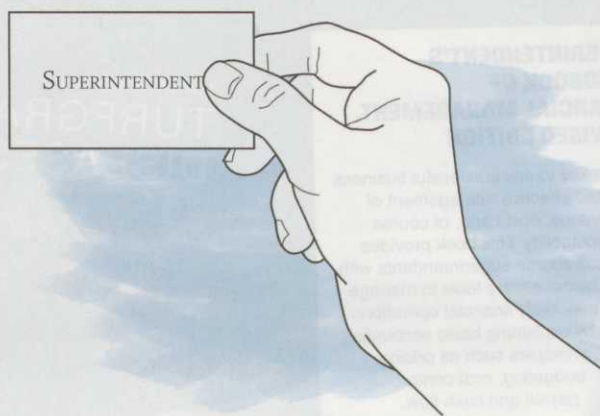




MISSION: MOVE UP THE LADDER

Is your handicap on your resume? Maybe it should be. That and other career advice from the Atlanta Athletic Club's Ken Mangum, CGCS.

By MARISA PALMIERI



As the director of golf courses and grounds at the Atlanta Athletic Club overseeing two championship golf courses and a par-3 course, Ken Mangum, CGCS, knows a thing or two about “taking the next step.”

A graduate of Lake City Community College's two-year golf course operations program, he's been at AAC for 21 years and in the industry for 31 years, making a name for himself managing the redesigns of both of AAC's championship courses and hosting tournaments, such as the 2011 PGA Championship.

Considering his credentials, Mangum frequently doles out advice to aspiring superintendents (see “GSA Journal,” page 34). Golf Course Industry senior editor Marisa Palmieri spoke with Mangum to cull some of his best career advice for assistants.

What's the No. 1 career mistake assistants typically make?

I think people get impatient. Especially with the economy the way it is, people

are going to have to be more patient and take the right job. Some jobs are a dead end. Chances are your first job isn't going to be one you're going to stay in for 10 or 15 years, so you need to make a good evaluation of the golf course you're going to. Look for a place you can make some improvements, make a name for yourself and stay for about five years.

Some assistants may make a lateral move to another course, and sometimes that may make more sense than moving on to their own course.

The career path is a little slower than it has been and it'll take patience and good investigation and serious consideration before you take a job.

When you hire, how much time do you spend looking at resumes?

We have a scoring system we use to help go through the resumes. We have to – we can get anywhere from 20 to 60 resumes – so we try to evaluate what's on paper based on the criteria we have here. For example if an applicant has zoysiagrass

experience, he gets a point for that, there's a point for working with a certain type of irrigation system and so on.

We pick the people who have the most experience for the criteria we need here. Occasionally, I may have a superintendent from out of the area call me up and tell me about an applicant if he's a really good guy, so that would make a difference.

References are very important. Where they've worked before and done internships is very important and where they went to school is very important.

How many people will you typically interview?

Usually we'll do the top five. I remember one person from this last time we made a hire who didn't get an interview. He called me up and said, “I can't believe I didn't get an interview. I have experience here, a four-year degree – I would have thought I'd at least get an interview.” I said you do have a good resume, experience and education, but there are five



guys with all the same things plus their experience is here in this city, not out of town, so we're interviewing them. Sometimes people don't realize the level of competition out there.

What are some other things you specifically look for on a resume?

I look to see if the person's involved in local and national associations. Where have they worked? Who have they worked for? What's the size of their operation? If someone applied here from a course that plays 5,000 rounds a year, well that's not good experience for us. I need someone who's used to 30,000 rounds.

I look for a handicap – do they play golf? It might not be something that most people put on their resumes, but it's one of those bonus points. If you're going to maintain the course it's important that you play the game. It doesn't mean that you have to be a single-digit handicapper, but you should know the game. As time goes on, you're just more comfortable in the golf course environment if you can play.

What do you know now that you wish you knew early in your career?

There's a certain wisdom that comes with age. I remember not getting a job and it bothered me. I had to step back and realize they were looking for somebody older. I was young. I had all the turf knowledge I needed – or at least I thought I did – but I didn't have a good knowledge of managing people. It was a maturity thing. You don't get the respect when you're younger. That's just a part of it. I wish I would have realized at the time that I just had to age and mature some. That would have probably helped me.

What's the best piece of career advice you've ever received and who did you receive it from?

I worked in the summer of 1974 for Palmer Maples Jr. at the old Standard Club (in Atlanta). He rather sternly pointed his finger at me and told me I should be more observant. I came in early one morning and saw some water in a ditch. I saw it, but didn't think much about it and when I got back to shop everyone was scurrying around to fix a big irrigation leak. His point was that water in the ditch should have gotten my attention because it wasn't normal. You need to see things before they become obvious to others. Our eyes are one of the best tools we have to manage with.

What advice do you have for someone who feels like he's doing all the right



Ken Magnum

things but still hasn't been able to land a superintendent job?

Be patient, but try to network as much as possible so people know who you are. Sometimes it's not who you know, but who knows you.

Sometimes that's difficult from an assistant's standpoint, but it's important to make sure that people who have input into who gets jobs know who you are. That includes USGA people, consultants, leaders in your state association and superintendents in your area.

It's difficult to get that first job. There are a lot of good people out there. And when you do

have the opportunity to interview, do as much homework as you can. Spend a day or two at the golf course before your interview becoming familiar with the course so you can talk with some background knowledge on whatever issue they have. Typically, when there's an opening at a facility, they're looking for something specific – maybe they're not happy with the grass they have, the tree situation, the green conditions. Try to find out what that issue is and be ready to address it.

What's most common question assistants ask you and how do you respond?

It's the more career-oriented things. How do I take that next step?

But turf questions are a good way to get in the door with networking. That's what I did. I tried to bug all the old guys so they'd know who I was. Now I'm the old guy (laughs).

Does that really work?

It does. I actually got one job because the club went to the association, to the biggest turf supplier in the area and to two well known superintendents to ask for recommendations. I was the only common name that all four people gave them. So, yes, it works. **GCI**



NETWORKING AT ITS FINEST BY JOHN EKSTROM

I was fortunate to be invited to the 2009 Green Start Academy (GSA). Being an assistant golf course superintendent and a contributor to this magazine gives me an opportunity to share my experience from an attendees' perspective.

The trip was an enriching experience with education coming from an esteemed group consisting of Bruce Williams, CGCS, Valley Crest Golf Course Maintenance; Ken Mangum, CGCS, Atlanta Athletic Club; Dave Fearis, CGCS, GCSAA; Stan Zontek of the USGA; and Thom Nikolai, Ph.D., Michigan State University.

Dustin Peterson, assistant at the TPC at Deere Run in Silvis, Ill., called the experience "amazing." "The quality of speakers surpassed my greatest expectations," he said, adding that he encourages all assistants to apply next year.

The event's format included dinner and an "ice breaker" at Raleigh Country Club, time spent in the classroom, test areas and laboratories at Bayer's facility in Clayton, N.C., and a tour of the John Deere plant in Fuquay Varina, N.C.

Scientists from Bayer offered insights about current chemistries and some of the latest tools

they're working on. The folks from John Deere showed us two of their walk-behind mowers and we discussed some of the possibilities about future technological advances. It's great to know that companies support us and have the forethought to be looking ahead in gauging the needs of our business in 10 years or more.

One of the greatest aspects of my GSA experience was the opportunity to meet people who are just as passionate about their careers as I am mine. To those who question the strength and integrity of the future of the golf green industry, there's a strong group of people who will be ready to step up and lead when that time comes.

Williams said, "All assistants should have a group of people or network to call in good times and not so good times." Green Start Academy was a great place to network with fellow peers along with the industry professionals. Attendee Matt Dutkiewicz, assistant at Ingersoll Golf Course in Rockford, Ill., said that being invited to GSA is the high point in his career thus far. And I couldn't agree more.

Ekstrom, a GCI Assistant's View columnist, was one of 50 attendees at Green Start Academy, an annual event for elite assistants hosted by John Deere and Bayer Environmental Science last month. For more on Ekstrom's experience, visit the November Online Extras section at golfcourseindustry.com.