

Jack-Of-All-Trades; Master-Of-None

By William Sell

Port Washington Country Club

As I was preparing this paper on Jack-Of-All-Trades; Master-of-None, I wondered what the text should be about. After making a few notes it was amazing, and even a little amusing, the number of professional skills, and trades, that we as Golf Course Superintendents are expected to master. Of course you realize that this is utterly impossible. Therefore, I believe the Jack-Of-All-Trades Master-Of-None, can be interpreted to mean Golf Course Superintendents.

For the most part, I believe our jobs can be classified as Agronomists. I assume a statement such as this will make the Agronomists think—WHAT'S THIS CHARACTER TRYING TO DO—DEGRADE US!—not in the least, for that is the farthest thing from my mind. Allow me to proceed with my line of thought and perhaps you'll agree with me.

We know our clubs expect the course to be maintained in top condition, and when this is done, the Golfers score well—the cash registers in the pro-shop and the bar room, are ringing loud and clear, the management no longer considers us as a superintendent, but perhaps as the world's best Agronomist—or even better than that—as a genius—but—when we have a little trouble or a lot of trouble, the golf scores go up—for one reason or another—and the cash registers have quieted down, we are no longer considered as a genius—or the world's best Agronomist—or even a superintendent—that's when we become just a plain old bum.

At times such as this we don't call for the Jack-Of-All-Trades—we call for the master—The Professional Agronomist, such as O. J. Noer, Charlie Wilson, and Jim Latham. The Agronomist not only assists us in the production of the fine turf, but also in the treatment of the soil—as in Pathology—Entomology and many other facets of maintaining our course.

When entering the grounds of the country clubs in Wisconsin, it is interesting to note, that most of the Superintendents, are more the Master than the Jack in Floriculture. For he knows that the ornamental flowering plants brighten the area and their colors do much in landscaping it. It is easily noticeable that he has taken into consideration the flowering season of each plant, so that there will be blossoms throughout the entire golfing season. Most golfers enjoy the beauty of flowers. Usually the ladies are the most ardent admirers.

Now for the trades—Mechanics—Carpentry—Plumbers and many Other—

As mechanics we are expected to have the knowledge and ability to properly repair our equipment, and I'm certain that all of us do. Especially with the mowers and the smaller motorized equipment. Many superintendents have the ability to perform the major repairs on the larger equipment—namely the tractors and trucks.

A number of years ago I had the unfortunate experience of the transfer case on our jeep to break down. I didn't think this job would be difficult, so my assistant and myself removed it from the jeep, dis-

mantled it, and after getting the necessary replacement gears, began to reassemble the gears and pins into the transfer case. After struggling with it a couple of hours, I decided the "Jacks" couldn't do it, so we took it to the master, at one of the local automotive garages.

We're carpenters to the extent of remodeling our work shop, or adding onto it, and being called into the clubhouse to build storage cabinets, shelves or whatever it may be.

On the course we construct concession stands, rain shelters and bridges. When we build the bridges, the profession of the civil engineer enters the picture. To design and construct the bridges in such a manner to absorb the stress and strain of the traffic. No doubt most of the bridges will be for golf cart traffic, but will be built to withhold the weight of a ten-ton truck.

Plumbers—certainly all of us have repaired, or added to our irrigation systems. If you have a system like I have it's repaired every spring. For the farm plow that was used to dig the trench for our line must have been here before Christopher Columbus—and the men that installed the pipe must have been on the Santa Maria with Columbus.

In the past number of years many of you have installed new irrigation systems and I am certain that there hasn't been one installed following the exact blueprint of the irrigation specialist.

The next subject has always been a rather humorous one to me—the weather forecaster. I'm sure that this has happened to all of you many times. On the course or in the clubhouse area a golfer speaks to you about the condition of the course, and finally gets around to the weather, how dry it is and how much a good rain would help. Suddenly he would ask you, "Do you think it'll rain"? Just like you're supposed to be another Bill Carlson. Perhaps you come up with something like—My arthritis has been acting up, or the old war wound has been bothering me—we all know these are always sure signs of rain. If it does rain you're a better forcaster than Carlson.

When buying equipment and supplies a lot of thought is given to what type or brand is best suited for each individual needs. Maybe equipment more so than supplies. I feel that our clubs put a lot of faith in our judgement to purchase the best equipment at the best prices possible. In this category we could be purchasing agents.

The changes made by the superintendent were for logical reasons and will help him to maintain a better course—much easier—in the years ahead. Perhaps we are master plumbers, but jacks of the irrigation specialists.

Electricians—many superintendents are qualified to be master of this trade—I'm strictly a jack—for the electricity is hot. So I am a firm believer in having the master do all this type of work.

Painters—perhaps this trade is one of the most forgotten of all. Certainly our equipment—tee benches, ball washers, buildings and bridges are painted, and at many clubs the maintenance crews are expected and do paint, the interior and exteriors of the clubhouse, and do a masterful job.

Those of you that are not required to perform such duties, or any duties connected with the clubhouse are extremely fortunate.

In regards to record keeping and communications within our clubs, I imagine we all are jacks compared to superintendents in other areas.

I realize that many clubs don't want, or feel they don't need our reports and communication. If the clubs would accept our reports it would be very beneficial to the superintendent in making the Board of Directors realize the importance of his request for added equipment and materials.

I feel the present method I use for my records are adequate. In the event I am called upon to give a report on labor, materials or whatever it may be, I am able to give an itemized report—if so requested—in a very short time. I don't mean to imply that my method is the best, or even one of the best, but it fully covers my needs for the present time.

I remember a speaker at one of our national meetings saying, that each superintendent should have a secretary—if she were to keep the records and take care of the communications—or if he had something else in mind. . .

We as superintendents have a major responsibility in the field of education. The first and perhaps most important is to educate ourselves. We do this by attending conferences, like the one we have here today—The National Conference, and our local association meetings. Also by reading and studying the golf reporter, Golfdom, and other golf course management publications.

Dr. Love has often stated—the man who knows how will always have a job, but the man who knows how and why will be his boss. We get these "whys" by attending these meetings and studying these publications, also during the bull sessions, be it in the hallways after the conference, or at the bar while enjoying some liquid refreshment.

Not only by the aforementioned ways do we have the possibilities of acquiring knowledge, but also while playing golf at other courses. While hacking around this other course we are able to notice the things that that superintendent is doing, or has done, that may be applicable to our own course.

Education is a continuous process, you can be living, and yet be dead. For when your desire to learn has stopped—You're Dead.

The founder of the Winter School for Turf Managers at the University of Massachusetts, Professor L. S. Dickinson, now retired, so very aptly put it, "When a man thinks that he is ripe in knowledge, he starts to rot from lack of growth."

Another responsibility is to our employees. We are aware that when assigning duties we should do so in the manner that they are understood, and create a relationship with each employee assuring them to feel free to discuss with us any problems that may arise from these duties.

Experience has taught me, that some are brilliant learners, and it takes others longer to learn.

In selecting summer help many times it is advantageous to the superintendent to hire boys that are sophomores in high school. This enables him to have after school help and the same seasonal help for 2 or 3 seasons.

When one of our employees shows an interest in golf course management we should encourage him to further his education in turf, by attending our universities.

When we are asked by the universities to accept a turf grass student for summer placement we should do so. In order that this student get the necessary field practice or training in becoming a superintendent.

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It has been said, "practice makes perfect," I don't agree. I like to think that these are different kinds of practice and all accomplish the same end results, as long as they are the proper practices. Therefore, I would like to say, "The proper practice is the most important single element in acquiring skill."

It is also necessary to educate the owner, Board of Directors and other department heads in our operating practices, so that all department function as a successful unit. For it is very disturbing in budgeting our time, to be called into other departments, unless it is an extreme emergency.

Perhaps the most difficult task is educating the responsible department head in the vital importance

of the club financing the superintendent to our national conferences. Little do they realize the amount of knowledge that is acquired and the amazing results when this knowledge is put into practice.

We must also realize that while we are educating them, they are doing for us the same thing.

The all important subject of public relations—Are we public relations jacks or masters? I would say that most of us are the master of the jacks—if that makes any sense.

What is public relations? I have heard it is said to be a "science, art, ritual selling yourself, personal rating, or do unto others as you would have others do unto you." I doubt if anyone has ever gone wrong following that rule.

Dr. Gene Nutter, Executive Director of the Golf Course Superintendents of America, once stated, "A superintendent is a technician first, and a public relations expert second, if at all.

Perhaps we, the golf course superintendents of Wisconsin, have failed in public relations more than anything else. In failing I mean by not heeding the advice of the masters by enrolling in a speech course, such as the Dale Carnegie, of the Toastmaster International Club.

For the past month and especially the last 10 minutes I wish I had enrolled in one of these.

A course such as these would enable us to improve our relations, not only with our clubs, but within the communities in which we live. I don't recall that a fellow superintendent has told me that he has been asked to give a speech to some organized group—as a Men's Club, Ladies Aid Society, Christian Mothers, or whatever the name may be. Although I recall a few years ago a number of superintendents were on this program and did a commendable job.

(Continued next month)

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