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A golf superintendent

The love of greenkeeping

by Paul N. Voykin

I may be mistaken, but I think I see the golf course superintendent's profession turning from its true direction. I am speaking of the recent trend of green superintendents slowly encroaching on the field of managership and away from our true profession of greenkeeping. This situation, I believe, has developed from the managers becoming general managers and taking charge of the whole clubhouse-and-grounds operation. As a result of their yet unproven venture, we have become panicky and think that by acquiring new titles and certificates, by attending bookkeeping and finance seminars, and urgently seeking further clubhouse property responsibilities, the situation will change.

I don't think so. A Golf Course Superintendent is a Golf Course Superintendent, and a Manager is a Manager, and the only way this fact will change is if you wish to change your profession completely. If that's what you want, go ahead, but do it full turn, please. Do not play games — you're only fooling yourself.

In my case, there is no conflict. I know what I want to be: a good greenkeeper and nothing else. I'll be happy with that title, because I know something else — call it a basic managerial premise, if you wish. That is, unless the golf course superintendent is in complete charge of all and total bookkeeping, and unless all money passes through his office, he can never be top dog or in full control at the club — at least not in the eyes of the board members. This fact is as sure and true as the fact that the golf professional will always be the glamour man at the country club, no matter how many double knits you own or how well you groom the grass.

Clouding up our true identity by seeking out extra jobs and taking more responsibility for a little more money has nothing to do with our real profession and skill of growing and manicuring grass. This is futile hypocrisy.

General managership is not our business. The managers who have taken over completely and are now total general managers have sold down the river their true responsibility to the club. They have taken on too many responsibilities and have gone into fields that they know nothing about. Let's not play their ambitious game. As in the past, top clubs will learn that it's not going to work, and there really is no money saved.

Let me be absolutely blunt. Become a manager or stay a golf course superintendent, but whatever, be true to yourself. You can't be superb at both jobs. Declare your hand. Don't get into a mixed-up ballgame unless you want to change jobs every few years, as some general managers are doing. The wise ones work with us, cooperate with us, communicate and coordinate with us, and they are smart enough to keep out of our areas

of responsibility — something they know nothing about. That's the way it should be.

I would like to say something else. I am not, nor is anybody else, impressed by greenkeepers calling themselves property managers, golf engineers, turf managers, and other nonsensical names. Golf or green superintendents — yes, greenkeepers — lovely. "Grass growers" or "grass farmers" is fine with me. I know what I am and I make good money at it. I don't need to seek extra "janitorial" jobs around the clubhouse to tarnish my true professional image. My direct responsibility is the golf course and that load is heavy enough for me. And please don't give me that old business about shirking my duty as a breadwinner, or not being able to take on extra responsibility, or not trying to uplift our profession. I take on more responsibility and I am more involved with exciting things than I know what to do with — for my family and for the image of my profession. And I know many of you are the same. Long ago I could have become manager, but that's not my forte. I am a GREENKEEPER, and in this field of endeavor I strive for perfection.

There is something else I must tell you that is in me (and unless you have a touch of the same, you might as well become a manager or go into something else). I would miss the soft warm rains that fall on the turf that I grow. I would miss the white snow that covers the golf course in late fall for the first time, melts, and then softly comes again. I would truly miss all the challenges of nature that go with my profession. The hot sun of summer heat and the salty sweat of humidity on my brow. I would miss the pleasure of admiring turf manicured and maintained under both good and adverse conditions and knowing that I had a hand in keeping the verdant picture that way. But, of course, there would be other things also soothing the frustrations of working with nature. I would miss her many gifts to us greenkeepers, the trees changing in the seasons and the flowering shrubs in spring. I would miss the daisies and other wild flowers hiding from our mowers next to the majestic elms, and I would miss the wood thrush calling to its mate in early morning. I know I would miss the honest faces of commercial friends calling on me and old greenkeepers advising me. But most of all I would miss getting up each early morning and playing the endless chess game of man against nature or, perhaps more truthfully, trying to work with her and relishing the achievement. And, oh, the satisfaction and the pleasure that come once in a while each season when, just for a short time, I have won the battle.

Paul Voykin is superintendent at Briarwood Country Club, Deerfield, Ill. Past president of the Midwest Association of Golf Course Superintendents, he is also the author of *Ask the Lawn Expert*, published by Macmillan Publishing Co.