



**Dan Schuknecht** is the assistant superintendent at Talons of Tuscany Golf Club in Ankeny, Iowa. He serves on the Iowa Golf Course Superintendents board of directors as the Class C representative. He can be contacted at [dsschuknecht@msn.com](mailto:dsschuknecht@msn.com) or 515-865-9814.

## SUCCESS THROUGH EDUCATION

It's been difficult for assistant superintendents to further their careers. A job opening for a superintendent position can draw hundreds of applicants.

What can assistants do to compete for the opportunities we desire? We make ourselves marketable. There are many ways to accomplish this. One is through education. We can never stop learning because there are better technologies, strategies and management practices that will produce better results. We're fortunate to have numerous educational opportunities available.

There's something for each of us. It's important to find a course or program that motivates you and will help you accomplish your goals. Every bit of education and training helps us do our jobs more effectively and makes us more marketable for future careers. As the business demands of golf course superintendents increase, there will be a need for advanced degrees and business experience. I decided the best way to reach my desired position was to get an MBA from the University of Iowa. The program gives students the opportunity to learn about all aspects of business in a way that's relatable to their career fields and teaches them how a business is run and how to operate one. Whatever educational track you choose, keep these things in mind:

**Leaders are human resource managers.** They aren't only responsible for hiring and firing, they help develop their staff into a hard-working, cohesive unit. This takes leadership and the ability to motivate others. Leaders must have people skills to communicate and influence the wealthiest club and board members and those who earn minimum wage. MBA programs require human resource courses to prepare you to succeed when dealing with many types of personalities and backgrounds.

Many program projects are completed in teams, making teamwork an important part of the program. You must be able to sell yourself and your ideas, and establish credibility within your group.

As you learn to depend on the expertise of your classmates, you deal with those who can be difficult to work with to achieve the grades you desire. The diversity I work with in class is similar to what a general manager faces daily when dealing with different department heads and staff members.

**Leaders are change managers.** They have to lead and influence those around them and have vision to see what the future of their business will be like. Often times the future of our clubs will cause us to change. Last fall, I took a course about change management that taught me how to lead others through change with preparation and communication. I also learned to identify my organization's culture and to develop strategies if I had to change that culture.

For example, say you accept a new position as a superintendent or general manager. You're hired with the expectation of raising performance levels and achieving results but are surrounded by a staff known for underachieving and having a poor work ethic. Create change first by creating a sense of urgency among your staff that necessitates the need for change. Cast a vision to show your staff where you want to go as a team. Empowering others to act on this vision and removing obstacles to change will help as you create momentum through short-term wins. Making changes within your staff and developing staff members to carry out the vision also is an important component of change.

Finally, taking action to ensure the change strategy is carried out long term and the organization's old habits don't come back into common practice can be difficult but is vitally important. These steps are crucial to ensuring a leader can create and keep change and achieve results.

**Leaders are resource and financial managers.** We care for a club's greatest resource: the golf course. Studies have shown golfers come back because of well kept greens, tees and fairways. This was valued more than all other areas of their experience.

Leaders must find creative ways to deal with increased labor and supply costs and decreasing budgets. They must work to stay under budget while producing a high quality product. I'm enrolled in an accounting class that teaches students to evaluate a company's future viability and success by studying its balance sheet and income and cash flow statements. The class also will be useful when determining if an organization is worth purchasing, managing or investing in.

**Leaders are time managers.** Those in the industry know time management is a must because successful leaders are given much to accomplish to provide necessary worth and value to their club. Being in our business and continuing with education can be difficult because of time and financial constraints. Working toward achieving an MBA has made me a much better time manager, but it hasn't come without challenges. I continue to work full time and take night and weekend classes. When I started the program last fall, our club was completing the seeding phase of a grow-in. This season will be a test to balance class work load with the challenge of a grow-in. Delegation and managing your "time wasters" can go a long way toward better time management.

The MBA program will help me understand the business side of the golf industry much better. While pursuing an MBA has meant challenge, sacrifice and commitment, it will be worth it. If this educational path is something you're considering, visit [www.mba.com](http://www.mba.com). Here are two tips:

- Consider your options. What programs are available that you find interesting and motivating?
- Talk to your employer. Many are supportive of continuing education, and some might offer tuition assistance. Be ready to sell why you want to pursue higher education and how it will benefit your employer.

A leader once said, "If we aren't prepared and educated to make decisions, someone will make them for us, and we probably won't like it." I encourage you to consider education as an opportunity toward career success. **GCI**