

## The Role of the Assistant Superintendent

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Everyday experiences are fun to share. I know a story or two involving Assistant Superintendents that some people in the golf business can relate to. The first is about the frustrations of dedication. Our young assistant was at home enjoying an outdoor barbecue with his family when he received a phone call early Sunday afternoon. "There is a serious problem with the irrigation system! We can't reach the Superintendent. Could you please come to the club? There is water leaking near the tennis courts."

Not overly concerned, the assistant excused himself from the party and drove to the club to find a four inch main spewing twelve hundred gallons per minute of water across the tennis courts, the parking lot, down the hill, and over the first fairway. It didn't take him long to shut the system down and isolate the main. He surveyed the damage and decided to return in the evening to make repairs so the irrigation schedule for the entire course could be met. The course was very dry and three holes would be without water with this section of the system out of commission.

He returned to the scene an hour before sundown that evening. Working conditions were poor, at best. The huge hole made by the main's rupture was still full of water. After sloshing around in the mud until two a.m. in the morning, with only dim headlights from the '66 Chevy Pickup, the young assistant crawled out of the hole, covered with mud, satisfied that the temporary repair would hold long enough to complete the irrigation on his three holes. He returned to the pump house to resume irrigation, but noticed the sun had disappeared behind some clouds.

Leary of the situation, (thunder to the west and a fresh repair that could let go), he waited in the office. By three a.m. a one and a half inch cloud burst sufficiently watered the rest of the golf course and the remaining irrigation program was cancelled! (Oh well, "at least the irrigation reservoir filled up again.")

The second story points out where blind ambition can get the assistant in his efforts to impress his Superintendent. They had been discussing a crowded work schedule and their inability to get the fairways fertilized this past week. (It so happened that this particular assistant was bucking for a raise. He loved his work, liked his boss, but that didn't put bread on the table.) Something extra had to be done for the fairways. They were not in top condition and the tournament was just around the corner. Everyone had gone home except the ambitious Assistant Superintendent. He would single-handedly fertilize the fairways and water them in. Some four hours later, three and a half tons of fertilizer had been applied to the fairways. It was perfect. He had come within a bag or two of proper calibration. Driving up to his last irrigation controller, he swelled with pride thinking no one else could have done it better. Having started up the last fairway irrigation controller, he popped his keys into his rear pocket only to look up and see his tractor roll down the hill and smack squarely into the sturdy Hickory tree guarding the lake.

Producing an excellent golf course is no accident though it requires programs, tried and true. The make-up of these programs includes several formulas, one of which is an attempt to surround yourself with good people, starting from the bot-

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tom up. They are loyal, clean and honest people that work hard and are willing to be supervised.

Over the years, golf course superintendents have found they need an assistant to help lead the crew. The situation is clear: golf management and course maintenance have expanded to the point where quality work is demanded. Busy golf courses compete to produce the best product possible, and golfers market these courses by word of mouth, regardless of the type of facility, resort, public, or private.

If you are not familiar with the second man in charge, you will want to know what he is doing ...

- I can tell you that he is directly responsible for most of the work on the golf course, while the Superintendent gets most of the credit.
- He is the working foreman, caught between directing an experienced crew while trying to please the Superintendent.
- He is the one who doesn't get invited to the clubhouse often enough. Assistants love to pick up the mail for you.
- He may have a four year college degree but is working for the qualified Superintendent to gain necessary field experience.
- He is an intern, paying his dues, working seven days a week, with a few nighttime jobs thrown in for good measure.
- An Assistant Superintendent is the person being trained to take every precaution, to carry out minute details and produce the highest level of manicuring possible; but, sometimes is forced to look the other way when the golfer fails to repair a ball mark or drives his golf cart across freshly laid sod.
- He is highly motivated and looks forward to the feeling of accomplishment.
- He is the anxious one who must learn patience.
- He may be one of the younger individuals on the crew, ready to raise a family.
- He is the one who should be encouraged to actively participate in the game of golf, but seldom has the time during the growing season; nor does he have the money to go to Florida in the winter time.

Every Superintendent has his own ideas for the role of the Assistant Superintendent and his relationship with this important individual. I look for a college man whose goal is to become a Superintendent in the near future. His educational background is very important. With it he brings fresh ideas that the Superintendent can judge for himself and use if he desires. A good assistant wants to be taught. That makes me the teacher.

The Assistant Superintendent will probably be in his early twenties and should expect to work as an assistant for two to five years under the training of one or two Superintendents. An aggressive individual will note his training and the mannerisms of his Superintendent. He should be intelligent enough to learn from the mistakes as well as the success of each season. He should be his own man.

As an assistant, this individual will be working year around for the first time in his young career. If he is to become successful, he will begin a crash course in all phases of the golf course operation. For example, even though he may have had experience in operating an automatic irrigation system, he probably has never started one up in the spring or winterized one in the fall.

His role is to learn the business of golf and the maintenance of the golf course. He must learn to meet new people and deal with their problems on the golf course. The horror of **Poa an-**



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nua is not nearly as bad as the horror of psoriasis. But when you are talking to a golfer about mid-summer stress there are certain do's and don'ts in the discussion. Our man is required to learn about these things when he works in the background. Our man must learn the difference between his golf course and the one down the road. He must learn that there are probably six ways to successfully deal with golf course maintenance and one or two ways to really screw it up. He is a working leader on the grounds crew that must have the fortitude to stay a little late at the end of a long day to help the superintendent plan the coming week and judge the progress of this past day. He should behave himself in the evening and be alert the next morning, so that when I change my mind the next day he understands where I'm coming from.

He must understand that he, as the Assistant Superintendent, will have extra pressure put on him by the Superintendent. He will be criticized properly because the Superintendent cares as much or more about his assistant's progress than anybody else on the crew. He must be prepared to take over when I'm absent. He must learn to develop the attitude that he is a key to the maintenance operation and there are a few more important decisions to make than who cuts what in the morning.

You see, his role as an assistant is to learn my business. It's not until he gets into my shoes that my business is completely understood. I've made it a point to ask my former assistants, who are now Superintendents, if some of our previous differences in opinion make any sense now. Their reply has always been similar to: "I had no idea how important some of your funny rules were, but now I do."