

## Following the path to success

In the competitive world of golf course superintendents, a bit of knowledge and a road map of the future can take one a long way.

The key to moving a career forward is having a sense of a golf course superintendent's changing responsibilities and the proper steps to take when obtaining a job, according to Lyne Tumlinson, director of career services and Frederick Thomas, career guidance manager for the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America and Paul Vermeulen, director of agronomy for the PGA Tour.

The three golf industry professionals hosted an interactive half-day seminar at the GCSAA's annual educational conference, Feb. 19 through 24 at the Anaheim Convention Center in California.

Superintendents face a changing industry as society presents more choices and more constant updates in technology, Tumlinson says. She quoted John Stebbins, western region v.p. of East West Partners Club Management, who told her, "People think superintendents are magicians or celebrities who have pixy dust."

The GCSAA's Frederick Thomas offers career advice to superintendents in Anaheim.  
Photo: Heather Wood



To better prepare superintendents or those who wish to hold the post, the professionals helped to educate attendees on what will be expected of them.

The audience, which included a mix of golf course superintendents and assistant superintendents, collaborated to name factors they predict will come into play in the golf industry during the next 20 years. They include:

- Longer golf courses;
- A more technology-based job;
- More efficient water use;
- A more diverse group of

golfers;

- More strict environmental regulations;
- Fewer golf courses; and
- Higher expectations of turf conditions.

Those attending the workshop also said superintendents will face some of the following factors:

- A more mobile office (the ability and need for superintendents to access information while in their golf cars/utility vehicles instead of running back to the office in the maintenance building);

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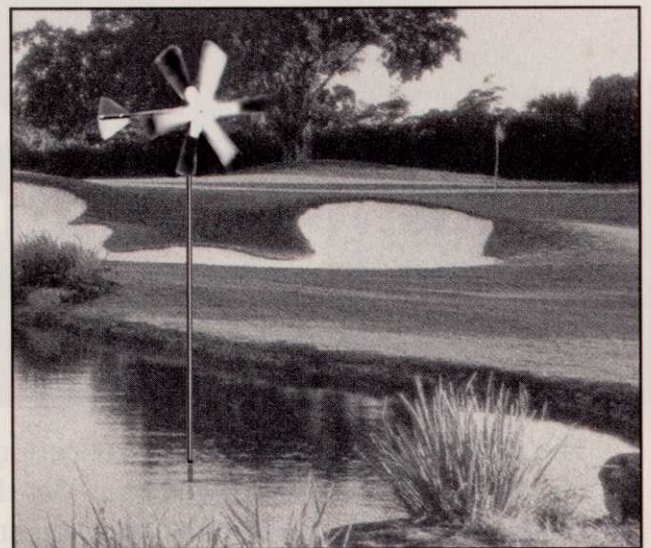
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- The need for a highly qualified engineer to keep technological systems running;
- A possible labor shortage; and
- The need to change maintenance programs because of environmental restrictions.

**TAKING ACTION**

To progress in one's career, golf course managers need to evaluate themselves first. Look for aspects of job performance that could be improved and set goals to achieve, Tumlinson

says. For some, goals might include reducing the work week to 40 hours and learning to train and delegate better. For others, committing to continual learning in the industry or working to strengthen family or community relationships might be what superintendents or assistant superintendents work toward.

Vermeulen has seen countless signs of golf course mismanagement at courses he's visited, including bunkers that haven't been raked or facilities that aren't kept in good working condition. These reflect poorly on a superintendent and can negatively affect any chances of advancement.

"You can't hide your weaknesses as much as you think," he says.

Once a superintendent believes he has marketable qualities and wants to aim for a higher position, he shouldn't be discouraged about intimidating career-related numbers. For instance, it's said more than 175 candidates apply for any given superintendent position.

"That's a lot of candidates, but how many of them are qualified?" Tumlinson says. "The number of qualified candidates probably is much smaller."

People also often speculate the number of turfgrass students entering the job field exceeds the number of open positions in the industry, Tumlinson says. But many of those students don't end up entering the golf course industry. Still, the number of job candidates can be overwhelming, so the best way to stand a chance is to stand out.

**JOB APPLICATION BASICS**

When advancing a career, applying for a job is inevitable. The first step is to find a way to set yourself apart from the other candidates. That might simply mean displaying key competencies needed for the job. Tumlinson identifies them as communication skills, leadership, operations management, personal skills and resource utilization.

Exhibiting these skills to a potential employer is a plus, but getting to that point is equally as important. It starts with the first correspondence with the hiring company: the resume and cover letter.

A resume tells employers who you are and what you want (objective). It also has to be job specific and include what you have to offer (three to five bullet points) and a list of accomplishments. Employers like to see numbers to

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The GCSAA's Frederick Thomas offers career advice to superintendents in Anaheim. Photo: Heather Wood

the interviewers are likely amateurs with little experience with the hiring process, Vermeulen says.

"Sell to their weaknesses," he says. "Make your moments with the selection committee count."

Interviewees can do this by considering the committee probably lacks:

- Knowledge of what the job requires;
- Understanding of the education required;
- An idea of what they want from the golf course;
- Knowledge of the hiring process; and
- An abundance of time.

The committee probably will favor the candidate with the least resistance, Vermeu-

## Career Help

➤ For more resources to help advance your career, contact the GCSAA career services office at [www.gcsaa.org/career](http://www.gcsaa.org/career).

len says. A few other tips for the interview include:

- Don't mention salary;
- Don't chew gum or smoke;
- Don't use profanity;
- Ask questions about the position;
- Practice good communications and presentation skills; and
- Avoid poor posture.

Above all, set yourself apart. Throughout the process, remember to make the application process about the employer.

"All they want to know is what you can do for them," Thomas says. — Heather Wood

illustrate these.

Thomas says a cover letter is a must. "The resume won't get read without a cover letter," he says. The letter should include short, concise sentences explaining why you're writing, what you have to offer and how you will follow up with the potential employer. If you're called for an interview, take advantage of the fact



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