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INTERFACING WITH CONTRACTORS

I asked contractors for tips to give superintendents about the contractor/superintendent relationship. There were some common refrains, starting with the concern about the number of good superintendents who've lost their jobs soon after a renovation project. It seems no one praises superintendents for their good work, but they sure get called out when things seem to go wrong – and a lot can seem to go wrong with renovation projects.

In some cases, superintendents get so involved in construction, they neglect other responsibilities that are visible to club members. It's more common for members to have false expectations that a reopening will occur sooner or better than it actually does. This expectation creates ill feelings that are unreasonable, and the superintendent usually pays.

Superintendents should strongly recommend the best contractor possible and implement clear communication starting from the planning phase until well past reopening to set realistic expectations for the schedule and playability. This includes estimates of achieving peak condition and playability differences, such as new USGA greens versus old ones, or why bunker sand won't settle immediately.

A superintendent's relationship with a contractor will last several months, so it pays to be civil, timely, reasonable and consistent. While there are some adversarial conditions in the contractual relationship, superintendent must realize:

- You both have the same objective – an on-time, quality project.
- The contractor and its personnel are professionals, just like you.
- Profit isn't a dirty word. Don't try to reduce it unnecessarily.
- The contractor's costs are higher

than yours. Some owners might lament that tile cost \$0.45 and contractors charge \$4.50 for it, not figuring in the costs for gravel, material waste, trencher rental, labor, travel expense, home-office overhead, contingency and profit.

- The contractor doesn't bid each item at true cost. Some items are break even and others are loaded with profit. If the contractor bid low, you're getting a fair price, and it isn't fair to cherry pick high-value items for cost reductions.

In a superintendent's daily work, he should strive to:

- Respect the contractor's chain of command. Give directives only to the supervisor.

A superintendent's relationship with a contractor will last several months, so it pays to be civil, timely, reasonable and consistent.

- Give directives mandating expected results, not work methods. The contractor is responsible for those and might use different machines and methods than you expect. Don't make him change if the job is done right. Be aware that directing specific actions or methods might make you liable for injuries or delays. For example, if you want irrigation pipe laid deeper, tell the supervisor, but don't direct workers to retrench.

- If you desire a certain construction method, ask in the beginning. Contractors want to comply with the superintendent's or owner's wishes if costs are similar.

- Don't write memos for the file. Share your concerns in a timely fashion rather than secretly documenting errors to cover yourself. That doesn't help the project now or you later if things turn out poorly.

- Respect the budget. If the specifications call for \$12 per ton of green sand, you can't order the contractor to use a \$30 per ton of green sand without a change order.

- Understand the contract, which is likely different than ones you've used with past projects.

- Take care of your responsibilities. As an owner's rep, you'll have responsibility, so make sure you get it done. If you must arrange for power to be installed in the pump station, plan for inevitable electric company delays. Chances are you'll still struggle to have power on time.

- Help the contractor, which usually results in going above and beyond what's stated in the contract. If you can easily lend materials, equipment or labor to reduce the contractor's cost in one area, such as mowing to reduce turf stripping or tree trimming, by all means, do it because you'll likely ask the contractor for extras later. Remember, it's a two-way street.

- If you provide work – by contract or volunteering – do it well and on time. The project schedule depends on it. Only volunteer where you have actual, not expected, expertise. Performing work, such as seeding and fertilizing, near the end of the project usually minimizes potential delays to the schedule.

- Interpret specifications reasonably and in light of actual project conditions. Most contain some boilerplate written long ago and are restrictive and geared towards the worst possible conditions. They're written for the worst possible conditions in mind.

- Don't force the contractor to redo numerous low-value work items if you expect cooperation. **GCI**