



finding **balance**

When it comes to work/life balance, superintendents are often their own worst enemies.

BY MIKE ZAWACKI

Ten months ago Jeff Sweet's world changed.

A self-described workaholic, Sweet, CGCS, says his newborn daughter's arrival made him more conscious about striking a balance between the 70-plus hours a week at Bucks Run Golf Club in Mt. Pleasant, Mich., and his new parental responsibilities.

"You want to make sure you don't miss all of the intangibles that life brings you now," he says. "You find yourself asking, 'It's 4:30 p.m. and why am I not at home?'"

"You don't want to look back 15 years from now with regret," Sweet adds. "You won't ever be saying to yourself, 'Gosh, I wish I would have worked harder.'"

Sweet's predicament – establishing an acceptable balance between work and life – is a scenario familiar to superintendents, their assistants and their crews. No one enters the profession naive to the fact that it's a physically, mentally and emotionally demanding vocation.

And for some, this devotion mirrors addiction.

"I just always felt the need to be at work and I wasn't happy unless I was at work," Sweet says. "I don't know if I was wired wrong, but I wasn't happy unless I was at work and making sure that everything was getting done properly."

This shared perspective is part of the problem, says Bill Bieck, CGCS, Heritage Hills Golf Course, McCook, Neb. Superintendents have always sought the unattainable – course perfection.

"Many superintendents, especially us old-timers, are very dedicated to the profession and to the job," says Bieck, who's spent 34 years as a superintendent. "We strive for perfection and we know when things aren't perfect. Unfortunately, we also know we can never reach perfection, but that doesn't stop us from striving toward that goal."

Throughout their careers, the scales in many superintendents' lives skew toward work and the golf course. As a result, they make sacrifices. According to a Golf Course Industry survey, the majority of superintendents cancel appointments with family, friends or spouses due to work-related commitments. Few have the time or energy for leisure activities or hobbies. Likewise, their duties make it difficult to relax, leading to irritability and detachment while away from the facility. (See GCI's Work/Life Balance Survey on page 23.)

"In this industry, it's easy to become immersed in a whole myriad of challenges and issues within the job," says Bob Hickam, director of golf, Tahoe Mountain Club, Truckee, Calif. "In a lot of cases, it's a 12-hour day, 365-day a year operation that we manage. There are no breaks and there are no holidays because those days are our busiest times."

Current economic conditions have only exacerbated the work/life challenge in most U.S. business sectors. According to a recent FedEx Office survey, 86 percent of full-time workers planned to pursue a better work/life balance this year. Likewise, 96 percent place greater importance on their work/life balance this year than they did in 2008.

But even before the recent economic downturn, professionals were focused on greater work/life balance. According to a 2007 Monster Worldwide study, 89 percent of employees believed work/life balance programs – such as flex and vacation time – were important when evaluating new jobs, yet only about half of human resources professionals considered work/life balance to be an important initiative for their companies.

Work/life balance always has been an issue in the American workplace, says Terrence Sember, a management consultant in Clarence, N.Y., and the author of

"The Essential Supervisor's Handbook."

"Managers and employees both feel the pressure to survive or succeed at work and that's what drives people out of balance," Sember says. "It's easier to say 'no' or 'not now' to family and friends because the repercussions are potentially less immediate and visible. At work, clients, bosses and coworkers may be less tolerant of choosing life versus work, and to avoid potential ramifications they can't or don't say no. Likewise, many people define themselves by their work. So a perceived failure there can shake someone to their core."

OWN WORST ENEMY

The paradox, though, is most superintendents recognize the value in work/life harmony, and many have taken steps to facilitate balance, not only in their personal lives, but in the lives of their crews, as well.

Outside of the golf course industry, the average overextended U.S. worker is more apt to point the finger at job expectations and corporate culture for their work/life imbalance. This is not necessarily so in the golf course industry. Very few superintendents blame their club presidents or boards for an unbalanced life. In fact, more than half (see the chart on page 24) say their superiors are accommodating and sensitive to their family-related needs and responsibilities. Likewise, majority (54 percent) say they're encouraged to strike a work/life balance, and more than half don't believe they're expected to put their jobs before their families.

So why is there personal conflict?

Jeff Holiday, CGCS, has received nothing less than the full support of his superiors at Salisbury Country Club in Midlothian, Va., to maintain a work/life balance. Holiday's sense of dedication – a trait he describes as being "hardwired" into him early on as an assistant – is the

overriding factor.

"I put more pressure on myself than my membership or my general manager just because I want everything to look good," Holiday says. "It's a part of me. I want my members to be satisfied and happy with the way things are going.

"For three months out of the year – June, July and August – it's hard to have balance,"

Holiday says. "Those are three months where my dedication is to the golf course. My family understands that."

While they may struggle with their own issues, many superintendents are particularly sensitive about work/life balance in their employees' lives. Some will go so far as to chew out a subordinate they catch neglecting their family duties.

"I've always had some single parents (on staff) and I've made it a point to say, 'Listen, your kids are No. 1. There's nothing that's life threatening on this golf course that you should neglect your children for,'" says Thom Martinek, superintendent at Oberlin Golf Club in Oberlin, Ohio. "I drive that point home enough to say that I'd dismiss them if I ever caught them neglecting their children to stay at work for an extra hour."

Gregory Jack, assistant superintendent at The Old Collier Golf Club in Naples, Fla., is waiting for his opportunity to become a superintendent. In the meantime, there's pressure to test his mettle, which is often gauged by long hours and hard work.

"When you're working six days a week there's not a lot of time left over for personal things in your life," Jack says. "My specialty is irrigation systems. We use brackish water and we have to flush the brackish water out with fresh water. We found out that the most efficient way of doing this was overnight. So that required me to work 24 to 28 hours straight. I'd go to work at 5:30 a.m. and leave at 8:30 a.m. the next morning.

"I guess you could say that's when you really start to feel the pressure," he adds.

While many superintendents say dedication and commitment are traits they seek in assistants, burnout is not.

"I remember one kid in particular who wanted to work all of the time," says Tim Powers, CGCS, Crystal Springs Golf Course, Burlingame, Calif. "I said, 'You just can't do that. You need to go home.' We really are our own worst enemies."

Bieck agrees. Many superintendents bring this problem on themselves. In his three decades as a superintendent, work/life balance has been a key issue and he's authored a number of articles over the years addressing the topic.

No superintendent intends to play favorites, but it's no secret that the demands of a superintendent's job can swell and overwhelm life off the course. Despite Bieck's best intentions, there were instances in his own career when the demands of his golf course superseded those of his family. "I've really tried to guard myself against that and prevent that from happening," Bieck says. "But sometimes there are emergencies that happen on the golf course and our families are forced to take a backseat."

TROUBLESHOOTING

To an outsider, Powers has a no-win situation. He lives on the grounds of Crystal Springs Golf

Value in your pocket. Quality on the course.



JRM Inc.
Innovative Turf Technology

www.jrmonline.com

JRM Inc. • P.O. Box 1689 • Welcome, NC 27374

888-576-7007 or 336-354-1243

GCI'S WORK/LIFE BALANCE SURVEY

In June, Golf Course Industry magazine surveyed 374 superintendents and assistant superintendents via an online survey service. Here are some of the results.

Do you work too much?

YES 52% NO 48%

Would your family, friends and/or spouse consider you a "workaholic?"

YES 62% NO 38%

Which of the following would improve your work/life balance?

73%	Additional staff
54%	Less cost cutting
47%	Better/new equipment
45%	Better communication
36%	Larger salary
34%	Better planning
32%	Clearer objectives and expectations
29%	Less red tape
25%	More vacation
23%	Positive attitudes towards managing workloads
12%	More control over workload

How frequently does this happen to you?

	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
Irritable at home because of work	8%	72%	17%	3%
Become detached at home because you are thinking about work	9%	68%	21%	2%
Cancel appointments with family/friends due to work-related commitments	12%	64%	21%	3%
Do not have a lot of energy for leisure activities	9%	49%	33%	9%
Do not have time for hobbies	14%	48%	28%	10%
Work obligations make it difficult to relax	14%	51%	26%	9%

Course, and his home is about 195 yards from his office. While the temptation is to work all the time, Powers says 18 years as a superintendent has taught him how essential a few ground rules are for work/life balance.

"The most important thing is I go home at 1:30 every day," he says. "Sure, we could do stuff all day, but by saying I'm done at 1:30 makes me organize and prioritize more to get

what needs to get done, done. You put things off and suddenly you have things stacked to the ceiling that need to get done and it'll drive you crazy."

Short of changing industries, how can superintendents better balance their lives? First, superintendents must lead by example. Since most superintendents don't judge the hours they're putting in as excessive, it becomes their



THE NEXT WAVE IN SEEDING IS HERE.

- Patent-pending floating heads follow the ground contour—you won't miss the low spots and you won't destroy the high spots or sprinkler heads.
- Patent-pending WaveBlade™ technology creates a clean, optimal square slit while minimizing turf disruption.
- Patent-pending seed delivery system puts seed directly into the slit, reducing seed waste and increasing germination.
- Patent-pending depth adjustment allows for infinite, in-field adjustment to suit your specific needs. (No tools required.)
- Close 1-1/2" spacing increases germination with fewer passes.

If you need to seed, you need to see the TriWave™ difference.

Call 800-679-8201 to arrange a FREE DEMO from your Turfco Distributor today!



WWW.TURFCO.COM

way of life, says Piscataway, N.J.-based business consultant Deb Bailey. They look around at their peers and everyone else is putting in those same hours, so they don't seem out of the ordinary.

"Managers can encourage a work/life balance with their employees by having one for themselves," Bailey says. "That means placing more emphasis on the work performed and less

on the hours one spends to complete it."

Next, superintendents need to trust in their crews and realize their job as supervisors is to manage workers, not babysit them.

"I trust my employees to do their jobs and I empower them to make decisions on their own," says Sweet about how he's created more work/life balance. "That way I can feel comfortable about being away from the golf course.

"We've done cutbacks and we're at the lowest (staff) level we've ever been at, but I'd have to say it's my most efficient staff," he adds. "We kept on the strongest people and the most experienced and they're able to do their jobs in a timely manner so that we all can get out of here on time."

In addition to better organization and coordination, Hickam says another key is communicating that a balanced work/life philosophy is a priority and a part of your shared culture at the course. "I make it clear to my team members that they need to find work/life balance," he says. "It provides an atmosphere for excellence. A fresh employee – a fresh professional who has that balance – is going to perform on a level that's healthy and they're going to enjoy their job. If you don't have that then there's no way you're going to deliver on a standard of excellence." GCI

To what extent do you agree with the following statements in relation to the work/life balance afforded to you at your golf course?

	Disagree	Neither	Agree
My superiors are accommodating of my family-related needs	10%	15%	75%
Management encourages sensitivity to employees' family and personal needs	13%	18%	69%
Management is sensitive toward employee child care responsibilities	11%	32%	57%
In the event of a conflict, my superiors understand when I put family first	10%	16%	74%
I am encouraged to strike a balance between my work and family lives	19%	27%	54%
It is difficult for me to leave during the workday to take care of personal or family matters	52%	11%	37%
To turn down a promotion for family-related reasons would seriously hurt my career	29%	33%	38%
To get ahead, I am expected to work more than 40 hours a week	19%	16%	65%
I am expected to put my job before my family	52%	26%	22%
Boasting about my work/life imbalance demonstrates my commitment and my solid work ethic	51%	32%	17%

Source: GCI Work/Life Balance Survey

The Professional's Choice for Bunker Lining

MILLIKEN

SandMat®
Geosynthetic Bunker Liner

- Engineered for performance
- UV stable
- Superior drainage capabilities
- Increased design flexibility for improved bunker aesthetics
- Two colors (white and tan)
- The "green" bunker liner composed of recycled fiber
- Faster installation with reduced waste
- Reduced labor costs associated with installation and maintenance

www.sandmat.com
toll-free 877-sandmat

www.golfcourseindustry.com/readerservice - #22