



Jim McLoughlin is the founder of TMG Golf (www.TMGgolfcounsel.com), a golf course development and consulting firm, and is a former executive director of the GCSAA. He can be reached at golfguide@roadrunner.com or 760-804-7339. His previous columns can be found on www.golfcourseindustry.com.

BEWARE OF (SOME) G.M.S

It's often said that while the American form of government isn't perfect, it's clearly the best form of government available to man. Similarly, it can be said that while the general manager format of club governance isn't perfect, it's the best available to the private golf sector. (See my March 2007 GCI column.)

Some might think there can be no more deadly power struggles than what we see within the halls of government where the welfare of constituencies, or voters, often are subverted to the will of the politically ambitious. Regrettably, this level of political infighting isn't limited to government. We see similar devastating infighting every year within the halls of America's private club community between general managers and golf course superintendents.

In my March 2007 column, I mention there are about 4,600 private golf clubs throughout the country, about 950 of these are governed by the committee format, another 850 are managed by contract firms, and the balance of about 2,800 clubs (61 percent of the total) are operated through the general manager concept. The approximate 2,800 general managers in American golf can be broken down into the following three categories:

The good guys (about 60 percent of general managers). If general managerships are the best form of governance in golf (and they are), the reason for this is solely because of the experience, leadership qualities and maturity of the people who occupy these positions. Their personal makeup includes a fundamental understanding that private clubs are in the service business, staff careers should be nurtured, effective intramural communications are essential to success, and a club's welfare is the paramount objective at all times. This is the best working environment throughout all golf for golf course superintendents.

The power brokers (about 25 percent of general managers). This category of general manager generally is employed at a club

before a superintendent candidate is hired. These general managers have established their power base within the club and don't want an incoming well-qualified golf course superintendent becoming too popular, thereby, potentially undermining this authority. Consequently, they do what they must to ensure star-material superintendent candidates don't get hired and lesser, more



These general managers dismiss superintendents at the first practical opportunity. If a superintendent resists, the big guns are brought to bear.

pliable candidates do. Once hired within such an environment, superintendents should be mindful that the better they do their jobs, the more tenuous their job security might become. Accordingly, superintendents always should have their personal Web sites ready to move on.

The bad dudes (about 15 percent of general managers). These are the most lethal type of general managers who, generally, will be hired *after* the golf course superinten-

dent at a club. They join a club administration without an established power base and don't want to take the time (or might not have the ability) to earn one. Consequently, once on board, they look to identify staff professionals who might be a threat to them in terms of acquiring status or power. What juicier target than a well-qualified, well-paid popular golf course superintendent?

These general managers dismiss superintendents at the first practical opportunity. If a superintendent resists, the big guns are brought to bear. Superintendents are told that, unless they leave quickly and quietly, their salaries and benefits will be terminated immediately, health coverage will be shut down, their families will be put out on the street if the club provides housing directly or indirectly, and positive references will be permanently denied. Left with no choice, proud superintendents cave and go quietly, often with little hope of resurrecting careers. This scenario is repeated a few hundred times a year throughout the country.

If the memberships at these clubs knew how their respected golf course superintendents were being treated, there would be outrage. But they don't know because the GCSAA and its 103 chapters have done little throughout the years to educate people in this regard. They haven't addressed the lack of written contracts issue, which, once resolved, would restrain overzealous general managers. While the present GCSAA board scrutinizes these issues more closely, the 103 GCSA chapters might consider taking this issue directly to their local clubs via their Web sites and newsletters to ask their constituent clubs why only 20 percent of golf course superintendents are granted written contracts when as many as 80 percent of golf professionals, club managers and virtually 100 percent of club employed members are. This question properly presented should open the door for better dialogue with clubs about this issue.

Closing reminder: It should be clear that candidates for superintendents' jobs should check out the caliber of general manager they would work with if hired and act accordingly. **GCI**