



Organizational Knowledge

By JAKE RYAN

Assistant Superintendent, Northland Country Club

The National Association of Greenkeepers of America (NAGA) was formed over eighty-one years ago. Those sixty greenkeepers, who first met at Sylvania Country Club in Toledo, Ohio, pioneered the way for what is now the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America. A couple of years after the formation they held the industries first trade show. While they may not have foreseen the large impact they would eventually have on our industry. I am sure they knew how important their trade show was.

With last month's Golf Industry Show fresh in everyone's mind, I thought this would be an appropriate time to further develop aspects of organizational knowledge. Developed topics in this arti-

cle include technical expertise, knowing the business and using financial and quantitative data. To better understand these topics I had the opportunity to interview a successful businessperson. The following is a brief profile of the person, with whom I had an opportunity to correspond.

"To achieve goals you must acquire functional and technical knowledge."

Lee Bergstrom-Pfizer, at 20 years old, began a career with the corporation Warner-Lambert, a former diversified American corporation that manufactured products ranging from pharmaceuticals to candy. In the year 2000, Pfizer and Warner-Lambert merged, creating the world's fastest-growing major pharmaceutical company. In the early stages of his career he was a Division Sales Manager supervising about 100 people and before that was a District Sales Manager. He spent the last two years of his employment as part of the Non-Traditional Accounts Department. In this position he had the responsibility of developing accounts with businesses that would not traditionally carry his companies' products. After a thirty-two year career he spends his retirement in the Mille Lacs Lake Area.

I was fortunate to have Mr. Bergstrom

take some time and offer his opinions on the following questions.

How important is it to build an informal network of peers in similar organizations through which you exchange ideas and discuss issues relevant to technical advances in your field and why?

"It is very important. However during my management period this was not recognized."

Expanding on this, he believes, to achieve goals you must acquire functional and technical knowledge. Achieving these goals can be

accomplished by laying out a management plan specifying the moves that will help you. He also mentioned, "By hiring staff with superior technical knowledge you challenge yourself and benefit the organization." Challenge yourself to search out new ideas and information on a regular basis by taking on at least one new project each year. Attend conferences on your professional specialty and subscribe to professional publications.

When presenting technical information, what approaches did you use in the past and what worked the best?

"I employed third party resources when in house personnel were not available." From his experiences he believes you must first identify your audience. Using technical terms and concepts is appropriate, even desirable, when presenting to an audience with relevant technical expertise. The more diverse the group, however, the fewer terms you should use. He further added, "Consider how much detail you need to communicate." Before getting to the "meat" of a document or presentation, free the audience of wading through unessential details, by presenting an "executive summary." When talking with people about technical information, give illustrations and examples to which your audience can relate.

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What steps do you take to assure the company stays on the cutting edge and performs at full potential?

"Keep yourself and your employees 100% informed of all current conditions in the sales plan and industry." He conversed about identifying what will have an impact on your field, suggesting we make a list of emerging technological advances and develop an action plan. Read the latest books in your field and look for research on new ideas and developments. He added to this topic, "Ask for more detailed updates from your people when they are working on highly technical tasks." This should be done to gain a better understanding of the subject matter. Make a determined effort to learn the business from the perspectives of other people. Take advantage of the times when you are working with the experts in other fields.

How did you aim and position yourself to meet constant change?

"I made certain before any decisions

were made at the beginning of the day I was 100% up to date of all current information." He made aware the need to ask someone who seems particularly savvy about the organization to be your mentor. Look for opportunities to lunch and socialize with others outside the normal work environment, or after hours when informal "bull sessions" about the organization take place. Read your organization's history to understand how the business has developed and changed.

What approaches did you take to assure that company weaknesses were identified and corrected? Likewise, assuring strengths were not compromised?

"This can only be handled in one way with openness and honesty. Situations cannot be ignored, all politics must be set aside, and we are all in this together." A suggestion he made was implementing a total quality management program or some broad-based effort to broaden your perspective. Serve on a task force that is dealing with a problem relevant to the organization's future. He believes you must, "Develop benchmarks for the key success factors in your organization." Find out whether your group has received input from stakeholders. List things you can do personally to help the organization

overcome its weakness and list things you can do to make the strengths even greater.

How did you develop a wide-angle perspective of the company?

"I started at an entry level position and followed the management levels when opportunities became available." He mentioned the importance of doing your homework before deciding to join an organization and then ask a lot of questions about the mission, strategies, structure, culture and management style. He advised me, "Get to know several people in the organization that can be good sources of information." When your group tries to solve a problem, ask what other parts of the organization have a stake in the outcome.

Besides quantitative data what are a couple key points for having a realistic budget?

"A realistic budget allows you to meet your objectives without wasting time on revisions." A suggestion he made concerning the budget process was to review your strategic plan, identify goals and objectives, and determine the resources needed to achieve those objectives.

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Carefully assess what resources you have and what additional resources you will need during the period to be covered. Meet with a controller or financial accounting person in your organization to discuss the information you need to understand how to do your job better. Avoid getting bogged down in data by determining the two or three most important implications of the data. He stressed to me, "Back your decisions with quantitative logic whenever possible." Insightful information was shared and developed and it relates to our industry on many levels. Here are a few examples of how I see the information being applied.

The golf course industry has many outlets allowing us to be experts. The GCSAA is one of the many sources we have to increase our technical knowledge. Many of us network with peers, through forums like Turfnet, to get first hand information on industry topics. We utilize publications

containing research, case studies and best management practices that help us provide superior playing conditions. Resources must be used when conveying protocols to golfers, committees and owners. All of these tools give us the technical expertise needed to provide the best playing conditions for golfers. We are better prepared to make smart decisions through the efforts of the Association and making the most of our outlets

As your golf course advances, all current information must be known. In the golf course industry we are amidst many sensitive issues concerning the environment and the well-being of the public. Increased awareness of fertilizer application is seen by recent phosphorus restriction in our state. Researching drift from our sprayers continues in order to limit potential affects on water bodies and nearby private/public lands. The implication of your practices on these entities is vital to the perception of your golf course. Keeping other divisions of the golf course attune to situations like these allows them to know our industry better. Likewise, to gain a wide-perspective of the golf course operations we must understand other

areas. Communicating these issues effectively and understanding the big picture, we improve the golf courses position for the future.

The increasing demands of golfers compel us to make sound financial decisions. Bunkers are being maintained at extremely high standards requiring more man-hours. We provide the desired results even as the wages required for hiring and retaining quality employees continues to increase. Turfgrass is being maintained with high intensity, which often requires greater inputs. Despite increasing fertilizer costs we are still expected to produce the same high quality product and the persons responsible for the golf course finances still expect realistic budgets. For budgeting purposes we must "use financial and quantitative data" in order to justify our increases.

I would like to thank Mr. Bergstrom for his time and hope everyone has taken something from this article. If you have any ideas for future "Management Matters" articles please feel free to email me at jryan@northlandcountryclub.com.

(Editor's Note: The history of the GCSAA was gathered from www.gcsaa.org.)



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