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ASSISTANTS' KEYS TO SUCCESS

The following suggestions are geared to help assistant golf course superintendents succeed in the world of golf course management:

1 Learn as much as you can about the operation and repair of the irrigation system. It's important to learn when and how much to water. Many times, good water management is the most important factor of having a successful season.

2 The assistant's No. 1 job is operational efficiency. It often can be the difference between mediocre, good or excellent conditions. Have people work smarter, not necessarily harder. Get jobs going in a progression that avoids having people standing around waiting for someone else to finish an operation before they can start. When people are standing around, red flags should sprout over your entire body.

3 Keep a list of jobs that need to be done. List priority jobs based on time (half-hour jobs, one-hour jobs, plus longer jobs) and projects you think need to be done as time allows. Always carry pencil and paper or a tape recorder and make note of jobs that need to be done as you travel the course. Always be aware of what's going on around you, both right and wrong.

4 Take a course in small-engine repair (through adult education or some other source). Know how engines operate. Take care of small repairs in the field yourself rather than calling the mechanic to come all the way out on the course to fix it. Remember, it's all about efficiency.

5 Learn how to adjust mowers and grind reels. This is important. If you apply for an assistant's job and have that knowledge, you have an advantage over someone who doesn't. If you're an assistant and someone else is responsible for mowers, make sure you learn.

6 Offer ideas and suggestions. Don't be offended if the superintendent decides not to do it your way. It's your job to offer ideas and suggestions, but it's the superintendent's job to figure out the best way to get it done. Don't ever take it personally if it's not done your way and never let it deter you from offering other ideas and suggestions.

7 Play golf even if you're not good at it right now. Playing golf is important to your ability to see problems on the course and relate to golfers.

Never demean a simple job. On the contrary, talk about the importance of less-skilled jobs such as weed-eating, trimming, bunker-raking, divot repair, etc.

8 Take pictures. Before-and-after photos of projects are great resources.

9 Go to work early, and be prepared to stay late.

10 When you tell employees what to do, make sure you get your message across. You should explain the job to them and then ask if they understand and if they have any questions. After they go out on the job, you should check to see if they're doing what you want. You should make sure they actually see you so, if they have any questions, they can ask.

11 If someone isn't doing what you told him to do, don't immediately criticize him. First, look at yourself. Did you explain the job correctly? Did you enunciate clearly? Were there any interruptions when you were talking? The vast majority of people want to do the right thing. I can't ever remember someone coming to work thinking, "I'm really going to mess this job up!" Most people want to do the job right. It's up to you to communicate it correctly. This takes practice.

12 Learn how long it takes to do each morning job. An assistant should be able to tell if things aren't going well by noting if someone's out of place at a certain time. If it takes 30 minutes to mow a green and it's been two hours and the person is only half done with his third green, something's wrong. The same is true of fairway mowers, tee mowers, cup changers, bunker rakers, collar mowers, etc. Efficiency should be at a peak in the morning because there are no golfers. Practice checking where people should be at a certain time.

13 Get a pesticide license before you leave school. If you're out of school, get one as soon as possible. It shows you have a commitment to your chosen career field, and it's another advantage over your competition when obtaining a job.

14 Never demean a simple job. On the contrary, talk about the importance of less-skilled jobs such as weed-eating, trimming, bunker-raking, divot repair, etc. Those jobs, done correctly, often are the difference between a good course and an excellent course. Never use a less-skilled job as a form of punishment. This attaches a negative connotation to that particular task.

15 As an assistant, be upbeat, particularly in the morning. Your mood often carries over to the crew. Try to bring a little levity to the operation. Humor is often an excellent way to get a serious point across. **GCI**