

Is a GM Position in Your Future?

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During the Golf, Government & Environmental Session at the GCSAA International Convention in Orlando, James Singerling, CMAA, supported the concept of a management network comprised of three equal department heads versus the general manager, or "GM," system of management. No comment made during the session's almost two-hour time frame drew as much applause.

I have been fortunate to get along with the golf professionals and club managers where I have worked, but time after time have heard stories from fellow superintendents about how a general manager used his authority over a superintendent to tie his or her hands on an important issue, not for the good of the club but only to reinforce the power of the GM position. In the mad pursuit to be viewed by the membership as the most important club employee, GMs have been known to purposely make other department heads look bad solely to exert their own dominance.

We know that clubhouse managers and golf pros do not totally understand what we superintendents are faced with on a day-to-day basis, so why is the clubhouse manager or pro still usually chosen over the superintendent for the GM position? Several reasons exist, but the trend is changing. Over the past few decades, our profession has made great strides in education and presentation. No longer is the superintendent stereotyped as

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wearing bib overalls and sporting a "green thumb." Today, a college-educated professional is the standard. (And about the coverall thing—if you don't dress like a professional, you won't be thought of as one. It does not take much to switch from blue jeans to Dockers.)

Years ago, many superintendents were not visible on a regular basis to people in the clubhouse, staying out on the course doing what they did best, distant from the public. Golf pros and clubhouse managers have always been the personnel speaking to the

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players one on one. Now, more and more, superintendents are becoming involved—indeed, need to be involved—with public relations on behalf of their organizations through direct contact around the clubhouse. Many superintendents are now attending club board meetings, another step in the right direction. The superintendent position itself seems to be more stable as in general, superintendents have very long tenures.

How many superintendents have pursued a general manager position? Probably not too many. Most will say that they do not want to give up time away from the golf course, their true devotion. But would you feel the same way if your club was going to a GM management scheme and you could either pursue the position or answer to a clubhouse manager or golf professional on a daily basis?

Several MAGCS members have opted for the former, pursuing and securing titles of either general manager or director of golf. Mike Nass of Cantigny Golf Club and Dave Fisher of Park Hills Golf Course are two good examples of superintendents advancing to the GM position. Both Mike and Dave feel it is easier for a superintendent to learn the restaurant and pro shop businesses than it would be for a pro or clubhouse manager to learn and understand golf course management.

Mike Nass enjoys being the main “go-to” person at his facility and welcomes the challenges of the added responsibilities. He feels very fortunate about his work situation and appreciates the fact that his employers provided him the opportunity to acquire the education necessary for the position.

Dave Fisher’s transfer to the GM role was slightly different than Mike’s. Initially, the pro at Dave’s course assumed the GM position, and when this did not work out, Dave stepped in. Dave’s friendly personality eased the transition and no hard feelings developed. Operations are going smoothly and organizational coordination has been achieved.

When asked about any difficulties with the transition to GM, both Dave and Mike expressed concerns about letting go of hands-on golf course management and managing from a distance. For both, making this sacrifice was well worth it. Neither Dave nor Mike hesitated to say he would take the same path if he had to do it all over again. Both agreed that the effort and responsibilities are worth the advantages

of being a GM and that they would rather be general managers than work for GMs.

If golf professionals and clubhouse managers coming into GM roles are “trained” with a basic course or two in turfgrass management, why doesn’t the GCSAA promote educational courses that train superintendents on the full spectrum of GM responsibilities? I for one would take part in the training. Although I am perfectly happy with the tri-management system at my club, if the situation were to change I would like to have enough qualifications to at least be considered for the GM position. When push comes to shove, I too would rather be a GM than work for one.



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