

## FROM ASSISTANT TO SUPERINTENDENT

Let's take a close look at our assistant today and see if we can describe him a bit - this should be easy for me since I was one just two years ago.

What is the image portrayed by a golf course assistant superintendent today? An assistant today represents a young, aggressive college educated man eager to prepare himself to get where he's going. Where's he going? Well, hopefully, to a golf course of his own some day.

Why does he have to be college educated? Hopefully, he is a graduate of an accredited college turf program providing him with the strong scientific background giving him the best opportunity possible to understand, and thereby solve, the many complicated problems which he is faced with in growing excellent turfgrass. He is constantly going to be faced with the responsibility of providing better golfing conditions through better turf. It is imperative, then, that he understand the growth physiology of turf and its relation to its environment. He must be concerned with the altering of this environment with the correct combination of water, chemicals and cultural practices so as to provide the optimum growing medium for turf. And, this, he had better be educated for.

What brought this young man to a golf course for employment? Basically, his interest in this field developed out of an intimacy with nature and a love for the out of doors. We're all aware of the strong, attractive forces of nature on those who have been exposed to its beauty, peace and serenity. Although, the assistant will find his responsibilities later pulling him farther and farther from his initial love.

Undoubtedly, the assistant has various other qualities which align him in his position, such as enjoying physical work activity, seasonal work variation and anticipation of being eventually his own boss.

What learning processes is the assistant superintendent faced with?

The assistant goes through essentially two learning processes while working as an assistant—one which we'll call scientific learning and the other we'll call situation learning. Scientific learning can be defined in the assistant's situation as the direct learning of information which is available as a result of someone else's discovery or teaching and presents itself to the assistant in a predetermined formula.

This scientific learning refers to the learning of the procedures and practices involving the total care and maintenance of the golf course and growing healthy turfgrass. More specifically, it would be ounces of fungicide required for control of a particular disease, identification of a particular insect, or maintenance requirements for greens mowers.

This is readily available information, which hopefully will become knowledge if the assistant, as learner, is able to absorb the information through learning experiences as well as printed matter.

Situation learning processes, unfortunately, do not lend themselves to easy, clear cut definition. Situation learning is not merely absorbing of available predetermined formulas or teachings. Situation learning is not easily definable, defies measurement and exists without common parameters. Situation learning is just as it states, the learning, benefit or personal embetterment that results out of a situation or problem successfully handled. It is the building of personal character, emotional stability, and self control as a result of success in handling emotional stress situations, success in decision making and success in dealing with every day challenges and frustrations.

Situation learning involves more individual participation and concentration on the part of the learner assistant so as to assure that he benefits emotionally and personally as a result of each confronting situation. Whereas, scientific learning is more direct, involving simply a provider of knowledge and a receiver of knowledge.

This brings up a big question as to which learning process will be of more importance to the assistant later. Answering this question would be as futile as determining which is more responsible for the personality of an adolescent, his heredity or his upbringing.

OK, the assistant has served his apprenticeship and now he decides, after consulting his superintendent, that he is now ready to make his move.

What's his next step? What's the employment picture look like? How does he prepare himself so as to appear qualified for the role of superintendent? Well, if he has done his job as an assistant, this will all come very easily. The preparing of the resume, the initial letter expressing interest, and his conduct during interview will be easy if he has done a good job in his learning processes, thus qualifying him and providing him the confidence which is so important at this stage.

This process of obtaining a job can be lengthy and frustrating, involving alternating periods of excitement supported by anxiety and consequent depression. It is imperative that he hold his confidence through these trying times.

Alas, an acceptance response comes; he has a job, all he has to say is "yes, I accept." Be careful. It is most important at this point to not let his emotions carry him and refrain from haste. These next decisions may very well be the most important he will ever make, next of course, to those nuptial vows.

He checks back into his notes making sure he negotiates to achieve the monetary goals he has previously set.

Now, having successfully completed his learning processes as assistant, the terms of employment he is faced with present a whole new working environment—A great opportunity to apply the knowledge and skills which he has been gathering and storing.

The transition from assistant to superintendent could be compared with that of a promotion in most any field. From assistant manager to manager, from apprentice to carpenter, from co-pilot to pilot.

He must be aware when making the transition that he now holds the reins and with that, the full responsibility of his crew as well as the entire golf course.

What problems, challenges and frustrations will he encounter in the transition? Plenty!!

Of all the responsibilities, I would like to discuss two which the new superintendent will be least prepared for. One is the supervising of a working crew and two, the successful handling of the member-superintendent relationship. As a working assistant, you're unable to practice supervision and your appeal and image to members is not of concern.

First, let's look at our new superintendent and his relationship to his working crew. This new responsibility dictates a major transition from physical work to concentration on supervision. If he is totally responsible for a worker and the output of that worker reflects on him, then he better know what that worker is doing.

Gaining the respect and authority from a working man is an old long standing problem, but a new one for our new superintendent. Several alternative approaches to the problem exist.

It is generally felt that a respect and authority earned is better than one demanded, although a combination of the two is ideal in reality. Don't just walk tall and carry a big stick, but know what you're doing and develop a good track record.

A respect and authority simply demanded and expected, but not earned is built on fear and results in a shallow respect, which needs constant reinforcement to survive.

A respect and authority by the men of their new superintendent that is borne out of a superintendent's actions, correct decision making and successful results will serve as a motivator and result in a longer lasting respect and authority.

Hopefully, our new superintendent realizes that the maintenance of crew motivation and morale is a never ending task.

From day one, henceforth, more and more of the new superintendent's time is going to have to be spent maintaining the member-superintendent relationship. The innumerable complexities which develop out of a member-superintendent relationship present the new superintendent with a challenge of paramount dimension.

More and more of the superintendent's efforts are directed toward the member-superintendent relationship as a result of the members increased interest in the total operation of a golf club. As members and golfers become better informed, it seems to only spark new curiosities. These curiosities seem to develop greatly out of members and golfers seeking the perfect golfing conditions. They're interested, as we are, in any possible way of improving course conditions. This is advantageous to a progressive minded superintendent. It can lead to the allocation of additional expenditure over and above the normal maintenance for long range improvements, which provide our superintendent with additional aids to do a better job.

Another growing involvement on the part of the concerned member is that of economics. This member is interested in providing the same perfect conditions as those other concerned members, only with less expenditure. This, as we know, becomes more critical all the time and especially in the current economic situation.

These are all responsibilities which were not of concern to a blossoming assistant; but, certainly play a major part in the success in his new role as new superintendent.

Oh, and our new superintendent must not get confused and lost in the "cloud of responsibility" and loose track of his objective. Oh, by the way, what was that?

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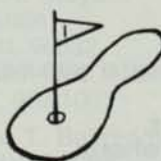
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