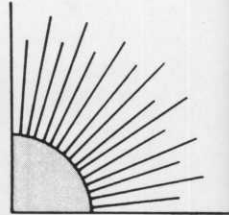


South Florida Sunshine

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THE FINER QUALITIES OF A GOOD SUPERINTENDENT

Pages of detailed information could be written about the vast amounts of technical knowledge a good superintendent must possess to excel in his profession. A superintendent must be a leader, a manager and possess skills in areas such as grasses, soils, plants, trees and flowers. He must be knowledgeable about fertilizers, chemicals, pumping stations, irrigation and irrigation hydraulics. He should understand some elemental chemistry, geometry, algebra, accounting principles and basic math. He should have a basic knowledge of electricity, hydraulics and fluids. He should understand equipment, equipment operation, maintenance and repair.

The list could continue to cover many, many phases of a vast variety of skills, professions and trades. And to be a very good superintendent, one must know a little bit about all of these technical areas — or at least be able to understand, diagnose, evaluate and make common sense decisions based on a lot of variables.

If there are shortcomings in that area, it is a good superintendent who can weigh and analyze mechanical problems that he may know little about. There are usually several options when your mechanic presents you with a problem and says, "Well, what do you want to do?" Equipment can be repaired, replaced, another piece of equipment cannibalized, re-engineered or junked. A good superintendent who asks all the right questions can usually make a good common sense decision even though he may know very little about the technical aspect of a particular piece of machinery.

Another quality a good superintendent should possess is the ability to relate his knowledge of turfgrasses in maintenance to his particular club and its golfers.

One would not necessarily maintain a golf course to the same standards for a membership that has 75% of the golfers under 20 handicap compared to one that has 75% of the members with handicaps over 20.

Different calibers of golfers want different conditions. Golfers above 25 handicap would generally find conditions that the touring professionals play

under practically impossible. Golfers of higher handicaps are not used to "pinching" the ball off a tightly mowed fairway nor would they find desirable greens that roll ten feet on a stimpmeter.

A good superintendent knows his golfers and their desires. Granted there are some agronomic practices that are necessary that some golfers find unpleasant, but as a rule, conditions should exist that are fair and receptive to the golfing talent of one's membership.

Most of the variables concern height of cut of fairways, roughs and greens. Low handicap golfers generally want short fairways and long rough and the higher handicappers want longer fairways and shorter rough. It is very difficult at times to strike a balance between these two factions but this is where the knowledge, talent, tactfulness and salesmanship of a particular superintendent comes to bear.

A good example is the speed of the greens. I happen to prefer a faster putting speed on greens because it is a fairer test of putting skill. So it is easy for me to justify to a higher handicap golfer who may prefer slower greens why faster greens are better. This usually appeals to both the low and high handicapper. I can usually sell a lighter weight putter and putting lessons along with the rationale.

The one other area that can separate the men from the boys in superintendent excellence is the manner in which a superintendent conveys his practices, beliefs and desires to his greens chairman, committee, owner or manager. A superintendent's ability to "sell" his ideas can make life pleasant or miserable.

Good salesmanship can initiate programs to upgrade present course conditioning. Most owners are quick to recognize a wise investment, especially if it is properly presented. Most golfers would like to see course conditions improve and a good superintendent can recognize shortcomings whether it be equipment, turf renovations or irrigation system changes. If desired course changes are thoroughly researched and presented in a manner that is logical and comprehensible to those who hold the purse strings, those ideas have a far better chance of being approved.

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A good superintendent is able to relate to his superiors on their level. For the most part, they (owners, managers, chairman) are, or have been, highly educated successful businessmen. It is necessary to present data that makes logical financial sense and can show significant course upgrade or at the least keep the course maintained to proper standards.

A good superintendent will give his golfers the best course for the money spent. He can also show where increased funds will produce a better product, and has the ability to spend these funds wisely.

A good superintendent is a good investment.

Instead of talking in depth about all the technical aspects, I wish to highlight the intangibles. How does a good superintendent coalesce and communicate all of this information to his maintenance crew in an effective manner? How does he translate his knowledge of turfgrasses to the unique conditioning of his golf course for his golfers? Also, how does the superintendent coordinate all his communications to his greens committee, board or owners?

Much of this boils down to the hard fact that a superintendent must be able to sell his ideas, concepts and technical knowledge to a lot of different people. I can sit here all day and know that I may be a good golf course superintendent. I may possess all the knowledge, perception and common sense that it takes to get the job done. However, if I cannot convince the maintenance crew, golfers and those to whom I report, it will be difficult to excel at my profession.

The maintenance crew must be an extension of the superintendent's maintenance procedures. Each of us have basic maintenance practices that are adhered to industry-wide. Then there are particulars that distinguish superintendents from average, better and best.

It is imperative that we be able to communicate to the workers who are actually performing the work, what it is we want done, how to do it and, of equal importance, why. We will only be as good as the people who do the work. I do not believe any of us would tell a new employee to just hop on a green-smower and mow greens.

It must be explained to the employee how the machine works and its function. The employee must be shown how to operate the mower and then be watched while he operates it. He has to know how to make the first pass on the green, how to make a straight line, which direction to mow, and how to make a clean-up lap. He must know how the mower should leave the green. He should know what to look for in a hydraulic leak, not to overfill the gas tank and how to tell if the engine is operating properly. He should know if the machine is cutting properly, and what it looks like if it is cutting im-

properly. He should know what to do if all of the conditions are not present.

Most importantly, he should know why all of this is being done. A good superintendent can communicate all of this information so that the person doing the task is an extension of the superintendent. The worker should have the knowledge through proper training to do the job as well as the superintendent.

Once all of this knowledge is communicated and demonstrated, there must be a system of checks and balances or follow-up to insure it is being done correctly. In this manner, the job will be done effectively and to the quality standards a good superintendent would desire.

As you can see, comprehensive communication is the key to insuring things get accomplished in a timely and accurate manner. A different type of communication is necessary when dealing with your mechanic and problems that arise with equipment.

It is usually quite easy to know when a piece of machinery is operating improperly, whether it be engine-related, quality of performance or cutting ability. It is important that a superintendent can properly explain the malfunction of a piece of machinery to his mechanic. An "it doesn't mow right" symptom is vague and ends up taking a great deal of the mechanic's time troubleshooting things that may not be wrong. Be specific. Seek out specific symptoms and then let the mechanic use his expertise to correct them.

Quite often, by taking the mechanic on the course when the equipment is operating, or better yet, letting the mechanic operate it, is the best way for each party to understand equipment shortcomings.

There are good superintendents who have a good basic understanding of equipment operation and repair. And there are even some excellent superintendents who could be successful mechanics if they chose to be in that trade. However, most golf course superintendents would probably like to understand more about the mechanical end of the business. ■

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