



Iron Sharpens Iron

I have always liked the phrase "Iron Sharpens Iron." It seems like something Tim—the tool man—Taylor would say on the sit-com "Home Improvement." He would of course follow that with a low, grumbling Ruh...Ruh...Ruh. Actually, this is a proverb that reads: As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another. I think we as superintendents have a thing or two to learn from this old proverb. You just have to ask yourself two questions. Have you SHARPENED any iron lately, and are you STAYING Sharp?

Sharpening iron refers to our ability to mentor and teach others. Staying sharp usually requires interaction with our peers and learning from those around us. Throughout my 22 years in golf course management, I have had the privilege of interacting and learning from many people. As time goes by, I find myself appreciating them more each day. As a superintendent, and a leader of many, it is clear to me that there are infinite opportunities to teach or be taught.

There is definitely an art to teaching and mentoring. So I thought it would be a good idea to offer a few tips to superintendents on how to stay in the sharpening mode.

- Engage in discussion whenever possible so others can learn from you. (Don't underestimate your impact on younger, less experienced superintendents or assistants.)
- Consider it part of your duty to prepare your assistants to go out on their own. (Are you doing everything you can to move your assistants to the next level?)
- Go to bat for your assistants during budget time. Budget for them to attend a monthly meeting or two. Send them to a local seminar. Start small, and get your superiors to buy-in on the fact that it is wise to be proactive in the professional development of your assistants.
- Be willing to make a small sacrifice of time. Take the time to coach and mentor whenever the opportunity arises.
- If you are unable to attend a monthly meeting, make it a point to send your assistant instead.
- It might seem like a stretch to some of you, but consider sending your assistant to the GIS.
- Be open and forthright with your ideas. Others can benefit equally whether your ideas fail or succeed.
- Consider proposing a club-sponsored tuition reimbursement program. Perhaps one of your veteran employees has an interest in earning his or her associate's degree, or bachelor's degree. What better way to encourage continuing education than with the almighty dollar!

- Send your assistant to the MAGCS "Shop Talk Series" and "The Assistant Workshop."
- Give those around you every chance at greater success.
- Don't limit your mentoring to "professional" matters; be open to coaching others through "personal" matters as well.

The other part of this equation requires a person to do everything he or she can to stay sharp? The MAGCS provides many opportunities for continuing education and skill sharpening. By the end of the 2007 season, the MAGCS will have offered two MAGCS sponsored GCSAA seminars, four monthly meetings with education, and of course the annual Midwest Turf Clinic in November. All these events help superintendents stay on top of their game. Many of the benefits are obvious, but I have listed a few things to consider in regard to the value of our educational opportunities.

- Elevate your membership status, maintain your class A status, or work toward certification
- Learn something new and broaden your horizons
- Discover a new passion, i.e., Audubon, wildlife restoration, prairie management, wetland restoration, etc.
- Network with peers, share ideas
- Enhance what you already know
- Maintain a competitive edge
- Discover ways to save your club money
- Increase your value as a superintendent
- Stay up to date on what is new and cutting edge

I believe that ours is an environment rich with opportunities for both learning and teaching. It will continue to be the goal of the MAGCS to foster this environment and maximize its impact on our members. The most important component then becomes your participation. So dive in people. Take advantage of the many opportunities before you, and remember the proverb: As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another! **-OC**