



# What I Did On My (Boss') Summer Vacation

*There is no better mentoring experience for an assistant and no better way for a superintendent to recharge his batteries than to take a vacation during the middle of the season. I found this out firsthand late last June.*

*A pump station goes AWOL during a heat wave, and an assistant superintendent spelling his boss for a week confronts some difficult decisions by mustering his resources, pondering his options, making the tough choices—and gains confidence in the process . . .*

It all started with a drive to the airport to drop off the boss for a week-long trip. Wow! He was really going and leaving me in charge to take care of everything! To top it off, it was supposed to get hot towards the end of the week. No problem, I figured, I have been doing this stuff for quite a while and we have a great crew. What could go wrong? Boy, was I in for a surprise.

When I returned to work later that morning, I got in my cart to drive around and check on everything. During the course of my travels, I went to the chemical building because I had to finish cleaning up everything from spraying that morning. When I went into the chemical building, I noticed the lights were dim. I thought this was odd, so I decided to check into it. As the chemical building is on the same power source as our pump house, I went there to investigate the fuses or any other possible causes. Upon entering, I noticed the lights were dim there also and the pump station was flashing an error message. The VFD drive was not working . . . OH NO!!! Now I knew something was definitely wrong. I immediately got on the radio to call the foreman to help me figure out what was going on. Because his knowledge of electricity was better than mine, he deduced that one of the three legs of power coming from the power line must be out. I was not quite sure what he meant but knew it did not sound too good. He told me to meet him by the electric pole adjacent to the 12th hole. Sure enough, one of the fuses from the power line was hanging there disconnected.

I raced back to the shop and called Com Ed. They would have someone out to fix it, they told me, but they didn't give me any estimated time of arrival. Oh great, I thought—this could take forever. Much to my surprise, an hour later a crew was there to replace the fuse. I asked the guy what could have caused the problem and he pointed to a dead squirrel on the ground beneath the pole. In no time they had the fuse back on and everything was back to normal, or so I thought.

I got back to the pump house to reset the pump station and the VFD drive would not reset. What now?! After checking everything that I could think of, I called the expert, Chris Plumb. While waiting for Chris, I made sure everyone

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was busy and did a quick drive-around to check the course. No problems so far, except for the VFD drive in the pump house. An hour later, Chris was there and started troubleshooting the situation. I did not like the expression on his face when he opened up the VFD drive box. Everything was black inside and definitely fried. I asked him what my options were? Chris explained to me that the manufacturer of the drive does not allow him to do service work on that drive. I would need to have their people fly in to fix it, which could take a week or longer and may get costly. Not a valid option, I thought. The other option was to replace this drive with one that he could service and get parts "next day." In my mind, that sounded a little better, especially with the predicted forecast of hot weather coming in the next couple of days. I wondered how much this was going to cost, knowing it was not in our budget.

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Having acquired all this information, I headed back to the shop to call the greens chairman to let him know of the situation and obtain his approval to fix it. After explaining the problem and our options to him, he asked me what I thought we should do. Wow, he is asking for my opinion, I thought to myself. I told him that I believed our only valid and sensible option would be to get the new drive, which our local service guy could fix in the future if necessary. He agreed and then gave me the okay to spend the unbudgeted \$9,000 that it would take to replace the VFD drive. All this because it was what I recommended!

I immediately told Chris our plan was to get a new VFD drive and he called in the order. Because it was already late in the afternoon, he said the parts would be there the day after next and he could have everything up and running shortly after that. I knew the course could make it through another day without water because the trustworthy weather people were predicting rain the next day and the course looked fine at the moment. I told Chris I would call him when we had everything. After a couple tours around the course, I convinced myself the course would be fine without water that night, knowing we could hand-water, if needed, the next day.

At that point, I needed to make one more decision: do I call the boss and let him know I have just spent an unbudgeted \$9,000, or do I just leave the bill on his desk as part of his summary of events while he was gone? Well, I thought to myself, there is not a whole lot he can do now and why stress him out while he is on vacation—that's not the reason he went. Trusting that I had made the right decisions so far, I opted to not disrupt his vacation and just leave the bill on his desk for him to see when he returned.

The next day was a long one. The daytime temperatures were approaching the 90s and nighttime temperatures were close to the 60s. Although the weather guys were still predicting rain for that evening, they were also predicting higher tempera-

tures to follow the next couple of days. That afternoon, I had some of the crew out doing some very limited hand-watering of areas on greens that were beginning to stress, while I stayed in the pump house to manually turn on and off the pumps as needed. My objective was, at minimum, to keep the greens alive and in good condition; the other areas we could deal with later when everything was back to normal. This seemed to be working fine and I just hoped nothing else would go wrong. Much to my surprise, I felt we made it through that day in good condition.

After a night of watching the Weather Channel, I happily arrived the next morning to see 0.6" in the rain gauge. Also, later that morning, a small package arrived. It was only the fan that kept the VFD drive cool, not the VFD drive itself. A couple hours passed and I began to worry about the rest of the shipment that had not arrived yet. I called UPS to find out the location of the VFD package, but all they could tell me was that it had arrived at O'Hare and should be at the club soon. Keeping the crew busy and watching the Weather Channel helped to pass time. The rain had given the course some much-needed relief, but I was not comfortable still having a disabled pump house with the temperatures getting hotter. A couple hours later, I finally found out where the package was . . . it had been sent to the wrong location! Oh great, who knew how long it would take for UPS to get it here? After a lot of complaining on my part, they assured me it would be at the club that day. My head was starting to spin from all of this turmoil, so I called Chris to let him know that the package would not be at the club until sometime late in the afternoon. Chris gave me reassurance by telling me he understood the urgency of getting the pump station fixed and that I could call him whenever the package arrived.

The crew's day was soon over and that left me there waiting for the VFD drive, checking the course conditions, and calling UPS every so often to check the status of my package. To prepare myself for the worst,

I had convinced myself that if need be the course could make it through the night without any water. Finally, at 6:30 p.m., the UPS guy arrived with my VFD drive. I called Chris to let him know the package had arrived. He told me it would take him 30 minutes to get there and then a couple hours to be up and running again, if I needed to water that night. At this point I was exhausted from all that was going on with this whole situation, but through my afternoon travels around the course things looked okay. So I made the decision to have him come first thing in the morning to do the install, convinced the course would be fine without water for another evening.

The next day, Chris was there first thing in the morning and amazingly everything went quite smoothly. By 10 a.m., Chris had everything up and running and back to normal. I spent the rest of the morning turning heads on here and there just because I could again. The only concern I had

was the approaching 90° weather. But after the whole ordeal I had just gone through, I had a boost in my confidence to handle anything that would come my way.

What a great experience for me to prove my abilities, interact with members and learn what it is a superintendent must do everyday. It was experience and training I could not learn in school or on the job with the superintendent there. I am sure it took a lot of courage on my superintendent's part to leave the assistant in charge for a week in the middle of summer, but it was the greatest compliment I could receive in regard to my ability to do the job and make the difficult decisions. Hearing from the boss that he would not have handled it any differently and that he was not worried when he was gone really made me feel good. This is truly a win-win scenario for both the superintendent and the assistant.



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