

Negotiate Your Way to the Top

by Mike Hamilton, CCS, Harbor Club

With new governmental regulations, water rationing and environmental issues staring us in the face, superintendents are increasingly concerned about our industry's future. Something I feel threatens the credibility of our industry just as much as superintendents who undersell themselves to get a job. Maybe this bothers me more because my career is on its way. Many superintendents are not being paid what they are worth, and this undersells the industry.

Personally, I feel no superintendent should make less than \$50,000/year in his total package. There are ways to turn a \$30,000 base salary into a \$50,000 package. The key is to first sell yourself, then negotiate a good contract.

There are four steps in the total hiring process — the resume, the interview, the negotiation and the contract agreement. All four are equally significant.

The resume should be short but impressive. Unless you are well-versed in resume preparation, I suggest using a professional resume service. It will cost, but it will be money well spent. These experts know how to make your resume alluring, and they know what employers look for in an employee. Chances are, you would not try to defend yourself in a court of law; you'd hire an expert. Do yourself a favor and do the same with your resume. Along with the resume, include as many creditable letters of recommendation as possible. Make sure these are not just friends who will put in a good word for you. The employer will know the difference. Most importantly in your resume, make sure there are no typos.

The cover letter may be more important than the resume itself. Be short and concise. Too often people squeeze their life story into a cover letter. Simply announce you are enclosing a resume and state when you would be available for an interview. Let your resume do the talking.

You have been granted an interview. The employer must be impressed, or you wouldn't be there. Now get informed. Find out everything you can about the club prior to your interview. Try anticipating possible questions so you can give impressive answers. Talk to the previous superintendent. Find out why he left, how much he made, his likes and dislikes, as well as likes and dislikes of the ownership and membership. Tour the golf course at least once and take notes so you can suggest improvements. Probe the greens to determine soil mix, ask to see the equipment, maintenance building and pump station. These inquiries are impressive and show a genuine concern. Convince the employer you are the greatest. But never, never discuss your needs until you are offered the job. You've done your homework, sold yourself, and have been offered the job. It is now time to negotiate.

There are three factors to remember during a good negotiation: 1) neither party gets everything they want; 2) each party feels they have gained something; 3) both parties retain their self-respect. By understanding these characteristics, you can retain confidence in the negotiation.

The third factor, retaining self-respect, is very important for both employee and employer. If you settle for less than minimum, you will always look for something better. Your attitude going into the negotiations should be that this job will be yours for the next 20 years instead of just a stepping stone.

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(Negotiate continued)

Any other idea is unfair to yourself and to your employer. On the other hand, if you ruin your employer's self-respect, they may never feel they are getting their money's worth and at the first opportunity, you'll be fired.

During negotiations, meet where you will be comfortable. If there are other people in the room, introduce yourself, and be sure to remember their names. Take charge with a general overview of the situation, then defer to them. Talk to the person who has the ultimate authority to deal and allow the employer to make the first offer. Get major issues out of the way so that if the employer falls short of your financial expectations, you have alternate ways to make up the difference. Try anticipating his moves and discover how far he can go. Have the employer divulge himself first.

If the negotiator only offers \$30,000 and you need \$50,000, don't just give up and walk out. Be creative and secure the other \$20,000 in other ways such as through insurance, a vehicle allowance, a housing or clothing allowance, etc. Retirement and disability insurance are other ways an employer can greatly assist a superintendent. Suggest a percentage of cart and green fees. If a club has 40,000 rounds of golf per year perhaps you can convince the employer to increase the green fees \$.50/round which goes to you. Other possibilities include a bonus to you for each new member, or a bonus if you stay within your budget. I know one superintendent who makes \$10,000 a year from golf ball concessions from his lakes. If the employer refuses to compromise on any of this, then it is time to leave.

Let's say you have a verbal agreement. Negotiations are still not complete. Now protect yourself with the contract. If the employer insists on drawing up the contract, have your attorney check it out before you sign.

A good contract is equally fair to both parties. It should state the nature of the employment (from when to when); I suggest a minimum three year agreement. It should include the responsibilities and duties of the superintendent, compensation, vacation policy, sick days, disability policy, insurance, allowances, seminars and dues, and membership privileges. Also include an indemnification clause where the employer pays all legal fees

"Be creative ... I know one superintendent who makes \$10,000 a year in golf ball concessions from his lakes"

if someone hurts themselves and tries to sue you. There needs to be a termination agreement, but make sure the reasons are valid. Clauses like: "Either party may terminate this agreement without cause 30 days prior to written notice to the other", can turn your three year contract into 30 days. In my contract, my employer can terminate our agreement at any time for any reason, but if he does, he must give me four months severance pay unless I am convicted of a felony or embezzlement. Also, I can leave with a four month written notice or either pay for their search for a replacement. Without it you are destined to lose the contract dispute, simply because legal fees will probably be higher than what you are going after. Pick four arbitrators, two of your choosing and two of your employer's choosing, and try to agree on all four.

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(Negotiate continued)

Contracts are very complex. But most importantly, protect yourself. I have a contract that basically covers everything. If you would like, contact me and I'll send a copy.

The "old-time" superintendents have laid vital groundwork for us to better our profession. Through education, communication and research we are taking great strides to continue this advancement. Please do not backslide. We must set minimum standards. Sell yourself and get your worth, not only for yourself and your family, but for superintendents everywhere.

Credit: "Through the Green" May/June 92.

Leaves, Limbs, Needles & Boughs



by Fred Opperman

Well, it has taken me over four years to get around to the most common tree that is planted on the Chicagoland area golf courses. Why has it taken me so long? I have always felt that with the tree being so common, you ought to have other species to choose from and get more diversity into your plantings. Dr. Tom Green in his report on trees on golf courses, listed the Green Ash, *Fraxinus pennsylvanica*, as the most common tree planted with over 3000 being counted on courses he surveyed.

Green Ash is also heavily planted in the parkways of many towns and cities. It can withstand the grit, salt and the harsh conditions where little care is ever given.

Leaves: Opposite, pinnately compound, 5 to 9 leaflets, 2 to 5" long, 1 to 2" wide. These leaves are lance shaped to elliptic, and long pointed at the tip. Leaves are toothed along both edges and smooth top and bottom.



Bark: Light or dark gray, with diamond-shaped furrows. Similar to white ash.

Twigs: Slender to rather stout, smooth; leaf scars half-round and straight across the top, with several bundle traces forming a half-moon.



Size: 45 to 60 feet tall, with a trunk diameter of up to 2 1/2 feet and a spread of 25 to 35 feet. Fast grower, 2 to 3' per year. Budded trees may grow 8 to 12' in a single season.

Wood: Hard, heavy and strong. Used for interior finishing, tool handles, baseball bats and general lumber.

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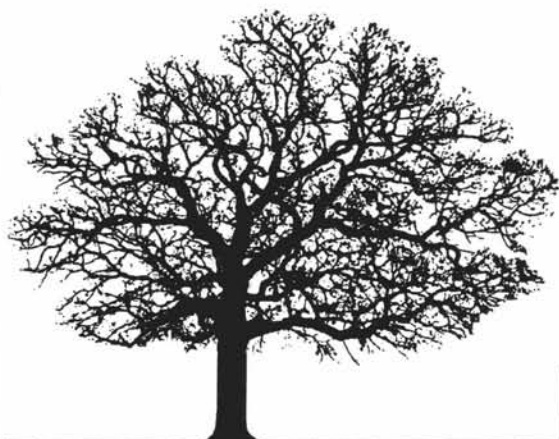


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