

A different perspective: Pro-active job interviewing

A job-hunter's perspective

By RAYMOND G. DAVIES

As superintendents, we have developed specific knowledge and skills that allow us to produce great golf course turf. Interviewing skills are not required to grow great turf, but having the right job is. To land a job in which your career can thrive, you must excel in the interview process.

A key to successful interviewing is to

take initiative in — pro-actively manage — the interaction between yourself as the candidate and the employer as interviewer.

As the applicant for a superintendent's job, you must achieve four objectives in an interview to glean

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Ray Davies

An employer's perspective

By TOM ISAAK

I heartily endorse the principles of pro-active job interviewing. The job candidate who understands the concept put forth by Raymond Davies, in the companion article, has a powerful career-building too — if he or she can implement the concept.

Ray and I work together. When we were interviewing each other we applied

considerable collaborative effort to shaping a job that would marry the company's needs with his skills and career goals. Now, as colleagues for two years, we continue this problem-solving relationship.

It was a pro-active interview that both launched and formed the basis for this highly productive relationship.

My observations are intended to affirm Ray's concept, while providing an employer's perspective.

COMMUNICATE COMPETENCE

It is almost as hard to communicate competence as it is to examine it. The pro-active interview strategy solves the problem for both parties. Competence — and its essential component, confidence — are communicated best by those who know where they stand. Understanding how a job fits into the career growth you have planned says you know where you stand. If career growth can be defined as acquiring knowledge and skills and applying them with satisfactory results, rather than simply where one works and for how much, the foundation is laid for a dialogue about what constitutes a successful employee-employer relationship. Think through the elements of career growth that will lead you to satisfaction. This self-knowledge about the subject of the interview — your career — is essential to communicating competence. It "centers" you for an interview and is the basis for knowing if the job is good for you. It also gives you the perspective as well as the strength to recognize if it isn't a good match. Note that this is quite different than playing "hard to get," which will come across to the interviewer as arrogance or manipulation.

QUESTION THE QUESTIONER

A good interviewer seeks to understand how you think. The pro-active candidate shows this, not tells about it, by question-

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Tom Isaak is president, CourseCo., Inc and Raymond Davies, a certified golf course superintendent, is the company's regional superintendent.



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Salt & turf

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Employer's perspective

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ing the questioner. A great interview for both parties happens when engagement occurs which reveals analytical thinking and applied knowledge by the candidate. Correct or satisfactory answers to questions are fairly easy to find in job candidates, particularly when the interviewer knows less about the subject than the candidate, as is usually the case when interviewing a superintendent. But what the interviewer does know is what his or her problems are. The outstanding candidate elicits and understands the interviewer's goals for the position and matches his or her competencies to them.

The hardest job the interviewer is to dream up hypothetical scenarios which will reveal how the candidate will reason and act. The best candidate can make any scenario a good illustration of his or her competence by putting on Ray's "consultant hat." Gain objectivity by thinking, "This isn't about me, it is about a problem to be solved." A consultant needs to understand fully a situation before he or she can respond with an effective solution. So, ask the interviewer the clarifying questions that give you the information necessary to solve their problem. Combining all relevant information with your knowledge as a superintendent will reveal your analytical and problem-solving ability. This provides the interviewer with a much richer basis for evaluating a candidate than simple Q and A. If scenarios are not offered, supply them from your own experience, include all the relevant information, then synthesize with your technical knowledge to show the effective conclusion.

DO YOUR HOMEWORK

Pro-active interviewing is not just an attitude, it is knowledge-based behavior. This means you need to be confident of your knowledge of the relevant facts and processes. Prepare by knowing all you can reasonably learn about the physical property, its management and its recent history.

You may find that because you are a trained professional, you can quickly know more than those interviewing you about turfgrass and its underlying conditions. Appropriately and modestly conveyed, this knowledge is impressive, and the fact of your effort to be informed says you are serious in your interest. Moreover, this knowledge creates the context necessary to put on the "consultant hat" necessary to understand the employer's goals and the problems and opportunities inherent in the job situation.

Job-hunter's perspective

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all the information necessary to make a good decision:

- The employer must determine your competence in the areas the employer has determined are critical for a successful candidate.
- The employer needs to communicate the job's benefits and

opportunities in order to interest of the best candidate.

- You must show your competencies, especially those that the employer is not aware bring value to the position.
- You must communicate an understanding of the necessary resources and support required to make any candidate with this

company successful.

A good decision combines a) your selection as the best candidate, and b) the necessary resources and support for you to succeed in the job. Employers may not immediately recognize that this second element is as important to them as it is to you.

The employer with limited technical understanding of turfgrass management may not know what competencies are required for

success on a golf course, but you can count on their knowing the results they require. This will very directly affect the strengths they are seeking in your candidacy. You can learn their needs by listening closely to the questions they ask, their sequence and phrasing. Your success depends on discerning what is important to the interviewer and your ability to relate your com-

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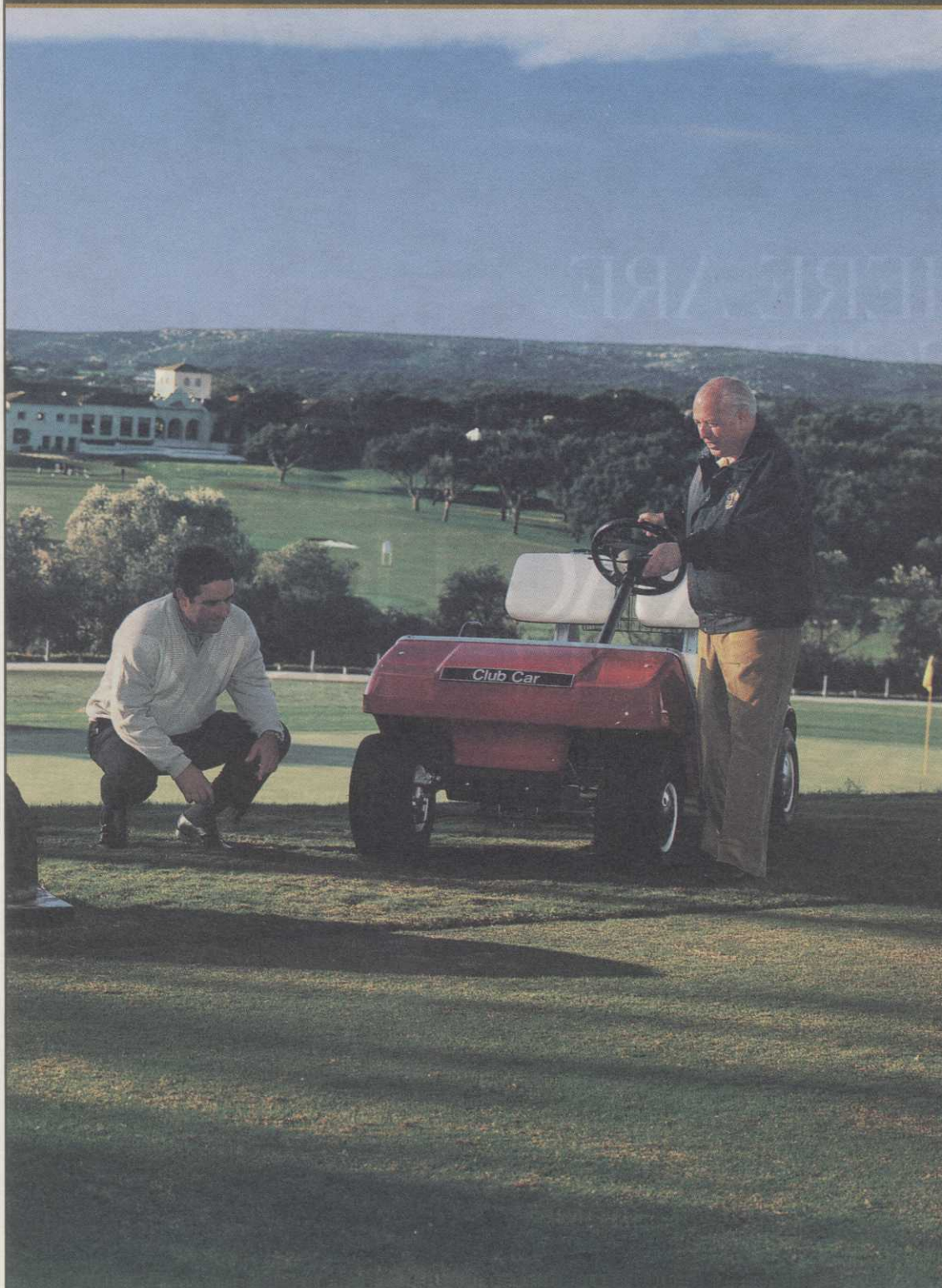
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AUDUBON MEMBERSHIPS KEEP GROWING

SELKIRK, N.Y. — Started in 1991, the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary System for Golf Courses (ACSS) now has 1,984 active members, while the Audubon Signature Program, created in 1994, has 66 facilities under its wing. According to Signature Program Director Nancy Richardson, 59 courses are in the planning and development process leading to certification and Signature status. Seven are fully certified and one former certified course has been dropped from the program. Among regular ACSS members, the retention rate is about 89 percent and no course has lost its certification, according to Audubon International President Ron Dodson. "We are having an increase every year in the number of people joining the program who are working toward certification," he said. "Our retention rate is high and our participation rate is growing."

Job-hunter's perspective

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petencies in these areas.

An astute employer knows this is the major objective in the process. It does an employer no good to identify the best applicant and not be able to interest the candidate in taking the position. A key portion of any benefit package is the value of opportu-

nities created by the position. You need to know what aspects of the position have value to you — such as educational opportunities, renovation projects, construction, or special challenges like major tournament preparation or environmental oversight. Success here is based on your understanding of your own career

development and how this job can influence your career. The employer needs to know that you value the position and that it meets your needs. Otherwise they soon will be on the market for a new superintendent, because you have moved to a more suitable job.

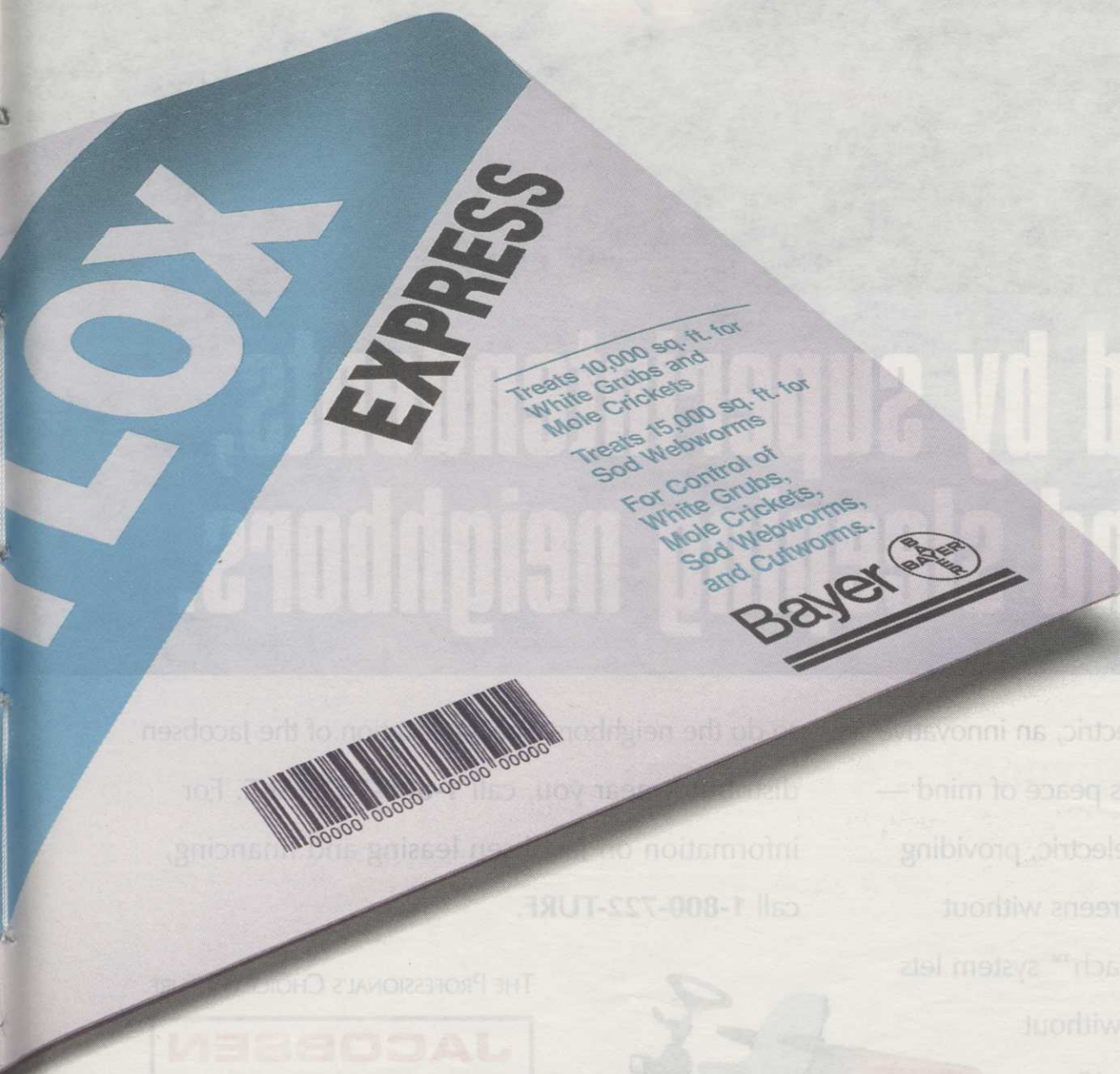
If you are the best candidate, you should know why. A key to pro-active interviewing is enlarging the question the employer asks to encompass the competencies you know are important and that differentiate you from others. For example, if you are questioned on your knowledge of pesticides and their use, you could segue into a discussion on integrated Pest Management and the abilities you have to reduce the severity of disease infestations by using appropriate cultural methods and managing the micro-environment of the greens — measures that reduce chemical use and save money. Most questions can be a launching pad to communicate your understanding of their course and you value.

Do not wait for them to ask you the questions you feel are most important. It is very likely that they will not be addressed if you don't bring them up yourself.

Now the critical step. You are in the best position to influence the circumstances of this new position — before you are offered the job. What will you need in the way of resources and support to meet the demands of the position — and be successful? You have done your homework and know the problems that previous superintendents have faced. If they are attributable to infrastructure such as irrigation, equipment or inadequate staffing, then now, in the interview, is the time to address the issues. It is even more important that fundamental questions related to the level of maintenance or financial problems be addressed at a time when they employer still owns the problems. After you accept the responsibility of the position, you will be in a less powerful position to effect change; and by identifying the hidden structural problems in the organization in advance, you will avoid inheriting problems which are beyond your power to solve.

One final key to successful interviewing is to change the perspective you bring to the process. Try seeing yourself as a consultant who has a great understanding of the needs of the employer. Knowing their problems and their resources, putting on the "consultant hat" gives you the detachment to convincingly illustrate how your management ability, coupled with their resources, can accomplish their objectives. You can then show your value, not just tell about your skills.

Showing is always more powerful than telling. To use a golf analogy: Telling about yourself is like "driving for show." Showing your problem-solving ability is like "putting for dough."



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