

A Superintendent's Responsibility

Glenn Bereiter
Aldeen G.C.

The longer anyone is in this profession as a golf course superintendent, the more their responsibilities increase. When I began in this business, my mentors would remind me almost daily that a golf course superintendent is the problem solver of the club. Ours was the only department with the resources and the knowledge to handle most problems that surface within the club. We are agronomists, managers, consultants, educators, teachers, electricians, accountants, mechanics, horticulturists, carpenters, inventors, etc., etc., etc. I'm sure we could all add more things to the list, but for the purpose of this article, I would like to concentrate on the educator/teacher responsibility of our positions.

As we began our journey to our present positions, we were educated to maintain a golf course; and we learned from Mike Mumper at the NCTE that "they don't teach you everything you need to know in school." We are constantly learning how to improve our courses, the environment, communication skills and employee relations. One of the most important relationships is that one between the superintendent and the assistant.

We all remember our first assistant superintendent position: learning the day-to-day operation of a golf course throughout the entire year; storing up the information that the superintendent had learned from years of experience; watching the decision-making process first-hand and even being involved in those decisions; knowing that whatever the outcome, the superintendent had to live with the consequences; and

moving from one assistant superintendent position to another and learning an altogether different style of golf course maintenance, but providing the same results.

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One thing that makes golf course maintenance fascinating is the many different styles of management; no two golf courses are maintained exactly alike. That is

why being an assistant at a number of golf courses is important. One can draw on the superintendent's knowledge and style to formulate your own style of maintenance. I always tell my interns and assistants that you can learn from any situation, good or bad, or more importantly, how to handle a situation or how **not** to!

In my opinion, in order for the assistant/superintendent relationship to succeed, a set of guidelines needs to be stated and agreed upon. From the superintendent, we must: **RESPECT** their previous experience, education, and professional goals. **COMMUNICATE** with them, the same way you expect communication from the golf pro, general manager, or any other club official. **TRAIN** them in the

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intricacies of golf course management, teaching them what they haven't learned in school. Prepare them with assigning RESPONSIBILITY to carry out daily tasks and to manage the crew in the superintendent's absence. TRUST their judgment and abilities. Provide EDUCATION, as members in local associations, GCSAA, and attending seminars and conferences. Give them HONESTY with regard to performance and evaluation. Finally, and possibly most important, is FLEXIBILITY. Allow the assistant the opportunity to make mistakes and learn from them. All too often we don't give an assistant the opportunity to fail; and, consequently, we never give them the opportunity to succeed.

In turn, from the assistant superintendent, I expect: TRUST in the decisions we make that they will be handled as we agreed, or in some cases, as assigned. DEDICATION to the high standards I expect and our patrons demand. WILLINGNESS to learn, record experiences, and work long, hard hours. Being the first one to work in the morning and the last one to leave in the evening. RESPECT for my experience and training and in following the decisions we ultimately come to. CONFIDENTIALITY for information of club officials or members that could be construed in different

ways. An EXEMPLARY employee for all staff to imitate. A PROFESSIONAL in the way they approach their job, other employees, members or patrons, and association gatherings. The assistant must want to LEARN. All too often assistants come to us thinking that they have all the answers and know how to handle any situation when, in reality, they do not.


Earlier I mentioned communication from superintendent to assistant, but it is also true from assistant to superintendent. Remember that in order to communicate, someone must be LISTENING for proper instruction and plan of action. The number of students entering the marketplace yearly are making quality assistant positions scarce. It is common for a club to receive fifty or more applicants for a job opening. We are in a competitive market here, and it seems to be tightening as time goes by. There is no "fast track" to a superintendent position any more, and it is up to us to train our employees properly to give them every opportunity available to succeed in this profession. 

Luke Strojny -N- Poplar Creek C.C.

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When I asked Luke about his aspirations in our profession, he seemed to be caught off guard. But he answered very simply: to find contentment in his work.

The more I thought about the answer, the more it made sense to me. Our profession allows us to nurture beautiful places of recreation, enjoyment and supposed relaxation. Because every member, guest, or participant judges our work and sometimes is not satisfied with the conditions we provide, it is difficult to be content ourselves. Every aspect of our business, whether it is our budgets, personnel, employers, physical grounds, turf types, or nature herself, has limitations. It is up to us to recognize and understand these limitations and work within the confines of them. Once these boundaries are defined, it is up to us to achieve the uppermost limit within that confine. By doing so, perhaps we will and can find contentment ourselves.

I know the members of the MAGCS will be content by the fine surroundings and accommodations that Luke will provide for us at the March meeting at the Poplar Creek Country Club. Thanks, Luke. 

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