

10 tips for a successful job interview

Bruce Williams, director of courses and grounds at The Los Angeles Country Club, has plenty of experience on both sides of the interview table. During the past 20 years, most of his time in job interviews has been spent on the interviewer side of the table. After conducting hundreds of interviews for prospective golf course superintendents, Williams has a few ideas about what candidates can say to get a job.

Interviewees will sit before a panel of people involved with golf course operations. They could range from the general manager or director of golf of a facility to a private club's green committee or park district's selection committee.

Based on his experience sitting on some of these committees, Williams offers 10 points to follow to win over the multiple types of interviewers when applying for a position. These tips can be applied to jobs at any golf course in the United States, he says.

1. There's no need to cram for the interview exam; you either know things or you don't. If you don't know facts about the club before you go in, you're not going

to soak up that knowledge two days ahead of time.

"These things don't happen quickly," Williams says. "You can't just look stuff up on the Internet. Surely there are a couple of weeks to prepare from the time you apply for the job until the interview."

Prospects should prepare until they feel comfortable with the golf course's history and current information. Learn what makes the course unique, and find out if there are any projects in process. Is there any construction planned for the course?

Mock interviews help to increase the comfort level as well.

2. Have an agronomic plan in mind for the property. Prospects need to be able to communicate their vision for the future and how they would accomplish it.

3. Know the history of the facility, including the architect and the former superintendents who worked there. Also, know the financial information about the club and department. Know if the club has a waiting list, if it's profitable, etc.

4. Ask for a collection of soil tests, water tests, USGA reports or other consulting reports prior

to the interview. Interviewees should review this information before the interview so they can speak intelligently about it.

"In addition to getting the job, I would want to know if I can be successful with resources that are currently there and if I can make improvements with those resources," Williams says.

Whatever the condition of the course, don't make the mistake of insulting the current owners.

"People tend to be proud of their facility, so you have to walk a fine line," Williams says. "Go for constructive criticism rather than drawing negatives."

5. Analyze your staffing and budgetary needs before the interview and make appropriate recommendations. If the potential employer asks the interviewee what he or she thinks about the budget, the prospective hire should be able to respond with an intelligent answer rather than asking the interviewer what the budget is. To keep up with or exceed the competition, acquire that information before the interview.

6. Bring copies of your accomplishments and work at previous positions. Show before

and after work pictures. This is another way to get a leg up on the competition.

"When I would go into the interview, I would make sure every person has a portfolio with my resume and a business card attached," Williams says.

7. Be relaxed and be yourself. Let your personality glow and show. Don't let your nerves lose the job for you. Being relaxed comes with adequate preparation and practice. Being relaxed also can help the interviewee feel more like himself or herself.

"Sometimes people make the mistake of trying to be somebody they're not," Williams says, adding there's a fine line between confidence and overconfidence.

"If somebody says, 'You're going to make a big mistake if you don't hire me,' that's too much."

Fitting in appearancewise also helps the interviewee to feel more comfortable.

"If you think everyone in there is going to wear a coat and tie, why would you go in with golf attire?" Williams asks. "If you don't know, it's OK to ask. Some people go out and golf afterward."

A general rule of thumb is to wear a sport coat and tie or suit. Don't overdo it.

"A tuxedo isn't necessary," he says.

8. Reflect on the business acumen side of things and show future employers how savvy you are on the business side of

things. Terms such as return on investment and net profits should not be foreign to applicants.

"People worry about which agronomic questions are going to be asked," he says. "Usually less than 20 percent of the interview questions are agronomic."

Job seekers should focus on other topics of conversation, including business aspects.

9. Show examples of team building, development of training programs, motivational techniques, etc.

"Businessmen understand these things much more than plant pathology and soil science," he says.

Applicants should use portfolios to highlight this.

10. Tell the interviewer you want the job and why you are the best fit. Sell yourself. Some candidates go through the interview without ever mentioning they want the job, which is a mistake.

"Tell them when you go in that you want the job," he says. "Then, during the course of the discussion and when you close the interview, tell them again you want the job," he says. "Don't be redundant. Tell them you're excited and you'd be a good fit."



— Heather Wood

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The international way

Quent Baria, CGCS, at the Towson Golf & Country Club near Baltimore, took the road less traveled with his putting greens: the international route. Rather than California, push-up or USGA-spec greens, Baria tried a less-often-used method – the international green method – which he says brought greater benefits than conventional methods.

Baria took the superintendent position at the Geoffrey Cornish-designed, 35-year-old course in 2002. A year later, heavy rain – 32 inches in 58 days – spelled trouble for the greens, which had no drainage system.

“Eight greens were dead before Memorial Day,” Baria says, adding that putting surfaces at other holes seemed to be doomed as well.

Baria knew a change had to be made, but the club didn’t have the estimated \$1 million to rebuild the greens completely. Instead, Baria built on top of the existing greens, which cost about \$250,000.

The course closed in June 2003, and the project began. With help from Columbia, Md.-based Ed Beidel, a member of the ASGCA, and with the input from club committee members, design alterations in the

greens were addressed. Green configurations were adjusted to make existing bunkers more relative to play.

Surface contours were softened so the greens remained fair, yet challenging. This was necessary preparation for the faster green speeds achieved with the new generation bentgrasses, Baria says.

The first step of building on the greens was spreading sand over them. Harmon Turf Services of Hillsville, Va., then performed the on-site soil blending. Baria has heard many in the industry say on-site blending can’t produce quality, homogenous results, but that wasn’t the case.

“A uniform, six-inch cultivation depth was achieved,” he says.

The next step is what gives the international green method its name. The crew used a BLECovater, which, coupled with the method of using it, is from the U.K. The machine cuts channels to a 10-inch depth on 10-inch centers at width of about three-quarters of an inch. The channels can be filled with rice-size gravel.

“This creates negative hydraulic conductivity to move water into the profile,” Baria says.

The greens were then covered for methyl bromide gassing. This cost



A BLECovater cuts channels to a 10-inch depth on 10-inch centers.
Photo: Quent Baria



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Three different organic fertilizers were used to rapidly rebuild the essential microbial population for plant growth. An inorganic starter and gypsum also were applied.

Penn A-1 bentgrass sod, obtained at \$1 per foot, was installed. When the process was complete, Towson had functional greens for about \$2 per square foot. The course opened for play Aug. 26, less than three months after the project began.

Four years after the greens reopened, Baria continues to experience desired performance from his greens. The channels pull in and hold water, which means Baria doesn't see as many instances of localized dry spot as he did with the old greens. They also seem to recover quickly from other afflictions.

"After a freeze, our greens are ready three to five days before the others in the area," Baria says.

The greens stand up well to the stress that comes with 23,000 to 24,000 rounds per year, he adds. The second year after the greens were installed, there were only six to 10 days where they needed to be hand-watered. They continue to require few days of hand-watering and less maintenance than courses with more conventional greens-building methods, Baria says. — HW



Quent Baria, CGCS, renovated the putting greens at Towson Golf & Country Club using the international method, which cost about \$2 per square foot. Photo: Heather Wood

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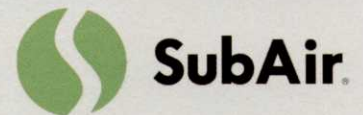
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The staff at Broken Sound Club is used to hurricane preparation. Photo: Joe Hubbard

Never too early

For Joe Hubbard, the name Wilma will always provoke a certain dread. Hubbard, golf course superintendent at Broken Sound Club in Boca Raton, Fla., has put the golf course back together after a few violent storms during his time there, though none have caused as much havoc as Hurricane Wilma.

Hubbard and his crew had just cleaned up after the damage Hurricane Francis caused in 2004 when Wilma hit the area in October 2005 with 140-mile-per-hour winds and caused more than \$1 million worth of damage. It

took more than a year to clean up, Hubbard says, adding that trees were wiped out, changing the layout of the course.

"Nothing will ever be exactly as it was before the hurricane," he says. "You can't replace the trees; the landscape was devastated."

Other named storms, including Jeanne, Frances and Katrina tore through the course and left a mess, though none were as devastating as Wilma.

This year, the chances of Hubbard and his crew getting a break look grim. Weather expert William Gray recently released

his prediction that there will be 17 named storms this year, five of them major hurricanes. Gray, who heads the Tropical Meteorology Project at Colorado State University, says the probability of a major storm reaching land on the U.S. coast this year is 74 percent, compared with the average of 52 percent throughout the past century.

While hurricane season is still a few months away, golf course superintendents who've been affected by storms say it's not too early to form an emergency plan.

Hubbard was the first of his

team to get to the course after Hurricane Wilma, allowing the crew to put their families' safety first. He spent many hot, humid nights on a cot in his office as he and the crew worked seven days a week to get the course back into shape. The power was out for several days, which made the high temperatures more unbearable.

The crew cleaned up the downed oak and Ficus trees, replaced the damaged sod and refilled the bunkers. Bunker sand had blown probably 50 miles away, Hubbard says. He brought in heavy equipment, including

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front-end loaders, as needed, but says some courses spent the money to have them on hand.

Hubbard hired contractors and temporary workers to share some of the workload with his crew. The blow Wilma dealt, just after cleanup from Jeanne was wrapping up, helped boost low morale among the workers, Hubbard says.

"I increased the crew's hours for a couple of months and put more money into my people's pockets," he says. "They had more money to help their families."

In the wake of such disasters, Hubbard would like to see more collaboration. Golf courses with less damage should put politics aside and help neighboring courses who aren't as lucky.

Terry Wood, golf course superintendent at Naples National Golf Club, says the last time a major hurricane hit that part of Florida was Donna in 1960. But even storms considered minor can cause damage. After Wilma blew through in 2005, the course was left with \$1.5 million worth of damage.

The course was just starting its season and had been open for two or three weeks when news of a storm came through. The course was closed the day before it was supposed to hit that area. This gave the staff time to move their families to a safe place. The storm dumped more than five inches of rain on the golf course – not bad compared to other locations and other storms that year, Wood says. But the winds that accompanied it were enough to cause considerable damage.

"We lost more than 635 trees, many of them pine trees," he says.

Wood's 24-man crew was on the course the day after the storm helping to make it playable again. Contractors helped grind the

trees and haul the stumps away. With the exception of a roof, most damage was contained to the debris scattered around the course, Wood says. The power outage lasted for a few days.

Hubbard and Wood say people in general are more prepared for hurricanes now than they were two years ago. More businesses are ready with backup generators. Golf courses in storms' paths have better ideas about how to prepare for a natural disaster.

Hubbard and Wood already have started to prepare for the storm season. Items on their checklists include:

- Create hurricane preparedness kits that include flashlights, medical supplies, contact sheets with information for emergency generators and a bottled water supplier;
- Meet with the other department heads and create or review an emergency plan;
- Keep a list of emergency contact information for all employees;
- Have the name of a reliable tree contractor lined up;
- Avoid as much tree damage as possible by trimming trees before the hurricane season starts; and
- Keep an adequate fuel supply.

Be sure gas pumps are manual, not electric, in case power is lost.

Storm seasons don't always turn out how they're predicted. For example, Gray forecast 17 named storms for 2006 including nine hurricanes, five of them major ones. Instead, there were 10 named storms and five hurricanes, two of them major hurricanes.

But Hubbard doesn't focus on the numbers.

"Whether they say there will be two or 30 storms, we always try to stay prepared," he says. "That's what a true Floridian does." – HW

From nine to five

What started out as a nine-hole addition at Hinckley (Ohio) Hills Golf Course ended up as a five-hole course aimed to attract beginners, youngsters or those who simply don't have time to play nine or 18 holes.

The project began eight years ago, according to golf course superintendent Jean Esposito. Her family, who owns the 18-hole, Harold Pack, Sr.-designed course, wanted to add nine holes but encountered problems securing land necessary for that size addition. Three years later, after five new holes were completed (three on the back side, then two more on the front side), they were integrated into the existing course and a cluster of five par-4 holes were made into The Buzzard's Nest, named after the bird who visits the course yearly.

"The Buzzard's Nest is good for the mother and son who like to play, but think nine holes is too much," Esposito says. "We thought five would be just enough."

Esposito hopes that attracting a more diverse group of golfers will help improve business. Yearly rounds at Hinckley Hills are below 20,000, not nearly what they used to be, she says, citing the economy, gas prices and competing outlets for people's disposable income as some of the causes for the decline.

When the Buzzard's Nest opened, it included holes four, five, six, 12, 13 and 14 from the existing course. The newly built holes took their places, moving from the inside of the course to the outer edges. The holes from the existing course that were taken out of play for the five-hole course sat out of commission before the Buzzard's Nest opened to give the stressed turf a break.

The original 18 holes opened in 1964. Until a few years ago, the layout hasn't been changed. The only exception was 10 years after it opened when the front nine became the back nine and vice versa.

In the beginning, Esposito's family was one of three owners. Each of the three families, including the children, labored to build the course. Much of the work was done in-house.

The original golf course superintendent (and Esposito's father) Donald Krush, 89, continues to keep her up to date on industry practices. He was involved heavily in the design and construction of the course, including the addition eight years ago.

"My dad was on a bulldozer during the construction," Esposito says.

The new holes were built consistently with the old ones. Penncross bentgrass (with some *Poa annua*) are on the greens, and a bluegrass/ryegrass/fescue mix is on the fairways. Esposito, along with her husband, Mark, nephews and a handful of other part- and full-time help, manage the grounds. Her sister, Sue Smith and nephew, Mike Smith, manage the concessions and pro shop, respectively.

Operating the course is a seven-day-a-week job for some of the family, which means holiday dinners during the golf season are spent in the clubhouse's back room. Esposito doesn't mind that because she enjoys the industry and aims to foster a greater enjoyment of the game among golfers, five holes at a time. –HW

