

Superintendent and Assistant Relationships

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When asked by our distinguished committee chairman Kevin DeRoo to write an article for "Ask the 'Expert,'" the first thought that came to my mind was that of one of my favorite characters from a 1960's sitcom. "I know nothing, nothing." Like Sergeant Schultz, I know nothing. I kept asking myself, "What am I going to write about?" Then the thought crossed my mind: While I'm at the Midwest meetings every month, I have entrusted my assistant to take charge of the course.

I have developed a great deal of confidence in my assistant's ability to handle situations as I would. How did I get to this point of trust and confidence? I thought I would ask some of our brethren how they handle their assistants and what do they expect from them. After all, we probably spend more time with our assistants than we do with our wives.

The criteria I used was to ask each superintendent what it was they were looking for in hiring an assistant, what is their relationship with their assistant, and how long did they expect an assistant to stay with them.

Rick Bowden at Bob O' Link knows how important it is for the superintendent and the assistant to be on the same page. Rick was a longtime assistant to Bruce Williams and knows firsthand that sometimes the assistant must make decisions in the absence of the superintendent, and the decision must be made in the fashion of the

superintendent. Rick believes that the assistant should not be thrown into a situation that he cannot handle. "Give him small responsibilities so that he gains confidence in himself and the crew gains confidence in him."

As superintendent, Rick tries to teach his assistants there are certain ways that he would want things to be done and that in his absence

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the assistant would make the same decisions that he would. Rick also expects his assistants to offer other alternatives and ideas. "I like to hear their thoughts and ideas, but I still want things to be done my way, and I will explain my reasoning with them. So far there have not been any problems."

Although Rick does spend some time with his assistants away from the work environment, he would prefer to keep it professional. "I spend most of my time during the season with these guys,

so I like to spend my time away from work with my family. Therefore, except for a few dinners and golf, there is little socializing away from the workplace." Rick does not have a problem with an assistant staying on and becoming a senior assistant. "It's all up to the individual. For awhile, I thought I was going to be one, but fortunately, things worked out for me. A senior assistant can bring a wealth of knowledge and continuity to an operation and create a comfort level."

John Gurke at Aurora Country Club wants an assistant that has experience and has worked at several different courses. "I prefer that the assistant be eager to learn and have a professional appearance. He must be able to interface with the membership in a professional manner." Gurke also adds, "The assistant and the superintendent should have a symbiotic relationship. The areas that I am not as knowledgeable in should be areas of strength for him."

John does not have a problem with a relationship that transcends beyond the workplace. "I believe it helps the overall operation that my assistant shares a similar interest away from the work environment. It gives us time to socialize and work more productively when we are at the course."

Gurke thinks that is important for both the assistant and himself if the assistant only stays on for three to four years. "I think the situation could become stagnant, and it is good to have some fresh ideas and perspectives in our operation. It is also better for the assistant, because

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after three or four years, he has learned everything he can from me."

Dave Blomquist takes an all together different approach when hiring an assistant. He subjects each candidate to a rigorous 14 questions-and-answers session. For example, Blomquist asks how many hours does the candidate expect to work in a given week. This is usually the make-or-break question for the candidate. If you are wondering what the correct answer is, I have taken a vow of secrecy; and if I told you, I would have to kill you.

Dave believes the superintendent/assistant relationship should be professional. "I try not to put myself in situations where I will compromise our professional relationship. That is not to say that we cannot be out in social situations. I think that is beneficial to our relationship." Blomquist further states,

In conclusion, having an assistant that we can work with and learn from is invaluable. Sometimes our jobs can be very stressful, and it is comforting to know that we have someone else who shares the same pride and dedication in persevering the highest quality of maintenance in our golf courses.

"I would not put either of us in a situation that could cause a lapse in judgment."

Dave wants his assistant to be on a fast track to a superintendent's position. "The ideal assistant comes to me with experience and knowledge. Hopefully, I can help them fine-tune their skills." Blomquist has already helped matriculate two of our Midwest members to the level of superintendents: Vince Dodge at Nordic Hills and Tim Anderson at Prestwick.

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