

Learn from your mistakes

Fired superintendents should resolve to first set their own house in order, admonish colleagues who have lost their jobs.

"I've been trying to correct the things I was doing in my 'previous life,'" said Jim Gilligan of Richmond County Country Club in Staten Island, N.Y.

Gilligan, who several years ago was fired after 22 years at his former course, said: "My current job is stronger because I've learned from those experiences. That's true when you're able to make the change. Some people can't do it. I've talked to a lot of superintendents who have been fired and did not evaluate themselves."

Books on career changes and outplacement don't address self-evaluation, Gilligan said. "They point you toward the future, stress your accomplishments, and put the negatives and failures aside. But they're [failures] still there."

Spot personal weaknesses, accept your portion of the blame for losing your job, and work to improve, Gilligan recommended.

Although he has a degree in club management as well as in agricultural biology and turfgrass management, Ted Horton said most superintendents have very little personnel training and few management skills.

Horton, vice president of resource management at Pebble Beach Co. in Monterey, Calif., said some schools are working to rectify that by adding personnel courses into their two- and four-year curricula.

"Jim McLoughlin [of McLoughlin Group in Pleasantville, N.Y.] 15 years ago started a club management course at Manhattanville College. All the superintendents in the area rushed to take it. But all the club managers avoided it. And because they did not participate in the program, it fell on its face. I think it

was a very well-intentioned program that should have gotten support of the whole industry," Horton said.

Gilligan said many superintendents feel isolated and that "it's you against the rest of the world. You become protective."

Because of his years at his former course, Gilligan was addressing the course as partly his. But, he said, "I was told it was not. It was the members' course. I was very protective of it. Too much so."

"Now I'm taking more of a business-like perspective of my job. I'm using some business plan models in dealing with personnel and jobs at the course, dealing with members, trying to act more as a middle manager in a corporation."

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While Gilligan, Bruce Rickert of Philadelphia and others said the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA) gave no help in finding jobs, the association has taken steps to improve its employment services.

A recent Arthur Anderson study of the GCSAA recommended adding a human resources person to the staff.

"Whether it comes to be is very much up in the air," said Scott Smith, GCSAA director of public relations.

But the GCSAA does operate an employment referral service, which Smith said works both ways — providing information on job openings to members and names of available superintendents to facilities.

The association now has a new Employment Resources Kit, free to GCSAA members, which includes six booklets written especially for the course management profession.

Those booklets are Career Development; Resume Workbook; Get the Word Out; Coping with Unemployment; Your Rights as an Employee; A Legal Rights Checklist and Glossary; and Sample Job Descriptions for Golf Course Maintenance Personnel.

Checklist: How to find a new position

By TERRY BUCHEN

1. First impressions will make or break you!
 2. Have a good thorough resume, usually done in a format that best works for you. Have references on a separate sheet of paper with addresses and telephone numbers for office and home. Use business, academic and personal/character references. Consider making an executive portfolio for yourself.
 3. Do your homework on researching the prospective club, to the smallest detail.
 4. Have questions and notes written down, i.e. questions for club officials, notes of observations made while touring the golf course, and fringe benefits expected.
 5. Dress professionally, like the members would dress in their respective businesses.
 6. Do not act nervous, but do not be over confident. Be yourself professionally.
 7. Do not be afraid to show enthusiasm that you really want the position!!
 8. How is your attitude?
 - a. Are you set in your ways?
 - b. Are you only happy when you get what you want?
 - c. Are you stubborn and hard to work with?
 - d. How is your public relations effort?
- No matter how good a turf manager you are, your attitude and how you get along with

people will ultimately prevail!

9. You must show that you can master many areas of responsibility, i.e. Agronomy, Accounting, Personnel Management, Business Law, Golf Course Architecture, Engineering, Construction/Renovation Experience, Horticulture, Floriculture, Environmental, Pesticide/Safety Training Public Relations/Speeches, etc.
10. State the items that you LIKED about the club — be complimentary about the good things that have been done in the past. Do not be too negative about items that you think need to be corrected, as you might embarrass club officials who are interviewing you and were also responsible for the problem.
11. Stay in touch with your references before, during and after. Make sure you have their permission and it's helpful if they know what position you are applying for.
12. Attend a GCSAA Negotiating Seminar.
13. Send thank you letters/cards to all people concerned, i.e. club officials, contacts, new acquaintances, etc.
14. If you do not get the position, ask them why. Then as them if they could refer any positions at other clubs that they might hear of. You'll be surprised how many referrals you can get if the initial club was impressed by your interview and credentials.
15. Keep smiling!

Questions club officials will ask

1. What are your three strongest points professionally/three weakest points?
2. Why do you want to come and be employed at our club?
3. Why should we hire you over the other finalists?
4. What is your philosophy about maintaining a golf course, i.e. tournament conditions all season long, best in town, etc...
5. Do you play golf or, if not, do you completely understand how to obtain our maintenance objective?
6. Are you a Certified Golf Course Superintendent (CGCS) or about to be one?
7. Tell us your opinion of our course and what recommendations you would make for its improvement? (try not to be too negative)
8. What do you do to stay on top of the ever-changing field of Turfgrass Management?
9. If you are from out of state, could you adapt to our climate and conditions? Where would you seek the local knowledge necessary to be competitive?
10. We have read your resume but, in your own words, tell us what your accomplishments have been at each tenure?
11. How effective are you as a people manager? What is your philosophy and how have and will you be effective?
12. Because of our large equipment inventory, what is your equipment maintenance philosophy and how is your working relationship with a mechanic?
13. How is your working relationship with the assistant superintendent? Do you hire turfgrass university students for employment?
14. Can you get along with other department heads and work together for everyone's benefit? Are you set in your ways about anything that would hinder the golf course maintenance operations?
15. Are you a state-licensed pesticide applicator (where applicable) and/or have you attended a GCSAA Pesticide Seminar?
16. What are your professional goals. If hired, how long would you like to be employed here? And would you use our club as a springboard for future success?
17. What is your normal work schedule on any given day? For example, check the course before employee assignments are made, telephone call to suppliers/green chairman, paper work, etc. . .
18. Tell us about your family life and your long-term personal goals?
19. How would you benefit the community, if hired?

Questions to ask club officials

1. What is your club's maintenance objective, i.e. What type of course do you really want? Speed of greens, height of fairways, etc.?
2. What kind of golf course superintendent do you want, i.e. what did you like/dislike about the previous superintendent?
3. Responsibilities? For example, all grounds except buildings, tennis courts, golf cars, bowling greens, etc.?
4. Chain of command? Who does the superintendent report to and work for — preferably only one club official? Does the superintendent report to a green chairman, general manager, or both?
5. Tenure of commitment?
6. Tenure of green chairman? Is he/she a member of board? Very important!
7. Golf course maintenance operating budget? Fiscal/calendar year?
8. Capital budget? New equipment, special projects, etc.?
9. Long Range Planning Committee? Their specific goals and does the superintendent attend meetings on a regular basis?
10. Green Committee — Does the superintendent attend all meetings? Who is on the committee?
11. Golf Committee — Does the superintendent attend? Is it combined with green committee?
12. Board of Directors — Does the superintendent attend any/all meetings? Does the board go into executive session and dismiss all of the staff members? Is the general manager the club's assistant secretary taking the Board's minutes?
13. Ladies Golf Committee — Does superintendent attend all meetings?
14. Tree Planting Committee — How does it function and who administers?
15. Golf pro/club manager relations?
16. Rounds of golf?
17. Course closed part/all day on Monday, Tuesdays after Monday holiday?
18. Hours of operation/employee hours — Is there enough lead time for routine maintenance before play?
19. How many maintenance staff members, full and part time? What percentage of maintenance budget is for labor costs?
20. Maintenance equipment — Regular replacement schedule/depreciation reflected in maintenance budget figures?
21. Maintenance building — Short- and long-term goals?
22. Irrigation system — History and goals?
23. Drainage — History and goals?
24. Golf course architect — On retainer/long-range goals/master plan?
25. Closing of golf course — Superintendent have total control during bad weather, etc.?
26. Golf cars — Superintendent have complete control of their use, i.e. bad weather?
27. Consultants — Who are they and who chooses them?
28. Play golf regularly/with club officials?
29. Tournaments at club? Local/state/regional/national? Amateur/pros?
30. Newsletter — Write monthly column to communicate with membership?
31. Vandalism — Is there a problem or history?
32. How many members? Playing/social/junior executive?
33. Initiation fee/dues structure/assessments past and present?
34. Equity/private owned/development owned — Will members own later?
35. What has the club's policy been on spikeless golf shoes?
36. Is winter golf allowed on regulation greens (northern courses)?

Notes taken while touring property

1. Things that you like about the club — be complimentary about the GOOD things that have been done in the past!
2. List the things that you feel need improvement. List even the smallest detail to show your powers of observation!
3. List the equipment you would need to do the job properly! (List of equipment that is on hand that should be replaced with more modern, state-of-the-art implements!)
4. List long-term goals that you would recommend if hired!
5. Any other pertinent items worth mentioning!