

# Stepping up



BIGGA's Open Support Team in action - just one of the many development opportunities the Association offers



Last month GI discovered how Andy Pullen has made the transition from Deputy to Course Manager at North Wilts Golf Club. This month we hear how Rob Sandilands has adjusted to making the same move in Cumbria and how the many opportunities BIGGA offer can help

**Three years ago I stepped up to my first Head Greenkeeper's post at Grange-over-Sands Golf Club, an 18-hole parkland course close to Ulverston in the Lake District.**

I had all the skills needed as I'd completed a string of qualifications and I had a good amount of greenkeeping and supervisory experience – it would be a breeze surely? I couldn't have been more wrong!

Although my qualifications covered all sorts of technical greenkeeping topics from woodland and environment studies to health and safety and spraying, there turned out to be gaps in my knowledge I really needed to be a successful Head Greenkeeper. The role of a manager, which is what I had had become, required the majority of my skills to be based on people skills and communication – topics barely mentioned in greenkeeping qualifications and textbooks during my studies.

Meetings were a brand new experience, as was dealing with the personalities on committees and issues with members of staff. Then came the paperwork; course policy documents, risk assessments, budgets, meeting agendas – the list went on!

In short, I'd started a new job I'd worked towards for years and I felt as though I was starting from scratch when it came to these new skills that were essential to my role.

Fortunately for me, greenkeeping is an industry that is full of people who are unbelievably generous with their time despite the demands of their job, and I was never short of support and advice when I really needed it. Since then, the learning curve has been steep and I have made mistakes, but most importantly, I have learned a huge amount and have developed the all-important skills I need to succeed as a manager.

I was invited to present a seminar on this topic during Continue to Learn at BTME. The chance to pass on my experiences and viewpoint to the next generation of Head Greenkeepers and Course Managers was a great opportunity and something I got great feedback on. Here are some of the main pointers...

**Preparing for your first head role**

**• Volunteer**

• Apply to be part of BIGGA's Open Support Team or volunteer at the BMW PGA Championships. Arrange short visits to



other courses to help with projects

**• BIGGA Delegation/Future Turf Managers Initiative/CPD Scheme**

• Free schemes and experiences that 'fast forward' many essential elements by condensing them into a short space of time and can be recorded on your CPD

**• Preparation topics (not to be left until you are in the job!)**

- Budget: get a template and build your own
- Agronomy: ask to walk the course when the agronomist visits
- Meetings: attend greens meetings to get a feel for their structure. You will meet dynamic, individual characters and encounter conflicts of interests
- CPD: get accredited for all the effort!
- Health & Safety: learn what the documents are, how to construct them and how they tie in together
- Regional section: establish a local support network and keep your finger on the pulse for those job opportunities
- Mentorships: would you benefit from a mentor to help you?

**• Interviews**

• Interviews are a two-way process; is the opportunity suitable for you? You need to consider your family and personal circumstances. Then you need to think about your potential new club's resources – how many staff and what equipment they have. Try and find this out in advance

• Either walk or play the course and make a plan with all the information you have acquired

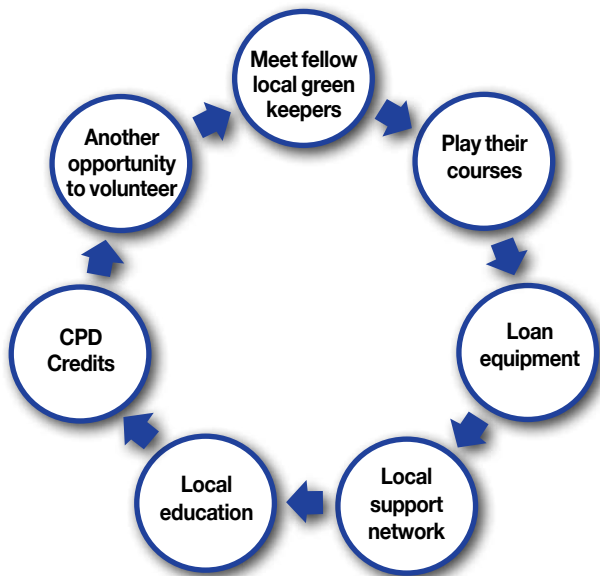
**You've got the job! Now what?**

- You will make mistakes – this means you're learning
- People will question you, it's human nature
- Check your plan is still on track and make changes if necessary – communicate at all times
- Take lots of early pictures to refer back to – continue doing this with work and projects

**• Planning**

- Thinking in detail about all your tasks in advance – what could go right or wrong and planning for both outcomes!
- Always have a plan B
- Use lists and whiteboards

## BIGGA Regional Section Benefits



### • Politics

- Communication is key
- You are the course custodian and need to ensure it is properly looked after
- Learn other people's language. Different people have different agendas, e.g. finance v greenkeeping. You must spell out the savings in time/money that will be made if you purchase a certain piece of equipment
- Remain professional

### • Greens Chair

- A role of support and liaison to you
- A link role not a management role
- Should not interfere daily with work on the course
- Issues should be addressed and not allowed to develop

### • Meetings and Committees

- The course is maintained on behalf of the committee and you are their expert
- Natural allies and adversaries will exist – again communication is key
- The best outcome for the club is the key to any meeting
- Set agendas and research your topics
- Remain professional – be diplomatic but assertive and stand your ground where necessary

### • People Management

- You are a buffer between management and the greenkeeping team
- You won't have picked any of your team - remember you may not like or have anything in common

with them. They might not like you either – you represent change.

- You have the potential to influence their career, for better or worse
- Set down YOUR basic rules at the outset and stick to them – be consistent
- Your conduct and work ethic should be their benchmark
- Tell people what you want them to do clearly in black and white then let them get on with it – never assume
- Be decisive
- Rotate tasks – the key for developing a skilled and flexible team
- Praise people personally and to others
- Have and show trust in your team
- Respect takes years to earn but seconds to destroy
- Everyone is different and has their own strengths
- Let people have an input - they may know a lot more than you on a subject
- Swallow your pride if necessary!

### Communication

- Very important
- Lots of great greenkeepers are poor communicators
- Give reasons how and why you are doing things
- Be consistent
- Communication is listening as well as talking

### Golfers Comments

- Greenkeepers can be defensive, but golfers are your customer. Try and show willing to respond to constructive comments and suggestions
- Do not let staff become victims of offensive comments, they are a soft target for certain types of people
- You cannot please everybody!

### Blogs & Social Media

- Free means of communication

- Enhance a professional image if done correctly

### The benefits of your BIGGA regional section

#### Sales Reps

- There are no miracle products
- Ask for independent data, local testimonies and a free sample

#### Your Style

- Everyone is different and everyone's course is different
- What works for one may not work for another
- Don't let it get to you
- Ask people's advice, maybe get a mentor?
- Don't worry about the things you can't control, such as the great British weather!
- Mistakes are frustrating, but they mean you are learning
- Avoid stress wherever possible as it clouds judgment and affects your health and wellbeing
- Go home on time whenever you can!

#### Conclusion

Being a Head Greenkeeper/ Course Manager is about creating a balance between all the elements in this article.

The balance between these will differ from person to person and club to club depending on resources and expectations and this is where your expertise comes in.

The balance is always changing and should always be kept in mind as it has so many factors affecting it.

Yet again, this is proof (if it were needed) of what a varied yet underestimated career golf course management can be, but also what a rewarding and interesting job it can and will be for the next generation of managers waiting in the wings.

### about the author



Rob presented a seminar based on his experiences as Head Greenkeeper during Continue to Learn at BTME 2014. You can read his regularly updated greenkeeping blog at [www.gosgogreenkeeping.blogspot.co.uk](http://www.gosgogreenkeeping.blogspot.co.uk) and follow him on Twitter @RobSandilands

He has a National Diploma, Woodland & Environmental Studies, a B.Sc. (Hons) in Rural Resource Management, and NVQ Level 2 and 3 in Sportsturf. He also has PA1, PA2, PA6 Spraying Certificates, Chainsaw qualifications up to medium size trees, strimmers and brushcutters training plus Health & Safety, first aid and manual handling training.

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