

Trevor Smith, Superintendent at Predator Ridge, in Canada, talks about the need to produce more than an excellent golf course to enjoy a prosperous career...

If the cap fits...

As superintendents (greenkeepers) there are a number of situations where, although your golf course is in good shape and you're doing all the right things agronomically, you can find yourselves out of work.

Why is that? Well, it doesn't have anything to do with agronomics, but it has a lot to do with politics and economics.

How many of us are willing to listen to someone tell us that we're wrong? That is something that we have to be able to do if we are to keep our jobs and be competitive in the job world. We have got to be able to sit down and listen objectively.

Another question would be. How many of you are happy working just where you are right now and don't want to move and how many of you would like to move into higher management positions?

Being a superintendent is what I started doing, but because the game is so diverse, and the business is so diverse, I find myself

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involved in a number of different areas. It's my feeling that you don't have to stay just with being a superintendent. There's a lot of opportunity out there, and it's important for you to take advantage of it.

It's about realising your potential, because you are an untapped source. It's not going to cost the club any more money to have you think than they're already paying right now, and I think that we can control our situation a lot better than we do right now.

One of the little techniques to help you understand what you're doing and what your value is to your employer is to do your CV. Look at all the things that you've done for your club, all your accomplishments and list them. If it's only one thing, it's better than no things. But if there's nothing down on that CV then maybe you should look at yourself.

We can all sit down at our golf course and say, "I hope it doesn't rain tomorrow, because I've put the fertiliser on... and if this works, and this works and this works, then you know, I'll maybe have Saturday and Sunday off." Well, Saturday and Sunday, whether you're at work or not, you're at work.

It's a matter of how you use your ideas, take a chance, do



something different - try a new way to apply fertilisers - if you've been using granulars all your life, work out an opportunity to spray. If you stay the same, that's where you're going to be, and it's important.

You want to invent something. When you wake up in the morning there's this little guy inside you who says "Why don't you try doing this?" and 20 minutes later you think "No, no, no, people will think I'm foolish or I'll make a mistake. I'll get fired." Well nine times out of ten that guy is right, but we don't take the opportunity. Listen to him, make calculated risks because if you take that chance, then something's definitely going to happen for you.

What was the last golf course

management innovation you saw which took your breath away? When was the last time you saw something amazing? I haven't seen anything in a long time. We've chugged along, improving certain things, but there's nobody out there just jumping in with their great outstanding new management tool. And I think that that's the kind of thing that we can do.

There are several main issues that face greenkeepers today, and this was a study that was done through the GCSAA and these came to a head. One of them is job security, there's a lot of very, very uncomfortable golf superintendents out there.

Replacement by lower salaried employees was identified as one of the problems.

Basically the issues amount to one and the same. How can you show your employer that you're worthy of your remuneration? Well, it's down to you and whether you're going to sit back and worry about someone taking your job, or whether you're going to be proactive and make sure that your job security is based on the value that you give your employer.

The key to success is attitude and how you relate that attitude to those around you, especially your employers. Growing grass just isn't going to be enough. It takes people

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to do it, and how you manipulate those people or how you get those people to do the job for you is probably just as important as the technology that you have to apply.

As greenkeepers, if we sit back and allow the world to push us around and dictate what it is that we're going to do, then we're powerless. We don't have that ability to make an impact or to control the destiny in our lives. What we have to do is just take advantage of every little opportunity that's out there.

You have to understand yourself. What do you want? If you want to stay in one place all the time, that's fine, but do a little bit. A little more value added business will keep you in that position for longer. Don't sit still because powerlessness is basically a state of mind and it's up to you to improve it.

As a greenkeeper do you have anything to do with sales, revenue, marketing, accounting or customer satisfaction? Well, you actually have everything to do with all four of those things. If you don't think having a golf course in good condition doesn't generate sales, you're crazy.

I like to think about many different ideas. Lots of golf clubs have Starters who get the people off on time. Well, why not



have a Finisher?

Why not have a person who goes to the 18th hole and says "Gee, Joe, did you have a good game? Well let me write that down, and I'll take note of it." Why don't we give that person's day good, even if he's had 17 bad holes.

That's coming from a greenkeeper. That's not the Clubhouse Manager having that idea, that's my idea. Those can be your ideas, and those are the things that don't have to cost the golf club very much money. If they don't work, it doesn't really matter, but they might and it will make the difference once again in your security.

Being a greenkeeper is really a "wow" job.

I've had great opportunities.

It's such a diverse industry, that it's no wonder everyone and their dog wants to be involved in the golf business. But take advantage of it.

Don't let the thoughts of job insecurity bother you. Be pro-active in that regard. Do those little things that really make you think, or make your employer think that he's got somebody that's worthwhile. You're in control of your destiny.

Canadian Wayne Gretsky is the greatest ice hockey player in the world, and one of his statements, is "If you don't take a shot, the puck's not going to go into goal". It's just as simple as that.

Here's another idea. Share. Hoarding is not good, it doesn't give you job security. Just because you know how to run the irrigation system, and you want a secure job, you don't tell anybody how the pump starts. Give your knowledge away to those who work for you, those who are around you Don't be afraid to share it with someone.

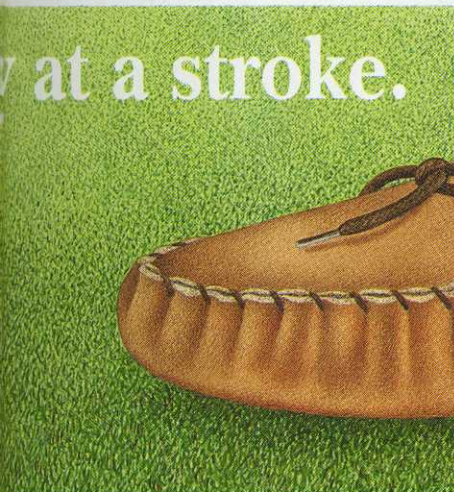
The best way to evaluate people is to set up systems where you can watch them. Don't just hire the first person off the street that looks like they've got a good attitude, set

your systems up so that you have probationary periods for new employees. Watch them work.

Or you see a waiter who does a great job. He hustles, he watches his manners, he's there when he should be, he's not there when he shouldn't be. What would be wrong with hiring someone like that? Look for talent in other areas as well because if they've got the attitude, you can train them to run that greens mower. What you want is attitude.

But be fairly certain about what it is that you want once you get them through the door, because there's very few bad dogs, there's just lots of bad owners. We train them how to be bad.

Edited extracts from Trevor Smith's, paper "Golf Course Economics and Politics (When Turf is Not Enough)" at this year's National Education Conference in Harrogate. Trevor is a Past President of the Canadian Golf Course Superintendents' Association.



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171