

# The Other Side of the Fence

Chuck Barber, *St. Charles Country Club*

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Choosing a career in golf course management (at any level) does not provide an easy lifestyle. It could be safely assumed when the general public inquires about the career of a golf course management professional one of the initial questions would be “Do you get to play a lot of golf?”

If you’re reading this article you’ve probably provided a much different answer than the person asking the question was expecting. As superintendents we choose a lifestyle that involves long hours, physical labor, exposure to the elements and work related stress that can come from multiple (and often unseen) angles. “The Godfather Part II” eloquently describes our decision

to begin or maintain a career in golf course management: “This is the life we’ve chosen”.

Many of the individuals in our profession’s support network frequently come from this same background. It is not necessary to have spent years as a superintendent or assistant to be in our industry’s support network. However, several Class A, SM and C members have found their career paths have taken a turn in that direction. The reasons behind the change in career paths vary a great deal and *On Course* reached out to a small sample of these members to discover more about the change they made from the field to sales.

Troy Tietjens (try spelling that without asking twice) served as an assistant superintendent to MAGCS member Steve Cook CGCS, MG at Oakland Hills Country Club near Detroit from 2001 to 2005. Troy then started as the assistant superintendent at Skokie Country Club for Don Cross, CGCS until 2006. Troy found a home with Liebold Irrigation in 2006. He first started as an irrigation service technician in the Chicagoland area and has evolved into the sales manager for JW Turf in Hampshire. “My transition out of the assistant superintendent role was largely due to curiosity to try something different. I had always had an interest in irrigation and I also had a decent background and interest in electrical work. The opportunity with Liebold offered me a different direction but fell within the industry that I enjoyed so much. It also provided me opportunities to grow within the business and develop some truly great relationships with superintendents, and other industry professionals throughout the country. ”

Jeff Leuzinger of Pearl Valley Organix grew up working for dear old dad, Peter Leuzinger, CGCS Retired, at St. Charles Country Club sweeping the shop floor and filling divots when he was but a lad. Jeff then went on to intern, be assistant superintendent and ultimately superintendent at Glen View Club from



*Relationships are very important to Dave Blomquist and his superintendent experience is invaluable to him and his customers in his role with Knox Fertilizer.*

1991 to 2003. The General Manager at Glen View Club at the time encouraged Jeff to strike out on his own as a small business owner and he did just that. He operated a landscape company and a small distribution company from 2003 to 2011. Jeff began with Pearl Valley in January of 2012. When asked, Jeff will tell you what he draws from the most from his years in the field in his new role in the industry. "Relationships: I want to treat people the way some of the best in the business treated me as a superintendent. The work ethic: being willing to do whatever it takes to get the job done and being willing and able to start over. Attitude: Life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how you react to it."

Dave Blomquist, CGCS, spent more than twenty years as a superintendent at Naperville Country Club and Twin Orchard Country Club. Now working for Knox Fertilizer, Blomquist acknowledges there have been myriad changes. The most unexpected consequence for him has been the support he has received from different corners of the industry. "The generosity and support of friends always amazes me. People you don't really know, or thought you didn't know, show tremendous support."

It's not necessarily easier than being a superintendent but



*There's a lot of windshield and travel time that often comes with sales positions.*

there can be positive changes at home. "Life at home is so much better. I don't go home and worry about the heat, drought, rainfall and other stress related issues. I can actually relax and spend time with loved ones", says Joe Baert of Burriss Equipment. Joe was an assistant superintendent at Merit Club in Libertyville for 3 years. Joe indicated stress played a factor in his switch to equipment sales. "I realized I was just too young to have that amount of stress in my life."

The switch to sales might seem like you'll get a great deal of your life back (weekends, holidays, etc) but that isn't necessarily the case. Dave Blomquist goes on to say, "There is more time to be with your family on the weekends but there is a great deal more out of town travel, which balances out the equation."

Jeff Leuzinger agrees. "With children, the time gained on the weekend is taken during the week at the dinner table or at the basketball game." Travel is just one consideration when pursuing a career in the sales or support component of the golf industry.



*Travel and late nights can impact free-time and watching your kids events during the work week.*

Troy Tietjens has this advice to anyone considering a move into a different industry role. "Good Luck! It is a big decision to make and every individual will have their own circumstances and reasons to make a transition like this. Take the time to really evaluate your decision and talk with other individuals that have made the change to the specific area you are looking into. Be prepared to evaluate achievements differently. There tends to be a more visual sense of achievement when in an assistant superintendent role, such as green speeds, course details and all those visual things that you can be proud of. Sales achievements and service achievements are a lot different and a person thinking of making that change needs to be aware of that. The achievements are just as rewarding but vastly different."

Expectations are also something to be aware of when considering a sales or support position. Joe Baert explains, "Be sure



*Achievements in sales are tied to moving products out the door. It is a measurement that not everyone likes or can handle.*

exactly what the expectations are for that position and go for it."

With any new venture comes surprises and this new, undiscovered country is no different. For some, the amount of travel



*Troy volunteering at the Ryder Cup last September.*

and the new found intimacy of airport concourses were unanticipated. For others, the amount of experience that is required in multiple financing avenues for equipment purchases has been difficult to overcome. Finally, one of the most unexpected outcomes is the change in how an individual lives their life at the most fundamental level.

Dave Blomquist explains this challenge. "The biggest hurdle is accepting the fact that you no longer manage a golf course. Everything you've trained for and lived for is gone. Your life rhythms change. You are no longer enjoying all of the challenges that makes green keeping magical."

Experience in the field can translate into success in sales and these individuals call on their training from working on golf courses every day. Joe Baert explains that "being able to relate to what a

superintendent or assistant is going through in the heat of the season. Utilizing past experiences to point out different approaches to problems has proven invaluable."

Dave Blomquist relies on positivity and a 'customer is always right' attitude to make the sale. "Dealing with end users is like dealing with members: they are always right. I never would have been able to deal with this philosophy had I not dealt with it as a superintendent."

Troy Tietjens credits his experiences at Oakland Hills and Skokie Country Club with providing him a strong base to build upon. "I was allowed to be a big part of every aspect of those operations and I was given freedom to succeed. These opportunities provided a great base for me to continue my learning

process as a young assistant superintendent along with obtaining the knowledge of equipment and irrigation which I still call upon today. It also enhanced my idea of what "service" is, which I have tried to carry on throughout my career in this industry."

Regardless of how an individual comes to the support sector of the golf industry they have all called upon their training in the field to help them excel. Their new positions also allow them to still be a large part of the business that they grew up in. Superintendents all rely on their expertise as well to make the best decisions possible for each facility that they service. MAGCS is lucky to have industry veterans in a variety of support roles throughout the area. 

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*Sunrises and sunsets are still appreciated but not from the same vantage point a golf course can offer.*

