

Professionalism - Stop Hiding!

By Robert LaChance

Despite seventy-five years of the national golf course superintendents association's efforts, when you mention a professional at your golf facility, there is still only one - the golf pro. GCSAA in recent years has tried to address this issue, and after a failed effort at educating the public is now focusing on educating us, its members. Maybe if we can somehow certify that we have the required education, time on the job, and attend even more educational programs continually, we will be viewed as professionals along with our golf-merchandising brothers. Realistically I doubt it.

The goal of providing education to its members in the many diverse areas of our profession is admirable. Continual education in a profession changing as rapidly as ours is a requirement just for holding on to your job. That is my point. These things do not make us professionals or make others view us as professionals. An education and a commitment to continuing education are prerequisites for our jobs. Like the prerequisites in college, you have to take the classes, do the work, and pass the exams in order to prepare for your more advanced classes. Frequently, the prerequisite classes do not even count toward your degree.

Our on-the-job performance is what sets us apart as professionals, and if we want to change our image to that of professionals, we need to change how our performance is perceived by the public, our members or golfers, our staff, our golf professionals, general managers and everyone else we interact with in the performance of our duties as golf course superintendents. After all, when we say we want to be viewed as professionals, we are actually asking for our due respect.

Respect, the adage goes, is earned. Your position or education or certification, do not guarantee respect. You earn respect by how others perceive you while you perform the duties of your job and in how you interact with others while you perform that job. You earn respect by being perceived as deserving respect.

Now this bothers quite a few people, and rightly so I would say. In a world that seems to be more about perception than reality, image than performance, perception is hardly truth. Nevertheless, the reality is that if we want to be perceived as knowledgeable, resourceful, and dedicated; we are going to have to project that image. We can no longer hide in our own little world, and expect others to recognize our achievements. We need to get out and show people what we do - and how we do it. That means we need to interact with more than our own staff, the golf pro's staff, and maybe the accounting staff. We need to get out more!

We need to be seen as doing our job, an important job that requires many talents, all of which we are capable of and proficient in. We need to be perceived as efficient and effective in the performance of our duties. We need to let people know what it is we do.

How can we do this? Most importantly, I believe we must stop hiding. The grounds maintenance building is usually situated where it will not be seen. Is this so the golfer will think the course takes care of itself? I have wondered sometimes.

As impractical and outrageous as it may sound, maybe the superintendent needs to have an office in the clubhouse, an office in which he or she can be seen and even visited. This office needs to be a bit like a professor's office with designated open office hours each week that the superintendent will be in to answer questions and other related tasks. The office at the "barn" does not have to be abandoned, but we need to be perceived as being available to more than our own staff. How about signs on our carts, "Golf Course Superintendent?" As a professional we need to be willing to take responsibility for our work.

Speaking of our staff, how many times have we heard that if you can raise up the lowest, everyone will benefit? Do we speak highly of our crew as trained technicians and quality people? Are they educated in their jobs and do they project and image of competency? We need to address this issue if we want to be viewed as professionals ourselves. Professionals supervise trained personnel, not interchangeable laborers.

The relationship with our assistants and interns needs to be examined too. Some assistants are merely interns putting in the time to qualify for a better job. We need to treat these people with respect and be sure we are providing the education, training and opportunities to learn that a person in these

positions deserves. They are not just extra cup changers, spray technicians or irrigation technicians; and if you are paying them salaries, the Wage and Hour people can straighten you out on this matter. We need to treat our assistants as the professionals they will one day be, and if we are lucky enough to have one of those career assistants, be sure to treat them with the respect and professionalism that you would want applied to you. Another adage is that you earn respect by giving respect.

We need to seize opportunities that present themselves to us. Why not speak to your kid's class on career day or get up and say a few things at your club's annual meeting when you are recognized. You can write for your club newsletter or chapter publication. You might even want to serve on the board of the local affiliated chapter of GCSAA or serve on a national committee if you have a special area of interest. Any of these activities show your dedication to your profession and consequently, your own professionalism.

One of the easiest ways you can show your professionalism is to host a local chapter function. Nothing is more impressive to those at your course than to see that you and your peers get together to share each other's perspective, receive some education, and share some quality time together. Your course can host a golfing event or an educational meeting. Guaranteed, the staff at the clubhouse, the golf staff, and general manager will view you differently when they see the professionalism of your local chapter. Sure, they know you belong to this organization and might even read the newsletters that you leave lying around, but bringing the event to your facility for all to see will make a lasting, positive impression.

Professionalism is about acting as a professional. To be perceived as a professional one must be seen as one. We cannot hide what we do. We need to be visible managers of our facilities and our staff. We do not need certification or a public relations campaign. We only need to be ready to put our best foot forward and let others see us as the professionals we are. We need to stop hiding.

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