

FEATURE I

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Being a Super Dad

The field manual all Superintendents should receive before leaving the hospital

As I sat down to write my article for this month's On Course, I started to review my list of topics, comparing them to all the articles we're accustomed to seeing in our local and national trade publications. Every month we read great articles on managing your golf course, career, employees, as well as the articles on cutting edge research or technology. For those of you who don't know me, I've been the Superintendent of a small, private country club in Rockford for the past five years. For the most part, I feel we do an amazing job here with the limited resources we have. Are we revolutionizing the industry by topdressing fairways or using the newest electric mower? Absolutely not, but we are improving the golf course every year and providing great playing conditions for our members. So I asked myself what possible earth shattering piece of information I could offer the membership in this article. Then it struck me, how about balancing being a Superintendent and a father? Although I feel I'm a great superintendent, I believe I'm becoming a pretty good father too, after seven years of experience. The real fun comes when you need to manage these two responsibilities at the same time.

Back in 2004, when my wife was pregnant, I may have been the most paranoid father-to-be. I knew how to keep grass alive at .125 of an inch, but keeping a baby alive – seriously, this was not for me. I finally calmed down with some help from my wife and by using the idea of bringing the basic principles of turf to childcare. Feed it, water it, love it, and clean it up when it gets messy, right? Heck, I have a turf degree. I can do anything. Why not raise a kid, too? Unfortunately, what doesn't come with the job is a simple set of instructions. I probably would have skipped the manual anyway and winged it, but things can go especially wrong when you bring little ones to the golf course. When you finish reading this article, if you still need advice, please seek a professional. Consult someone like Brad Anderson on the north side. He has about a dozen kids and grandkids. God bless him; Brad must



be very patient and have a high tolerance for pain.

Don't be afraid to bring your kids to work. Situations differ; make sure you understand and operate within your club or golf course rules. Check with your superiors first if you have any questions. At the Mauh-Nah-Tee-See Club, I'm lucky, because my family is seen as a part of the club and interaction is encouraged. For me, being a Superintendent isn't just a job, it's a way of life, and my family is a huge part of it. Some Superintendents can completely separate work and home, which is fine. I choose to involve my family because, frankly, I couldn't imagine it any other way. Please don't think my son, Jackson, is there all the time or on the payroll. I don't bring him to the golf course every week, but usually every other week during the season. So I thought I would share a few of the following lessons and ideas about kids at work.

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Making Time

1. I try to limit the time I bring Jackson to the golf course to afterhours when crew is gone or on Sunday mornings while I'm changing cups. I avoid Wednesday (men's day) unless it's late into the evening. I also try to bring him only when I know I have time to spend with him. Our job is stressful enough. If you can't spend time with them, it's not going to be fun for either of you.
2. Our favorite time is late evening golf course tours in the cart. It's priceless and probably the one thing he will always remember.

I think it's important to establish two basic rules from day 1 and make no exceptions

Rule #1 - We have the polo law written in stone for a professional appearance and khakis if we plan to go into the clubhouse or if members are going to see us on the golf course.

Rule #2 - We're quiet, calm, and no joking around or craziness.

At the Shop

1. Set the ground rules first and early, designate the areas where your child can be. Shop safety is important. I allow Jackson in the office and break room, only, unless he's with me.


2. Bring some fun toys to pass the time, but no matter what we bring, the dry erase board, maps, and desk calendar seem to be a hit at my shop.
3. Keep the irrigation computer and radios off limits.
4. Always keep the chemical and fertilizer off limits and locked.
5. Sand piles – years ago my Superintendent, Brian Yeager, allowed his kids to play for hours in the indoor, top-dressing sand pile. It was a great place for them, after the crew had gone for the day
6. Equipment is also off limits, unless you are with your child. Injuries can happen and last thing you need is a trip to the urgent care down the street

Around the Clubhouse


1. Establish a quiet rule, no running, and always use manners.
2. Try to limit or avoid interaction with members. The golf shop is a great place to practice addressing adults and handshaking while making eye contact with the Golf Professional and the staff.

On the Range

1. When practicing with your child on the range, always keep him/her in the hitting bay and in front of you. You can see them and avoid the chance of a backswing meeting a forehead.




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On the Course

1. Demonstrate and use proper golf etiquette at all times; it's never too early to start instilling the key principles.
2. Keep riding in a cart as a privilege, and do not play around while driving.
3. Avoid parking the cart on slopes. Remember to remove the key if your child stays in the cart.
4. Teach your child about all aspects of the golf course and what you do.
5. Teach your child how to walk without dragging his/her feet on the putting surfaces and the importance of properly raking footprints out of a bunker.

Playing Golf

1. Keep the game fun. There's a time for instruction and a time for fun. You will have many years to turn them into the next Tiger or Rory. They will naturally gravitate to the game. The last thing you want is for them to hate playing. Give them time to grow into the game, before you start talking about college scholarships.
2. Teach them the etiquette: how to pick up their feet, how not to swing a club on the putting green, flag placement, marking the ball, and retrieving the ball from the cup.
3. Play less golf: play from the forward tees or junior tees with them, and play fewer holes. It's a great way to speed up the game and work on your short game at the same time.
4. Avoid demonstrating any anger, frustration, or club throwing. Warning! Your child becomes a mini version of you.
5. Point out any wildlife, and teach them to be good stewards as you play.

Other:

1. **Starting point** – If you are nervous about taking your child onto the golf course at an early age, try a local public course's putting green. At the age of two, I used to take Jackson over to Tamarack and practice putting. You'll be surprised. Your child will act better than you think.
2. **Snowplowing** – Don't Do It! Do not take your kids with you to snow plow, even if it's just a parking lot. I always looked forward to the day I could take Jackson along with me. Then I heard a horrifying story from Northwest Indiana, about a Lawn care Supervisor's son killed in an accident while plowing in an empty parking lot. I'll spare you the details; trust me don't do it.
3. **The PGA** – every year I schedule a day to attend a local golf event with Jackson, during a practice round. It's a great way to get away from the golf



4. course, see the pros, and get a few autographs. The pros are more accessible, and often there are kid-friendly activities to participate in. Last year it was the BMW. This July we will be heading to the Women's U.S. Open at Blackwolf Run, in Kohler, Wisconsin. Oh, and I almost forgot, with your GCSAA card, it's free.

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5. **Watching golf** – I always pull Jackson into the room during the end of a major golf event on TV or during a highlight on Sportcenter. The excitement and thrill of victory never gets old, no matter what age you are.
6. **Career Day** – Last year, in Jackson first grade class, I volunteered to be a guest at career day. I made a great power point presentation, threw in a few jokes, polished up my public speaking skills, and fielded some tough questions. What is my favorite color of golf ball? It was great to talk about the game we love and teach others about our job. The true highlight of my day was having a student, the son of a local golf professional, make it clear to me that his dad was my boss. It was a good laugh. If it wasn't for the local police officer having a gun, I think I would have been the favorite that day.

Your kids grow up fast. Memories made at the golf course are priceless, whether it's first par, always having a Fanta out of the soda machine, helping cut a cup, or having lunch inside the clubhouse. Sure, it's a little crazy balancing work and time with them at the golf course. You probably won't get as much work done while they are there, but it's worth it. We often get lost in our jobs, worrying about the smallest of details and spending long hours taking care of

the golf course. Our wives and children sacrifice so much for us during the season. This is a great way to get a little bit of that missed time back. Your wife will appreciate a break and a little peace and quiet. Anyone can buy one of those, *World's Greatest Dad*, T-shirts at Target and wear it, but there's more to earning the title. I still have a long way to go in becoming the Superintendent and father I aspire to be, but I am headed in the right direction. What better place to grow up than on a golf course with your dad? I would like to leave you with one other final thought. It's amazing how many skills we can mix between both jobs. While parenting, I learned that communicating with a green committee member and a five-year-old is, sometimes, almost the same. Sometimes, no matter how simply you explain it, they just don't understand. Good Luck. I hope you learned a thing or two. Although there are a lot of days I pull my hair out, I can't imagine life without my little assistant beside me. **-OC**



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