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The assistant trap

If the role of the golf professional might be looked at as the sexiest job in golf, the role of the golf course superintendent as the most essential job in golf, and the role of the club manager as the most beguiling job in golf, the roles of assistants within the three professions can be looked at as the final approaches to career success.

Unfortunately, assistant jobs don't always lead to successful careers in golf because too many of those entering the assistant job market *settle* for the softer jobs available and stay too long at these positions as opposed to *selecting* a more challenging career path that presents the inherent discomfort and risks associated with changing jobs early in a career. Only the naïve can believe that staying too long at a job will bear good fruit. The more mature understand the need for assistants to test their mettle by changing jobs to seek a more immediate challenge.

The stark reality of staying too long within the assistant job market is: (1.) While an assistant has spent from four to eight or more years searching for a career in golf, his/her school peer class has been on the job gaining invaluable experience elsewhere, to the point where the assistant can no longer compete with peers outside golf; and (2.) the assistant, consequently, has become too old to be welcomed into entry-level industry jobs outside golf.

With virtually no meaningful place to go, late escaping assistants have been literally career trapped at a point in their lives when they should be growing into their peak career years. To ward off this type of calamity, assistants should:

- Change jobs to move up the job ladder;
- Develop a career Web site;
- Assume if after about five years in the profession they can't begin to break through the pervasive top job interview barrier, get out of golf; and
- Always continue their education to enhance evolving careers in golf and to develop post assistantship job opportunities outside golf should the need arise.

Assistant pros

The role of the assistant golf professional is the most *intriguing* assistantship in golf because it offers tantalizing enticements

and, at the same time, presents arguably the biggest challenge to achieving career success in golf.

The enticement factor translates into the disarming appeal of the profession in which an assistant shooting a score lower than 80 when playing with always approving members, or giving a lesson a week for which he/she will never be held accountable, creates the false illusion of growing into a meaningful career. The collective impact of these types of misleading opportunities is they hold assistants in to what should otherwise be perceived as dead-end careers.

The challenge factor translates into the need that every aspiring golf professional must address, i.e., to become a completely effective and passionate teacher of the game. Until a golf professional can consistently inspire and elevate the playing levels of student golfers through his/her teaching ability, meaningful careers in golf will always remain out of reach because too many less-talented people are available to do everything else a golf professional does in the course of a day.

Therefore, the general five-year "in or out" guideline might not apply to assistant golf professionals, provided the assistant is maturing consistently into a more effective golf instructor – a process that takes time. However, once assistants realize they don't have the passion for teaching and, therefore, aren't effective instructors, they should leave golf quickly.

Assistant superintendents

The role of the assistant golf course superintendent is the most *unique* assistantship in golf because, unlike elsewhere in golf, an individual must commit to a considerable investment of time and money to earn a multiyear college degree to qualify for a meaningful assistant job. Acknowledging this commitment, the obvious question becomes whether the general five-year "in or out" guideline should apply to assistant golf course superintendents.

The presumed answer to this question must be "yes". However, by maximizing every career enhancing opportunity available, an assistant can extend this five-year probationary period. This means assistant superintendents – more so than other assistants in golf – must meticulously plan

and stretch out their formative career years, or run the risk of sliding aimlessly into career mediocrity. (My March 2005 GCN column profiles the differences that meticulous career planning can have on a superintendent's career.)

Assistant managers

The role of the assistant club manager is the most *troubling* assistantship in golf because assistants are working to gain access to a profession that (1.) prefers to identify more with the hospitality industry than the game of golf – evidence, in part, by the fact that the majority of managers working at golf clubs don't play the game regularly and, consequently, aren't perceived to be within golf's family circle like golf professionals and superintendents are; and (2.) fails to control who can assume the top of the profession title of general manager to the point where there are more less qualified abusing the title than there are qualified using the title. This ongoing situation significantly undermines respect for the profession.

It's not a coincidence the club managers are the only professional membership organization in golf that doesn't have the word "golf" in its title name like the Professional Golfers Association of America and Golf Course Superintendents Association of America do. But, when more than 80 percent of Club Managers Association of America member clubs are golf and country clubs, CMAA members should consider symbolically embracing the game of golf by changing the name of the association.

Therefore, the question whether the five-year "in or out" guideline applies to assistant managers becomes moot because the profession is too unsettled to allow for any meaningful evaluation in this regard. Accordingly, the best advice that can be given to assistant managers is to identify with and play the game at every appropriate opportunity; and to work under as many "true" general managers as possible – the only environment in golf where meaningful club management is practiced.

Golf professionals, superintendents and managers have a responsibility to grow their assistants. However, once assistants lose career focus, they should be firmly pushed out and on – the sooner the better (for them). GCN

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