isolated, alone, as if they are against the rest of the world. You become protective."

Because of his years at his former course, Gilligan was addressing the course as part his. But, he said, "I was told I was not. It was the members' course. I was very protective of it. Too much so."

"Now I'm taking more of a business-like perspective of my job. I'm using some of the management models in my personnel and jobs at the course, dealing with members, trying to act more as a middle manager in a corporation."

While Gilligan, Bruce Rickert of Philadelphia and others said the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA) gave no notice regarding jobs, the association has taken steps to improve its employment services.

A recent Arthur Anderson study of the GCSAA recommended adding a human resource person to the staff. While Gilligan said the GCSAA operates an employment referral service, which Smith said works both ways - providing information on job openings to members and names of available superintendents to companies.

The association now has a new Employment Resources Kit, free to GCSAA members, which includes six booklets written especially for the course management profession.

Those booklets are: Career Development; Resume Workbook; Get the Job; Out; Coping with Unemployment; Your Rights as an Employee; A Legal Rights Checklist and Glossary; and Sample Job Descriptions for Golf Course Maintenance Personnel.

Learn from your mistakes

1. First impressions will make or break you! 2. Have a good thorough resume, usually done in a format that best works for you. Have references on a separate sheet of paper with addresses and telephone numbers for office and home. Use business, academic and personal/character references. Consider making an executive portfolio for yourself.

3. Do your homework on researching the prospective club, to the smallest detail. Have questions and notes written... is your public relations effort? No matter how good a turf manager you are, your attitude and how you get along with people can't do it.

4. State the items that you LIKED about the club—be complimentary about the good things that have been done in the past! 2. List any positives at other clubs that they might hear of. You'll be surprised how many referrals you can get if the initial club was impressed by your interview and credentials.

5. Because of our large equipment inventory, what is your equipment maintenance philosophy and how is your working relationship with a mechanic? 13. How is your working relationship with the assistant superintendent? Do you hire turfgrass university students for employment?

6. Did your golf along with other department heads and work together for everyone's benefit? Are you set in your ways about anything that would hinder the golf course maintenance operations? 18. What is your professional goals. If hired, how long would you like to be employed here? Would you like to be a springboard for future success? 17. What is your normal work schedule on any given day? For example, check the course before the members are made, telephone call to suppliers/green chairman, paper work, etc.

8. Things that you like about the club—be complimentary about the GOOD things that have been done in the past! 3. List the equipment you would need to do the job properly! (list of equipment that is on hand that should be replaced with more modern, state-of-the-art implements!) 4. List long-term goals that you would recommend if hired?

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Checklist: How to find a new position

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