

DEALING WITH BOSS PROBLEMS...AND PROBLEM BOSSES

Golf Course Superintendents - probably more often than most people in the work world find themselves reporting to a new boss.

Whether it's a new green chairman, general manager, or an entire board or committee, a change in command can be unsettling. But inheriting a boss you don't like - or worse, find intolerable - can turn a job you once enjoyed into pure drudgery. That's not to say that you can't suddenly find yourself at odds with your current boss, who you may have thought was a staunch supporter.

In either case, you don't have to resign yourself to a dismal situation. What follows is a distillation of expert wisdom on the subject.

Adjusting to a new Boss

Problem # 1: A new green chairman who makes little effort to get to know you, your staff, or department.

Strategy: Ideally, a new boss should take the initiative to find out what makes you and your department tick, says psychologist Peter Wylie, who co-authored the book *Problem Bosses* (Facts on File Publications, New York, NY) with Dr. Mardy Grothe, but unfortunately, not all of them do. When that's the case, Wylie and Grothe recommended that you take responsibility for getting to know your boss: *Write a memo to let your new green chairman know what you and your department have been up to. Keep it simple, and don't go gangbusters with recommendations on how you'd like to change things. You don't want to risk going against your boss's fondest ideas or deepest-held biases.

Another tip: Keep your old boss out of your memos and conversations.

*Whether the motive is self-interest or genuine concern, learning your boss's preferences and showing your support can pay off. Here are a few things to consider - and then adopt to:

1. How does your boss like to get information: in writing, by phone, or over lunch?
2. What's your boss's management style? Is he a "high involvement" type who likes frequent bulletins on work in progress, or would he prefer that you report only on major issues or

projects?

3. Does your boss make snap decisions or take a painstakingly long time to act?

The more insight you gain into your new boss's work style, the better you can tailor your habits to his. The pay-off: a more productive - if not amicable - working relationship.

Problem #2: Your new green chairman is pushing hard for what, in your view, are ill-advised projects, work methods, or course "enhancements".

Strategy: If you have any doubts about what your boss is directing you to do, discuss your reservations, but then respect your boss's final word. (*Just be sure to document the situation should it become serious enough to warrant going over your boss's head*). If you and your boss end up working at cross-purposes, *you'll* be the loser. Here are a few points to keep in mind:

*Deal with your anger, skepticism, or worry outside of work. You can make a lifetime friend in the first week by your show of support or a long-term enemy by being too challenging.

*Listen for the question behind the boss's question. "How would you handle this problem?" is a test of your loyalty as well as your competence. A response like, "I'll prepare a list of options and then discuss them with you," demonstrates both.

New Problems With Your Current Boss

Problem #1: Pressured by a group of low-handicap members, your boss now continually looks over your shoulder.

Strategy: This can be more trying than adjusting to a new boss. Everything looks the same, but it's not. Don't waste time fuming or second-guessing. Invite your green chairman to lunch, and open a discussion by explaining - gactually, not emotionally - your perceptions of the changes in your relationship. Some options:

*If you have a sense of what's causing the

problem, you might say: I know the greens have been a little slower than usual, but that's because we've had a lot of rain lately and they're soft."

*Draw your boss out; then listen closely: Is your boss more concerned about his standing with members than the condition of the golf course?

*Show you have your boss's - and the course's - interest at heart. If you know, for instance, that your boss is taking heat because a syringe when the course is under heavy play, explain why it's necessary; then ask how you can help. You might suggest, for instance, publishing a explanation to the membership.

*Finally, avoid negativity. Critical comments, even the most general ones, may be perceived as a personal attack. Instead, ask your green chairman to get approval on why you think you need - time, equipment, more staff, contract help - to meet any new demands, whether it be undertaking a new project or patching up an old problem.

Problem #2: Your boss seems to be disenchanted with you and your work.

Strategy: If the feeling persists for more than a week, don't look away, warn Wylie and Grothe. Analyze:

*Has the quality of your dealings with your boss diminished?

*Have you been asked to meet more frequently with your green chairman and committee?

*Has your green chairman made it clear that a piece of your work was unacceptable and then told you not to worry about it?

*If you can answer yes to some or all of these questions, the Wylie's script for smoothing over a relationship that's gone bad:

1. "I've had the sense lately that your view of me or my work has changed. It's hard to put my finger on it, but I've noticed that you haven't been quite as enthusiastic about what I'm doing on the course, and the frequency of our green committee meetings seems to have increased suddenly. If there's something I'm doing - or not doing - that bothers you, I'd like to know about it so I can try to change."

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2. Most bosses, eager to avoid a touchy subject, will reply, "No, no, nothing's wrong." But don't let it go at that. Ask, "So as you think about it, there's nothing I'm doing that annoys or troubles you?" Then pause, and give your boss a chance to respond.

3. Chances are, your boss will say something to fill the void. Keep quiet, listen and don't give in to the urge to defend your behavior or actions.

4. Instead, paraphrase what your green chairman has said so you know you've got the point. "Let me make sure I'm with you. It sounds like what's really bothering you is..."

5. Once you understand, don't dwell on the problems. Take steps to move toward a resolution: "Sounds like there are things I can do to solve these problems. I'll do..., and you can help me by...."

In the end, it's your ability to communicate with your boss that can make or break your working relationship - and prevent those inevitable "little blunders" from turning into job-threatening misunderstandings.

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MAY MEMBERSHIP

NEW MEMBERS

SUBJECT TO 30 DAY WAIT

CLASS A

Joseph Tompkins, Sunnyside CC, Fresno

Class B

Pat Voeks, Valley Gardens GC, Scotts Valley

AFFILIATE

Danny Brown, Diablo Creek GC, Concord
 Carl Reed, President Reed Equipment, Stockton
 Rich "Sarge" Gilbert, Reed Equipment, Stockton

30 DAY WAIT UP TODAY

ASSOCIATE

John Marion, Laguna Seca GC, Carmel

AFFILIATE

Bob Guadagni, Rain Bird Sales
 Lisa Hagopian, Golden Rain Corp.
 John Slender, BCJ Landscape Supply, Santa Rosa

Special Congratulations to

Chuck Weatherton, Jr. Castlewood CC for upgrading to Class A Status by Meeting Attendance.

