

Management Matters

By JAKE RYAN

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In the famous words of Ron Burgundy, "I wanna say something. I'm gonna put it out there; if you like it, you can take it, if you don't, send it right back."

What a great way to spend a summer! Riding lawn mowers and golf carts around some of the most beautiful tracts of land in Minnesota, many of my friends and family are extremely green-eyed with envy. Think of the childishly amusing, teenage tomfoolery and strangely human stories we all have from working on golf courses. Amidst all those enjoyable times, a job always needed to be completed, even though I had a lot of fun working on a golf course there were very few occasions when I let complacency creep into my family taught work ethic. "I am the best greens mower to ever walk a green", every time I mow a green, in the forefront of my perfectionist mind; I am unsurpassed in mowing ability.

Many men and women, in the golf course industry, have the same sentiment as they perform their daily tasks. My belief is we all should think we are the best at what we do. When performing my daily tasks failure to complete the task to the best of my ability is never an option. This mentality keeps me sharp, constantly trying to improve the task at hand. Undoubtedly, all of us take great pride in our abilities and the results we produced. Meeting the demands of golfers is not possible if we are not striving for perfection.

After several years as a green staff member and one summer as an intern, I began the past season as a Second Assistant Superintendent, and then moved up to an Assistant Superintendent. Although my work ethic has not changed, the daily tasks I perform are now much different. No longer is my work ethic utilized in the daily tasks of mowing greens, or raking bunkers. Instead, I am now charged with seeing the standards and needs the membership demands are met, with minimal interruption, on a daily basis. As an Assistant Golf Course Superintendent, I soon realized that this comes as no easy task.

At times perfection seemed to be

as unattainable as the Holy Grail. This is certainly no result of the men I have worked for but more so the standards I have set for myself. Rather as an Assistant Golf Course Superintendent I have come to realize a different definition of perfection. During my time as a crewmember I had complete control over the specific task I was assigned, allowing me to attain perfection up to and including the end product. As a manager I am learning to look more at the end product. While I am still trying to attain the same standards I realize the methods used to achieve those standards may not match my definition of perfection.

Let me use the New England Patriots as an example. While the end result of their season is yet to be determined they did obtain a perfect regular season. While the end result was perfection, was every play executed perfectly, was every game won, won exactly the way the players and coaches planned? No. Along the road to perfection we run across all sorts of problems. The question is; do we have contingency plans ready when these problems occur? During my first season as an assistant I felt like I had solid game plans. However, my ability to compensate on the fly, when problems did arise, rarely produced the end result I was looking for. I was disappointed in my ability to make contingency plans.

This led me to seek further education on management topics. I began reading a few

small "pocket size" books. While brief, they offered some valuable tips for new managers. As I read I was not surprised to find business management really is an art. It was also quite clear adaptation was vital to successful management. But what course of action do I take to continue sound management decisions if I don't know what that is. I decided to read a more in depth management book, called *Successful Manager's Handbook: Development Suggestions for Today's Managers*. Very much text book in nature, it was full of very practical information that can be applied in all sorts of current management situations. It was a tough read for a young guy with many

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other thoughts on his mind, but I will value the information for the rest of my turfgrass management career. These efforts of educating myself in business management led to the idea for this series of articles. This article is an introduction to a series of articles that I plan to write over the next year. Throughout this series interviews with successful business managers will be conducted in an attempt to further glean information about the business of managing people. These discussions offer important information to all of us in the golf course industry. The topics come from *Successful Manager's Handbook: Development Suggestions for Today's Managers* and include: administrative skills, communication skills, interpersonal skills, leadership skills, organizational knowledge, and thinking skills. A broad range of subjects will be covered and many different businesses will be investigated. The interviews I plan to conduct will acquire personal philosophies and approaches on management.

The following is a preview of the topics to be covered in future articles. These previews are the foundation on which I

will base my interviews. Administrative Skills—to quote President Dwight D. Eisenhower "Plans are nothing; planning is everything." There is a definite need for establishing plans that are appropriately comprehensive, as well as realistic for the golf course, in the long and short term. The structure and staff need to be evaluated to recruit and hire people for the different duties on the golf course. As a manager we need to develop systems and processes to assure that they are effectively performing the task. We must train employees to make decisions on their own while performing a job, then as a manager monitor their progress. We as managers can then manage execution as opposed to managing the specific task. Having multiple demands and competing priorities means we need to work efficiently, by allocating our time, to be effective managers. All of these topics help us reduce problems that may arise, but we must also communicate them properly.

The foundation for successful administrative skills demands effective Communication Skills. To express what needs to be said we need to speak effectively in every interaction with employees. The quality of these interactions is dependent on us to foster open communication in order to have excellent informa-

tion flow. This is accomplished if we listen to others and have an understanding of comments and questions. In order to eliminate questions we must deliver presentations that direct them in clear paths. If issues continue, managers may need to prepare written communication of formal or informal documents, conveying information more clearly. First-rate communication skills are critically important in all aspects of business management.

Humans with good communication skills are said to have good "people" skills and that cannot be any closer to the truth for the management aspect of Interpersonal Skills. By having a give-and-take mentality we can build relationships that are open and direct. The only way to effectively develop these relationships is to display organizational savvy and understand the agendas and perspectives of others. Building these relationships and creating a leverage network, we identify key stakeholders that get things done. It is also important to value diversity, value the chance to learn and move toward things differently. Also, if substantive differences and disputes occur, we must bring them to the forefront and manage disagreements. Having great interpersonal skills is one of many characteristics

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of being a great manager.

Another one of the aspects to being a great manager is the ability to make things happen by having Leadership.

Managers must cultivate a common vision and provide direction that clarifies responsibility. We need to stand firm on difficult issues and lead courageously by stepping forward. By stepping forward, we maintain our own ideas and influence others to achieve support and dedication. When employees are committed to organizational goals and we as managers' foster teamwork, efficiency is the result. If the work place is unenthusiastic, we need to motivate others encouraging them to have a drive to excel and invest hard work for the betterment of the organization. When employees don't have the strengths to accomplish a task, we must coach and develop these talents. By inspiring new initiatives, leaders champion change, they challenge normality on the golf course. Leadership in the eyes of Vince Lombardi, "Leaders aren't born they are made. And

they are made just like anything else, through hard work. And that's the price we'll have to pay to achieve that goal, or any goal." Adding to that, I believe a leader can never be satisfied with the status quo and must remain open to change.

With the ever-changing industry we find ourselves in, a very important aspect of business management is Organizational Knowledge. We must remember, fiscally sound budgets are a part of our job, the need to use financial and quantitative data to make appropriate business decisions. I alluded to the ever changing industry we are in; there is no question in my mind that we all use technical/functional expertise during our careers. Beyond staying attune with the changing technical aspects of our job we must know the business and stay informed of relevant issues in the golf course industry. The issues of business management are certainly relevant issues.

Just as significant as the other aspects I have brought up are Thinking Skills. Making decisions with a broad range of factors requires us to think strategically for the betterment of the golf course. We must gather information, analyze issues

and then react, in order to receive great results. When time is of the essence and the situation uncertain, we must use sound judgment when making decisions. If the best approaches are not available, we must innovate to present the best outcome with the resources available.

As you read these aspects and topics, you have no doubt thought about how the information relates to your own situations. This is why I am excited to present this series of articles. In my mind this will help young women and men like myself, as well as helping the more educated and experienced managers in the industry. The interview format will be a great way to publicize this information. As you read these articles I hope you will be willing to share your thoughts and possible ideas on how these topics relate to your own experiences. I look forward present this series of articles to the MGCSA members and to hearing from many of you with your own approaches and philosophies.

Please feel free to email me at jryan@northlandcountryclub.com with any thoughts or ideas you might have.

- Jake Ryan



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