

# Now What Do I Do?

## Making a Smooth Transition From Assistant to Superintendent

Congratulations! You are now the golf course superintendent at XYZ Golf Club. Now what? Have you prepared yourself thoroughly for the new challenges ahead? Are you ready to be the one that staff and members (players) look to for answers to the numerous responsibilities of your new position? What if you do not have the answers – what then? Remember – for the many solutions required on a daily basis, the buck now stops with you!

The position of golf course superintendent is as interesting and varied as it is challenging. Obviously you have worked hard to gain the education and work experience, which has resulted in your being hired as a superintendent.

More than likely, however, rarely have you been the one having to make daily decisions regarding hiring, firing, purchasing, or long range planning, just to name a few of your new responsibilities.

Hopefully, those whom you have trained under have allowed you to participate to some degree in these areas so that you are not totally unprepared to make such decisions. But, how far have you gone to be as prepared as possible for your first head position?

Preparing for your first head position as thoroughly as possible is essential for future success. Jack DelRio, head coach for the Jacksonville Jaguars was called at 8 p.m. the evening prior to interviewing for the position the next morning without notice. He was considered a long shot for the position but he so impressed the owner of the team with his preparation that he was hired. How could he have prepared so thoroughly overnight? The answer – he didn't. He had been preparing for several years – developing a book

that outlines every aspect as to how he would operate as a head coach. DelRio covered everything from offensive and defensive philosophy, training camp routines, disciplinary rules, etc. His preparation was so complete that he outperformed other more highly regarded candidates.

The lesson of course: don't wait for the interview to prepare for the interview. The time to start planning comes when you make the final decision to become a golf course superintendent. From that time forward, a vision should be developing as to how you will manage the course and the staff that you inherit.

It's never too late, but you should have started your book on the day you made that decision. If you somehow got the top job without a plan, you need help. A lot of help. In a hurry.

### ESTABLISH A NETWORK

One of the first things you should do is establish a network of peers who have been there, done that... and had it done to them. Their advice can help you save your course... and your head.

Your local chapter of the FGCSA provides you with a built-in network of superintendents who not only understand the job, but – particularly if you've moved to a new region – they know your golf course almost as well as your predecessor... and probably better than your new boss!

Furthermore, membership in the FGCSA includes membership in the GCSAA, the national organization with a wealth of resources to help you in every aspect of your job.

This advice may be old news. If you had a far-sighted boss when you became an assistant, you may have been encouraged to join as soon as you got the job. Maybe chapter dues were even built into your compensation package.

If that's not the policy at your new course, it's one you might consider... *after* you're firmly established in the job. Don't try to turn the horse before

you're easy in the saddle with a firm grip on the reins!

### UTILIZE RESOURCES

You've already mastered the technical aspects of the job, have all the appropriate licenses and have learned how to supervise work crews. You know all about safety and scheduling but do you know how to *manage*?

Managing a large ecosystem with a diverse group of people, all subject to the whims of nature, upper management, members and regulators is a whole different ballgame.

Supervising is getting a crew through a punch list; managing is figuring out what should be on the punch list in light of scheduled activities, requirements of management, agronomic issues and the weather.

The GCSAA Web site has an amazing array of management resources for superintendents.

For instance, you can learn five strategies for making yourself heard. One example:

- **Talk daily with your management team**, especially the golf professional, regarding course conditions and schedules? Since the golf professional has more visibility with golfers, you want to be sure accurate information is communicated to them. Initiate the meetings with the golf professional, the general manager and the food and beverage manager to discuss mutual plans, areas of concerns and upcoming events. These interactions will help to create an effective working relationship.

Or 39 strategies for success, such as

- **Take responsibility for your own mistakes** and for those of your subordinates. Blaming others, however justifiable, makes you look small-minded and weak. Earn a reputation as a “fixer” of errors, someone who can snap back from setbacks and learn from mistakes.

There's a wealth of practical management advice waiting for you at [www.gcsaa.org](http://www.gcsaa.org).