

How do you make the step up from Assistant to Course Manager? In the first of a two-part special, consultant Kevin Munt gives you a potential roadmap to success



18 steps to becoming a Golf Course Manager

Part one - The front nine

1. Ambition

Without this you cannot begin your journey so, if you haven't already, get some!

How do you become ambitious? Well it may be something that was sparked during your childhood or teenage years or you acquired throughout your career. Ambition can be gained out of either a positive or a negative situation. For example, you may have enjoyed playing golf and wanted to make a career out of it.

Alternatively you may not have achieved at school and, as a late developer, have now discovered your niche.

This was certainly my experience when, aged sixteen, my dad read out a job description for Apprentice Greenkeeper in the local paper and said "do this job, then build me a golf course". So by all means be as ambitious as you like, but don't let ambition dictate your pace, and don't ram that ambition down people's throats.

2. Support

You are not going to make it on your own, you are going to need the support of your family, friends, peers, colleagues, educators and employers, to name an important few.

Let people you trust know of your career plans and they will help you with advice, experience, knowledge and introductions. You will also need their support when you up sticks and move to the next role along your career path.

3. Learning

Before you can take that first step to being the boss there are a large number of course maintenance related topics that you will have to obtain a good understanding of.

This knowledge will be learnt by practical 'on-the-job' application, formal college education, and your continued professional development through BIGGA and other management workshops and courses.

The great news is that learning has never been so in depth, available and accessible to greenkeepers. You should be aiming for a well-rounded knowledge of the many practical and technical aspects of the role. But, for all your advance preparation you will gain the most learning once you have obtained your first Course Manager position.

4. Communication

I could easily have listed this as step 1, as you have to start sharing what you want to achieve straight away. We do not all start out as good communicators; indeed many of us enter greenkeeping because we don't want to spend all day communicating. We are not natural sales people or marketers, it is something we develop as we grow in our professional lives. In my experience all the awkward, difficult and stressful situations I have found myself in have been caused by miscommunication or non-communication. Remember that good communicators are 'influencers', your main aim as a manager will be to bring your influence to the decision making process and ultimately a satisfactory end result. Some may call this getting your own way but it's better to get your own way than get in the way! Just be aware of your 'two-way' communication skill levels and make sure you improve both enough so that your message is clearly received and understood without harm or offence.

Successful influencers have a strong vision that they support with measurable, achievable delivery targets that form the basis for well-constructed business/operational plans. So do you see yourself as an influencer? If not, you will have to be content with being a passive doer.

5. Golf Skills

This may surprise a few but in my opinion you must be able to play the game to a handicap. Do you think you are going to persuade your employers of your aims for their playing surfaces and course set-up if you don't understand the skills and nuances of the game? So if you don't play get some lessons and get out there now, or be prepared to be behind the gain line at interview, if you are lucky enough to get one!

6. Career Path

You may think that this should be listed earlier in these steps. There are (I hope) young greenkeepers out there who already have their hearts (and heads) set on running a championship course. It may be your plan is to stay at your first course and devote your entire working life to its success, or you may be on the first rung to St Wentingdale G&CC. I don't believe you can truly set your course management career path in place until you make that first



step into the role. Ambition and your career path are closely linked, however do not allow ambition to dominate your career direction totally.

Aged 26 I had ambitions to become the Links Superintendent on an Open Championship course, to ensure I gained the necessary skills and contacts I made my career moves in line with this aim.

At 29 I got distracted by a role that proved to me that all that glitters is not gold so mid-career moved into golf course construction and design, and then into club management.

So your career climb needs to be flexible because there are many branches to this particular tree. Things change in a career, you, employers, family and general life, so make sure you have a flexible path that still satisfies you and don't let that path run into a dead end.

7. Organisational Skills

These are vital, as simple as that. I presume you are reading this because you are already on a career path, maybe you are already a First Assistant or Deputy supervising a team. If so it is most likely that you are doing this because it has been recognised that you are organised.

So keep going, stay organised and plan, use day-to-day organ-

isational tools such as diaries and project notebooks, as well as learning IT software packages and mobile technology skills that help you plan, record and report.

8. Course Policy

Now we are getting into the nitty gritty of the job role. This is one of the subjects that all the Deputies on our workshop want to know about and get their hands on.

This document encapsulates the golf course manager's role and more or less writes their job description/specification.

To make the move up you should know what is in a golf course management policy document, if you don't get your Course Manager to show you one. When you have read it ask lots of questions about how it's formed and why it's there.

They should be telling you its main purpose is to identify the strategy needed to achieve the quality objectives set out in the club/business mission statement, and then identify the processes needed to achieve these aims.

Your golf course management policy document should be the foundation on which the management of your course is built.

If your course doesn't have one then ask around or look at the Model Document in the Member Resources section of the BIGGA website.

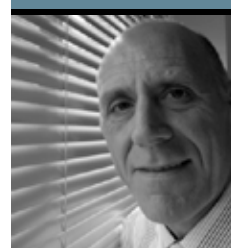
Kevin and Peter hosting their 'So You Want To Be a Golf Course Manager' workshop at Continue to Learn 2013

9. Resource Management

If these 18 steps were golf holes this would be stroke index 1. This one topic covers everything a manager is ever asked to control. Manpower, machinery and materials all require the fourth 'M' - money. Get this right and you will succeed as a Course Manager. Contained within the four 'Ms' your operational management will include health and safety, environmental management, power, water, irrigation and, in case you forget, the provision of a golf course that provides customer satisfaction. To control the delivery of these resource elements within the constraints of the fourth requires good management skills above all else. Of course you have to know when and why you are applying all of this resource, but if you don't have the structure, systems and controls in place your agronomic knowledge and skill will be rendered useless, and you will be neither efficient or attain your objectives.

Now you have walked the first nine of the Course Management Career Planner take some time out at the halfway hut to work out whether you are under or over par. Then note what you are going to do to improve on your front nine and be ready to take on the all important career back nine in next month's issue.

about the author



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