



“Setting Priorities”

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Director's Column Our Most Important Resource

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The Midwest Turf Clinic at Medinah Country Club is recent history. It was very gratifying to see many younger members of our Association in attendance. Several of these members were assistants and other members of our maintenance staffs. The role of these assistants or key staff members is very important at all golf course maintenance operations. Without these key individuals many important maintenance programs and important projects would not be able to be completed. The age of specialization has come to the golf course maintenance staff, my own staff currently consists of: two assistants, a horticulturist, an irrigation technician/supervisor, supervisor/project technician, and a mechanical maintenance supervisor. Many other golf course superintendents utilize key personnel at their operations. Some titles of these positions are: assistant superintendent, supervisor, foreman, head mechanic, maintenance technician, irrigation technician, horticulturist, head gardener, arborist, etc. This list can go on and on, and it would include buzzwords of the day, irrigation technician is a good example.

These individuals are working hard to help us to provide our golfers with the excellent conditions found on golf courses today. Well, many of us have this capable staff surrounding us today. What do we do with these individuals? Hopefully we treat them as we ourselves would want to be treated. What does that entail or require from us? As superintendents we must ensure that these individuals are fairly compensated (with a realistic living wage or salary), receive basic benefits (health insurance, etc.) and have the opportunity to continue their education. Improving their knowledge will benefit them as individuals, as well as, benefitting our golf maintenance operations. This is an investment that will benefit our entire industry.

Some of these individuals will aspire to move ahead some day to their own golf course, as a superintendent. Other individuals however, will remain within their role either at the same golf course or move to another operation. These staff members are our most important resource today. As golf course superintendents, we must strive to treat them as our most precious resource, and not take them for granted. They must be allowed to grow and prosper, just as golf itself is growing and prospering throughout the entire world.

After reading articles by GCSAA Director Bruce Williams, and GCSAA President Stephen Cadenelli, concerning the utilization of our spare time, I couldn't help but compare the French attitude with our own, concerning family and personal time. It seems this advice always surfaces in mid-summer when stress peaks for most Superintendents. But not for the French. This advice will surface at any time day or night, summer or winter, wet or dry. They put family, friends, and the enjoyment of life ahead of all other priorities. In fact there is no other priority. If you ask a French "Intendant de Parcours" whether he will be at the golf course on the coming weekend or in the country with his family, no doubt about it ... he will not be on the first tee. Even those who are single and without a wife and children will be with their parents and friends every chance they get. The point being: they make their chances. None of this "I've got to be at the course today or something will go wrong". Think about it. There are courses here in Europe older than the United States, and they're still there, after all these years, after all those Superintendents, they're still there! Time off or long hours at the course, they're still there. And who knows the difference? Their families and friends know. Oh yes, there are those of us who will say "We are more dedicated than they, more professional, harder working, and American members demand higher quality." This may be true. But after all those years the courses are still there! Still being played. Still being maintained. Still being watered. You won't find too many French Superintendents with a stress problem, unless he's trying to choose a good wine. I'm not saying this outlook is right or wrong, good or bad, but it works for them and after all these years their courses are still there! Most people can't believe it when they discover the hours an American Superintendent works. In France if you work extra hours, you are allowed by law to recuperate those same hours in the off season, which means along with the mandatory 5 weeks of vacation, you may be looking at somewhere around 2 months of rest and relaxation before the next season starts! When they get back .. that's right, the golf course is still there. I think that most of us will always be working those incredible hours. Our drive towards excellence demands it. It's one of the things that makes our country so unique and strong, along with giving us the greatest golf courses in the world. But there must be a middle ground between these two philosophies. There must be a way to find the time. While I personally don't hold to the French idea of "it can wait till tomorrow", I have learned one thing here, and that is that life is short, spare time is important, and the weekends spent traveling are much more memorable than those spent at the golf course. And when I come back Monday morning ... the course is still there!

(Editor's note: This is one of the articles that got lost in the mail with the October issue.)