

Superintendents can justifiably take great pride in the prominent stature our profession has attained in the golf industry.

Many consider the superintendent the most important position at the golf club.

Regulatory agencies now frequently solicit our input and participation.

We were among the first to be invited to the meetings which led to the formation of the Florida Golf Council and the Florida Golf Summit.

Code of Ethics: Spell it out and respect it

We are seen as professionals with the technical expertise and training essential to the successful operation of the golf facility. More and more we are also regarded as environmentalists who are part of the solution instead of the problem.

Credit for this positive image could be directed toward the few movers and shakers in our profession, but I feel it more accurate to credit the professionalism of the rank-and-file superintendent. The expertise, dedication, honesty, and concern displayed by the superintendent on a daily basis at his or her own club is the cornerstone of this solid, professional foundation.

Reasons for pride in our profession are substantial, but in my opinion, our professional growth and stature is limited — and at times compromised — by indifference towards our Code of Ethics.

Our association needs to be regarded by the golf industry as an honorable, highly-principled organization serving the best

interests of our individual clubs and the industry in general. Unethical practices or behavior by any of our members hurts every one of us and erodes the professional progress we have made.

The issue has been ignored for two very good reasons: fear of litigation and ambiguous language.

Officers of an association are unpaid volunteers who have valid fears of personal lawsuits that could realistically result from disciplinary action they may take for violation of the Code.

Damaging a person's professional reputation or employment potential is serious business and our associations are not financially fit for legal battles of this magnitude. Add to this the vague language of the GCSAA's Code of Ethics (adopted by the Florida GCSAA) and its susceptibility to broad interpretation, and a board's reluctance to enforce the code is understandable.

I personally am not aware of other local chapters' efforts, but the Palm Beach GCSA is to be commended for rewriting the Code and giving specific examples of proper conduct so that many of the "gray" areas are eliminated.

Specifically, I suggest:

- Educate the individual members about the Code of Ethics and its significance. Just making it available by printing it in the Membership Directory is neither effective nor sufficient. Since many members do not belong to the GCSAA, this task falls to each local chapter. This could be accomplished in several ways:
 1. Print the Code of Ethics on applications forms and have prospective members sign a pledge that they will abide by the



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principles if accepted for membership.

2. Have new members publicly pledge to abide by the Code at their first chapter meetings.
 3. Read the entire Code to the membership several times each year during chapter meetings.
- Treat violations seriously and bring the suspected violator before the board to discuss the matter. This may be all it takes to discourage further indiscretions. Refrain from disciplinary action to protect the officers from legal problems. We may have the resources in future years to feel secure with such action, but at the present, it is prudent to sidestep legal entanglements.
 - Follow Palm Beach's lead and write very clear and specific rules where they are needed. Some of the articles are ambiguous for a reason, and should be left that way, but others need to have clarification and specific examples to guide the membership.

A good example can be found in

Palm Beach's revision to the GCSAA's Article 7: *Recognize and observe the highest standards of integrity in my relationships with fellow golf course superintendents and others associated with this profession and industry.*

Palm Beach turned this into:

Section 8: When seeking employment:

- A. I will make certain the position is open before making application.
- B. I will obtain known information concerning the position from the local chapter when applying for a position in that area.
- C. I will, whenever possible, speak to the superintendent who is leaving or has left the position for which I am applying.
- D. I will ascertain and uphold the salary level in that area.

Section 9: At no time will I attempt to hire an employee who is presently employed by an area golf course without first consulting with the applicant's present employer. If the

applicant claims to be unemployed, I will verify status with the last employer.

These adaptations make it clear what is expected when seeking employment or hiring new employees, but leave the door open for your own good judgment in those sticky situations, such as when you are recruited for a job and the prospective employer insists that the present superintendent not be told. You can strongly recommend that the superintendent be told, but if you are serious about seeking the position, you cannot disregard the wishes of your prospective employer.

Many other code issues could be examined but the point of this article is to encourage local chapters to take the lead in revising the Code and implementing an effective awareness program. Fear of litigation need not be an issue. Good people respond favorably when challenged to act with honor and integrity, and dishonorable people will feel uncomfortable and may choose to socialize elsewhere. 🇺🇸

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