

Treasure Coast "Tide"ings

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Our Multi-Faceted Role

Many times during a normal working day I will be in the clubhouse discussing finances, staff problems or one of a hundred other things that occur relating to golf course management. On occasion, I have heard a member say, "That man is the greenskeeper here." To this person, keeping the grass green is my entire job description — any one off the street could accomplish that!

I often hear members complaining about course conditions. One example would be dry greens. I will explain to them that the pumps have been down and that we are doing our best to correct the situation. To most of them, that fact doesn't matter. They feel that they are paying good money to be a member and they want perfection. There is absolutely no excuse for imperfection. Perhaps all superintendents could be perfect if mother nature worked with us 24 hours a day!

Most golfers do not realize how creative and versatile one must be to become a successful golf course superintendent. Usually those who are the most ignorant of superintendent's ability are the people who control salaries and job security. We need to project our abilities and knowledge to all who benefit from our labors.

I don't know of any other professional job that requires one to wear the many hats of the golf course superintendent. The superintendent, at most courses, needs to be a mechanic. How many times have you trained an inexperienced mechanic or had to repair something yourself when the mechanic is busy, sick, or on vacation? If a machine breaks down and the part needed is on back-order, you become an inventor to get the equipment back in operation.

You need to understand soil chemistry, so you're an agronomist. You have to be a horticulturalist because you grow much more than grass. A major part of your job is understanding the weather, so you're a meteorologist.

Your club decides to make changes to the golf course. Naturally, they can't afford to contract the work out and you must do it yourself as cheaply and efficiently as possible. You're an economist. They want new shrubs and trees; you're a landscape architect. A new weather shelter and restroom are needed; you're a contractor. Cart paths are required; you're a paver. A toilet is clogged or a sink leaks; you're a plumber.

The irrigation system is down — either it's the pumping station, broken pipes or malfunctioning heads. You have to determine what is wrong and you must fix it as quickly as possible or the course will suffer; you're a magician. Someone has to know when and when not to water; you're an irrigation technician.

Mole crickets, ants, weeds and fungi start to take over; you're an exterminator. If you have wildlife or fish in your ponds you must be careful with what and how much you spray; you're an environmentalist.

Someone on your crew has a problem. To get maximum production out of this individual the problem has to be solved; you're a counselor. You have to set up work details and make sure your plans are carried out correctly; you're a labor supervisor. You have to make people work well together; you're a coach. You are always training inexperienced help; you're a teacher. To help boost morale, you play in a softball league with your crew; you're an athlete. You have an employee who is not being productive but everytime you approach him he appears to be working hard. You become a spy in order to find the cause of unproductivity and put the problem to rest; you're an efficiency expert.

To guard against being taken advantage of by salesmen, you have to think like a salesman. Look at all the products you can sell if you lose your superintendent's job!

In order to see the course from the members' point of view, you also must be a golfer. Most likely, you play golf with members; you're a public relations expert. The superintendent is often asked for a ruling on the course; you're a referee. Someone you are playing golf with wants to know how to grow this or that; you're a consultant.

The list goes on and on. You're a budget director, a laborer, an equipment operator, a mathematician, an accountant, a file clerk, a negotiator, a surveyor, a computer programmer . . . etc. I'm sure there are many other roles that haven't been mentioned.

With all this talent and versatility, why is the average golf course superintendent unappreciated and underpaid? Because the general golfing public doesn't know what it takes to be a superintendent today! We need to educate these people and make them more aware of our abilities and talent. Then, hopefully, we will gain the respect and pay we deserve! ■