

# Assistant Superintendent/ Superintendent Interactions

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This article may have a familiar ring to it because it is really little more than a transcript of the speech I gave at the Medinah Clinic on November 18, 1992. At the request of several of my peers I am now making the information contained in that speech available for anybody who is interested.

...In my two years working as an assistant and even in my years working at Aurora Country Club, I have noticed both strengths and flaws in the Assistant Superintendent/Superintendent relationship.

I am going to organize this article in terms of personal qualities which I feel are essential to a healthy and professional relationship. I will first name the quality and then I will describe how it applies to us as assistants and as superintendents.

The first characteristic is responsibility and how it should be delegated. This is something that varies greatly at different courses. Some superintendents like to maintain an "Iron Grip" on just about every operation that goes on at the golf course. In these situations the assistant is more like a foreman and often begins to stagnate in his position. He becomes bored with his job and does not receive the experience he needs to one day become a superintendent. A situation like this one might be satisfactory for an assistant who is content in his position and wishes to stay for years to come, but in many instances it leads to friction.

Conversely, there is the superintendent who delegates a great deal of his responsibilities to his assistant. This is a relationship which allows both the superintendent and the assistant to grow. Because he needs to spend less time with the more mundane details that go with running the golf course, the superintendent can expend his energies with other things, such as research, communication with the membership, writing articles, fishing, making a budget, really the list goes on and on. At the same time the assistant is gaining much needed experience and begins to develop the skill and confidence needed to be a successful superintendent. This situation is more suited for operations in which the assistant is planning on moving to a superintendent's position in the not-too-distant future.

If a superintendent plans to delegate this responsibility he must show at least some patience, which is the next characteristic I would like to discuss.

For the superintendent, this means not losing your cool when your assistant decides to zig when you specifically told him to zag. The assistant may have felt that conditions in the field warranted a change in procedure. Even if the assistant is wrong, this kind of free-thinking should not be discouraged. **Everybody** learns from mistakes, we just hope the price we pay to learn is not too high.

For the assistant, being patient means not getting angry or discouraged when the superintendent corrects you. Put yourself in the superintendent's shoes and understand that in the end he is trying to help you, the assistant, become a better turf manager.

Fairness is the next trait which comes to mind when thinking about a successful superintendent/assistant superintendent relationship. Of all the qualities in this article, this one is the most vague to me. Being fair means showing concern for a person's life outside the work place. While we all know that overtime

is essential at times, we must all make the effort to spend quality time on our personal lives. Superintendents should be careful not to overwork their assistants but at the same time assistants should be aware of their boss's situation and not be afraid to offer help. We, as assistants and as superintendents, must try to shoulder the burden as evenly as possible.

Being fair also means being compensated adequately for the job being done. According to most experts, assistants should be granted a 10% pay raise annually. I am sure every assistant reading this article would agree. Seriously, do not pinch pennies when it comes to your people. They are the ones who make you stand or make you fall.

Communication, communication, communication! It seems as though this subject always comes up when discussing the assistant/superintendent relationship. To be honest with you, I think that I will be ill if I hear that word much more. Let us just say that it is essential that the assistant and the superintendent are on the same page. Have frequent conversations and practice good listening skills.

At this time I would like to stress the importance of good listening skills. Instances of poor listening skills occur frequently and have plagued me before. There were times when I was being instructed as to how to perform a certain task and after hearing what the job was I would in effect stop listening. Oh, sure, I would acknowledge what was being said but in my mind I would be thinking about how I would get the job done in my own way. I feel that this is a problem that can be solved by making a conscious effort to really listen. Remember that listening is not merely hearing the words being said but additionally it involves thinking about what the words really mean. If any doubt remains, ask questions.

The final quality, and perhaps the most important one, is consistency. Always let those around you know what they can expect from you. I know that it is easier said than done, but try not to let your moods and personal dilemmas affect the way in which you treat those around you.

For the superintendent, this means adopting a management style suited to your psyche and then adhering to that style. If you are the stern and strict type of person, then manage those under you that way and do it consistently. People may chafe under this kind of treatment at first, but as long as you are consistent and fair in your actions, the people under you usually will learn how to perform effectively for you. Human beings are great at adapting as long as they know what it is they are adapting to. Do not be the "happy go lucky" superintendent one day and the next day be the "Neo-Nazi superintendent from hell!" It causes those around you, namely your assistant, but others as well, to never really know what to expect from you.

For the assistant, being consistent means being somebody that your boss can count on day after day. If you decide to be the assertive type of assistant, then perform in that fashion every day. The superintendent will then find a way to put that aggressiveness to good use. If you as an assistant are assertive one day and submissive the next, then every day you are presenting your boss with the question, "Just who is going to show up today?" I am sure that gets old after awhile.

Well, that about wraps it up for this article. I hope that some of the items I mentioned today hit close to home for many of you. I felt that it was a topic that just about all of us could relate to and hopefully, I was able to shine some light on a few of the problems we face as Superintendents and as Assistants.