



# ADVICE YOU SHOULDN'T FORGET

Industry members dole out do's and don'ts for assistants to use in day-to-day operations.

Career advancement advice runs thick for assistant superintendents in the golf course industry (in fact, we provide some more on page 31). But what about the day to day? What practical nuggets do you need to know about managing the golf course, running the crew and being a great assistant overall?

We cast our net to compile this compendium of advice from industry members nationwide.



BY MARISA PALMIERI

## DO

Do everything you can to treat your employees with the utmost respect. They are typically the ones working for the lowest wage and working under the most difficult conditions and the longest hours. Never miss an opportunity to say thank you to them for what they do. —Paul Jett, CGCS, Pinehurst (N.C.) No. 2

Start a journal of the daily activities at the course. You won't be able to remember everything you did and when or how you did it. The journal of agronomic activities will be invaluable when you get the opportunity to be in charge. —John Kaminski, assistant professor of turfgrass science at Penn State

Dress for success. Make sure the members can determine who is the worker and who is

the boss. Shave everyday and look neat. —Matt Schaffer, director of golf operations, Merion Golf Club, Ardmore, Pa.

Always work on doing it right the first time. —Ron Dahlin, CGCS, The Meadows Golf Club at Grand Valley State University

Have a positive attitude toward the superintendent and the staff. The staff takes on the personality of the assistant, so a positive assistant leads to a positive and productive staff. —Chad Miller, superintendent, Hillcrest Golf & County Club, Batesville, Ind.

Keep up with the latest research findings not only from your state or region, but from all over the nation. A number of local golf course superintendent associations have online access to the Turfgrass Information File, an extraordinary collection of scientific information about turf management at Michigan State University. If you don't

have access to this resource, work to create momentum within the association to join. —Doug Soldat, assistant professor, Department of Soil Science, University of Wisconsin-Madison

Be sure that the line of communication between the golf course maintenance department and the membership/customer is strong. An ally in the clubhouse goes a long way to that end, as the face time the pro shop personnel has with customers dwarfs the time the maintenance folks have. —Bruce Gregory, PGA, CGCS, Liberty (Ind.) Country Club

Be "fair, firm and friendly," in that order, when dealing with subordinates. You're a boss and not their best buddy. —Tom Brown, CGCS, Chesapeake Bay Golf Club, Rising Sun, Md.

Play golf at your facility. This will give you a completely different perspective of the agronomic and playability issues at

your facility. Seeing the course through the golfer's eyes is a great way to fine tune your agronomic practices. —Kaminski

If you use tobacco now, QUIT; it only gets harder. —Schaffer

Let the superintendent handle interclub communications. If it's a light comment about the weather, that's fine, but let the superintendent handle sensitive issues in a committee setting, or on the course. —Ray Richard, consultant, Richard Associates, Cape Cod, Mass.

Manage people for success; be a great teacher. —Matt Rosenthal, superintendent, Interlachen Country Club, Edina, Minn.

Come to work at least a ½ hour before the staff so you are ready for changes. —Schaffer

Get to know common equipment operation and common faults; you have to be smarter than the operator and the ma-



chine. Spend time in the shop and get a good overview from your equipment manager. Get a basic understanding of reel mower technicalities, equipment engine differences and specialty equipment like top dressers, aerators and sprayers. —Mike Kriz, equipment manager, Arrowhead Country Club, Rapid City, S.D.

Support the superintendent's policies and decisions in front of the crew whether you agree with them or not. Take up your disagreements with the superintendent one on one. —Brown



## DON'T

Expect to learn it all in one year. —Eric Bauer, director of grounds, The Club at Carlton Woods, The Woodlands, Texas

Only speak English. —Tucker

Be afraid of the press. If you have a potential story, contact the newspaper or local television station. There's not a shortage of negative press about golf course management, but many of the positive aspects are often overlooked. —Soldat

Stop being a student. Continue to learn the fundamentals of agronomics while working on the course. Read articles, talk to your peers, and take classes through GCSAA to learn as much as possible. —Kaminski

Forget to wear sunscreen. Too many don't take the time to protect themselves when out on the course. Simply taking a few

Consider clever ideas to reduce costs in labor and eliminate overtime, like two shifts, part-time workers on afternoons and weekends and section workers to eliminate wasteful travel time on-course. —Michael Vogt, CGCS, manager of the McMahon Group's Golf Division

Read the operator's manuals and watch the training videos — all of them. —Bill Hughes, equipment manager, The Loon Golf Club, Gaylord, Mich.

Be an extension of your superintendent. If the superintendent

minutes each morning to apply sun block can help to prevent serious skin problems later in life. —Kaminski

Get caught up in daily activities that keep you from supervision and managing. —Livingston

Hesitate to ask questions! —Flanagan

Forget that you'll have to work to earn the crewmembers' respect. —Hughes

Ever mix a chemical without looking at the label. New products come out; rates and labels change. Just because you have been spraying this product for the last several years, it only takes a second to check the rate and make sure it is right. One incorrect spray application can quickly cost you a job. —Jett

Forget to have a life away from the golf course. Longevity in this business can only be achieved

is gone, execute the cultural practices in the same manner as he or she would do it. —Troy Flanagan, superintendent, Anthem Country Club, Henderson, Nev.

Have excellent communication skills. —Stephen Tucker, equipment manager, Ritz-Carlton Members Golf Club, Bradenton, Fla.

Continually monitor the course, equipment, and staff with the idea of improving upon the entire operation. —Joe Livingston, CGCS, River Crest Country Club, Fort Worth, Texas

by knowing when to go home. —Brown

Be close minded. Listen, learn and carry out the superintendent's plan as best you can. The assistant's job is to carry out the plans, not to undermine them if don't completely agree. —Miller

Give someone a job that you wouldn't do or haven't done yourself at some point. Lead by example. —Brown

Expect everyone to like you because some won't. —Hughes

Manage everyone the same way. People are different. Take time to figure out how they work and manage them accordingly. —Schaffer

Forget to take off your sunglasses and look people in the eye when you talk to them. —Schaffer

Ignore a member/golfer when they pass by. —Richard

Tell the truth. Owning up to a mistake goes a long way to establishing trust between the superintendent and you. —Brown

Learn to delegate, don't think you can do it all yourself. In fact, when you are working who is supervising? Give yourself jobs that allow you to move within the ranks. —Schaffer

Serve as a course information conduit to the superintendent. Mention good and bad news. If you see a staffing or cultural problem, say something. —Richard

Forget that golf is now centered on a business that needs to be concerned with profits and losses. Just because you have an approved budget doesn't necessarily mean the amount of that budget should or must be spent. —Vogt

Automatically say "no." People don't like to hear it. —Rostal

Take corrective criticism personally. It's meant to help, not hinder. —Hughes

Expect to have a 9-to-5 job, expect to have holidays off or expect to become rich as an assistant. —Bauer

Badmouth equipment just because it's not what you had at your last course. —Kriz GCI

What advice do you believe all assistant superintendents should follow? What do you know now that you wish you knew when you were an assistant? E-mail us at [gci@gie.net](mailto:gci@gie.net) and we'll print our favorites.