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SUPPLEMENTING YOUR ROLE

In the past few issues, I've written about the contractual responsibilities of an owner's construction evaluation team, including a golf course superintendent's role. In what's perhaps a classic case of putting the cart before the horse, these articles assume the superintendent will be the construction manager. The question each course's management team must ask is: Does the superintendent have enough knowledge and time to protect the club's interests completely? Every club should assess whether it has the ability to manage a project in-house. If there are doubts, consider the option of a professional construction manager or additional services from a golf course architect.

It's common for green committees and owners to turn to their resident expert, the superintendent, for this task. Often, a superintendent is management's first and most logical choice to oversee a course construction project. A superintendent knows the most about a course, course construction and what a final product should look like. Many can produce quality results with in-house crews to aid or supplant the contractor in some cases. Also, most renovations need to remain within a budget, limiting options for additional consultants.

Perhaps because it's not sticks and bricks, many owners and the golf course construction industry don't use construction administration tools as diligently as other building professions. Although just as much can go wrong with golf course construction, one well-known turf management textbook perpetuates and compounds this idea by describing construction contracts as simple agreements. Architects, owners and contractors who have been through litigation would beg to differ.

The bottom line is that when you're spending millions of dollars, it pays to watch over the investment closely. So, although eminently qualified in his field, a superintendent might be at a disadvantage when attempting to represent his owner and might not feel comfortable doing so with so much on the line. Renovations that fail to meet expectations have cost superintendents their jobs.

Superintendents still will play a crucial role in any renovation, but if the stakes are high enough, supplementing their role with professional project management might make sense. The case can be made that it's a separate discipline from turf management, and, when done correctly,

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is a full-time job. Also, the consequences of saving money are significant. The contractor will have more experience than most superintendents preparing contracts and negotiating change orders, which most will use to their financial advantage.

The real potential for cost overruns lies in missing the schedule, where revenue losses become a considerable factor. During construction, a wasted week at the beginning of a project equals a month's delay at the end, and a wasted month might turn into a lost year of revenue just as quickly. Without proper oversight, expensive surprises and costly delays are

more likely to occur.

If a professional construction manager saves the owner one big mistake or manages the schedule to an on-time completion, their fee is paid for over and over again, says Sam Sakocius, principal of Sakocius Management Group based in Cascade, Colo.

If you assess the situation and believe using your superintendent is the best option, you must schedule accordingly to have him trained. There are classes at the Golf Industry Show where the GCSAA, GCBA and ASGCA put on classroom clinics. Some turf maintenance programs at universities offer minimal training in construction management, so it's possible your superintendent or assistant has some training, and perhaps has kept his project management textbooks, which contain useful tactics. One text oriented to golf is Charles White's "The Turf Managers Handbook for Golf Course Construction, Renovation and Grow In," which has information about construction administration matters.

Given the importance of construction, clubs are advised to provide the superintendent with rudimentary training before construction and extra professional training about project management. The assistance could come from a golf course architect or construction management consultant on a full- or part-time basis. The aforementioned textbook recommends this as the ideal situation.

A renovation project is a disruptive and stressful time, and sometimes a club's viability depends on a renovation. It goes without saying that any work done should be done right. While having an experienced professional project manager might seem like overkill and doesn't guarantee a problem-free project, it ensures the best possible outcome under the circumstances you might encounter during renovation. **GCI**