



# PROFESSIONAL PROTOCOL

One Penn State class is shaping the etiquette of tomorrow's golf industry leaders.

BY MEGAN LEONHARDT



Always keep your plate in your left hand so your right hand is free to shake hands. Be on time. Don't have more than three to four appetizers on your plate at any given time. Never order an alcoholic beverage during an interview or the first meeting.

These social rules may be nuances, but when added together, they can change the way both employers and colleagues view an assistant's or superintendent's potential. As the golf industry expands, so do turfgrass managers' personal responsibilities and duties. To better prepare students for these new dynamic situations, Penn State University's Turfgrass Management program requires first-year students to take a class on etiquette called Life Skills for Turfgrass Management.

"While Penn State's program concentrates on turfgrass management, we recognize that in the real world managing turf accounts for only 15 to 20 percent of their job responsibilities," says John Kaminski, assistant professor of turfgrass science at Penn State University. "The majority of

their career will be spent managing and interacting with a diverse group of people. This is why business management, communications skills, human resource management and etiquette play such a prominent role in our program."

Diana Zeisky has been teaching the 16-week course for several semesters. While she calls the course a work in progress, it teaches students more than simple etiquette. Students learn how to conduct themselves with people from all different cultures and backgrounds in various social and business situations.

Zeisky worked as an event planner in New Jersey before she moved and opened a bridal shop in central Pennsylvania. When she was younger, Zeisky attended finishing school where she received etiquette training. She began teaching the classes first to customers of her bridal business, then later expanded to teach within the community and finally at the university level.

The challenge in teaching this class, Zeisky says, is helping the students understand they are more than golf course maintenance workers.



She believes that students need to be able to switch easily from how they interact with their grounds crew to how they should interact with members and employers. She teaches students not only etiquette basics, but also how to present themselves and handle social opportunities such as how to give a great handshake that conveys confidence. For example, a good hand-

shake should have an interlocking “web-to-web grip” (the area between your thumb and index finger), Zeisky says. The handshake should be firm; even if the other person presents a weak grip, do not modify your own.

While Zeisky does not have a background in turfgrass management, she has worked with employers and companies looking to hire for

those positions. She knows what they’re looking for in future employees. She says there are still certain fundamentals that people expect to see in leaders, such as social ease and good personal appearance.

**SOCIAL GRACES**

“This is information that I would teach to anybody and is extremely relevant to the students,” Zeisky says. She is always surprised when students cannot present themselves positively to prospective employers. These students will eventually represent the organization they work for and they need to be able to give clients and employers a good impression, Zeisky says.

One of the essential points to providing that impression is the way in which a person conducts himself in a social situation. Leaders, especially superintendents, need to be able to interact with many people from different backgrounds, which is why Zeisky stresses cultural awareness in her class. For example, grounds crews often include Hispanic employees, so she recommends learning a few words in Spanish to find a comfortable level to communicate. It’s important to interact with employees without accidentally offending them.

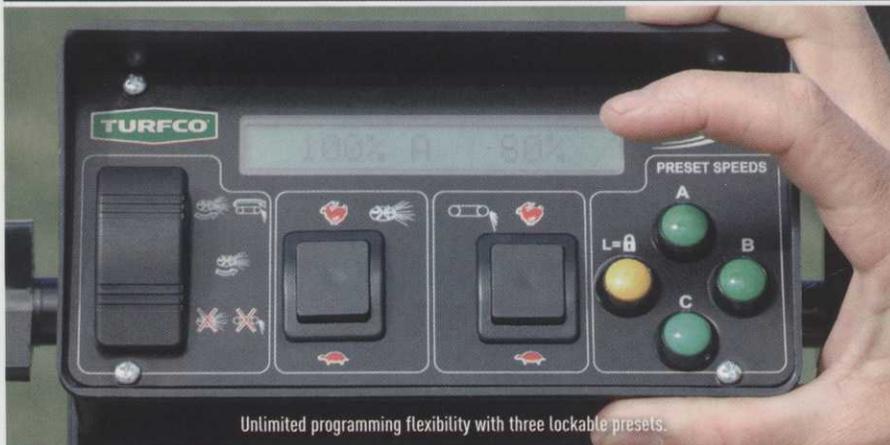
Students also learn how to interact properly with current and future club members, which is another emerging aspect of a superintendent’s responsibilities. In these situations, Zeisky says it’s all about the physical appearance, demeanor and handshake. While assistants and superintendents should maintain a level of respect, it’s a good idea to ask polite questions and give options for feedback on the course and the member’s experience.

Early in their careers turfgrass managers may use the pointers about working successfully with their grounds crew more than interacting with members, but it’s essential they understand both.

The class also focuses on life skills such as dining manners and protocols. Many of Zeisky’s students do not know the subtle dining basics such as correct eating speeds and safe conversational topics, but Zeisky says these aspects are the most important because many meetings take place over meals.

After her class, students feel comfortable and are able to avoid awkwardness. Zeisky believes this skill is so important, the student’s final exam is a formal dinner held at the Nittany Lion Inn, a historic colonial inn on Penn State’s campus. Here they are tested on all of the dining skills they’ve learned throughout

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the semester. They need to know everything from how to handle the cutlery to the correct position of a glass. (See "Navigating your place setting" on page 39 for tips.) During the cocktail hour and dinner Zeisky observes how the students are doing. During dinner students are asked questions based on what they've learned and graded accordingly.

Along with the dinner, students must complete an event-planning project. Although the project is only on paper, students are responsible for everything from the guest list to the room set-up. One of Zeisky's students had an internship with Augusta National and the company asked him to plan an event, so his class experience was invaluable.

"An etiquette class should be required for all college students," Zeisky says. The goal of the class is to reinforce the ideas that help create a successful personal presentation. That goal can be applied to any major, but it's an especially important goal to set for turf-grass managers – especially in today's volatile marketplace where employees who have good



## FIVE TIPS FOR FUTURE SUPERINTENDENTS

- 1 **Know your role and its importance:** Everything from the way you dress to how you carry yourself reflects your attitude. Dress for the next level of employment that you want. Don't think that just because you're part of the grounds crew now that you can be sloppy. Don't downgrade yourself.
- 2 **Make others comfortable:** Etiquette is about making the people around you feel comfortable. An easy way to do this is to maintain an open posture at all times where arms are uncrossed, hands are not in the pockets and your head is up and level with surrounding guests. This will encourage people to approach and mingle with you.
- 3 **Network:** Know how to communicate well with others. You should have a 30- to 40-second speech about yourself ready at all times so that people will remember you. Meeting new people can be one of the most rewarding aspects of any job.
- 4 **Be open to new cultures and experiences:** Interact with all different kinds of people and cultures. Be mindful and respectful of cultural differences. Zeisky recommends reading "Kiss, Bow or Shake Hands" by Terri Morrison and Wayne A. Conaway. The book covers how to respect intercultural relations, greetings and business engagements.
- 5 **Know how to dine:** Know how to keep up with the people around you. Keep pace with your meal without getting too far ahead or behind everyone else. Knowing the right cutlery and manners is important, but more important is knowing how to look professional while dining. Remember dining basics such as not talking with your mouth full and focusing on what your partner is actually saying throughout the conversation.

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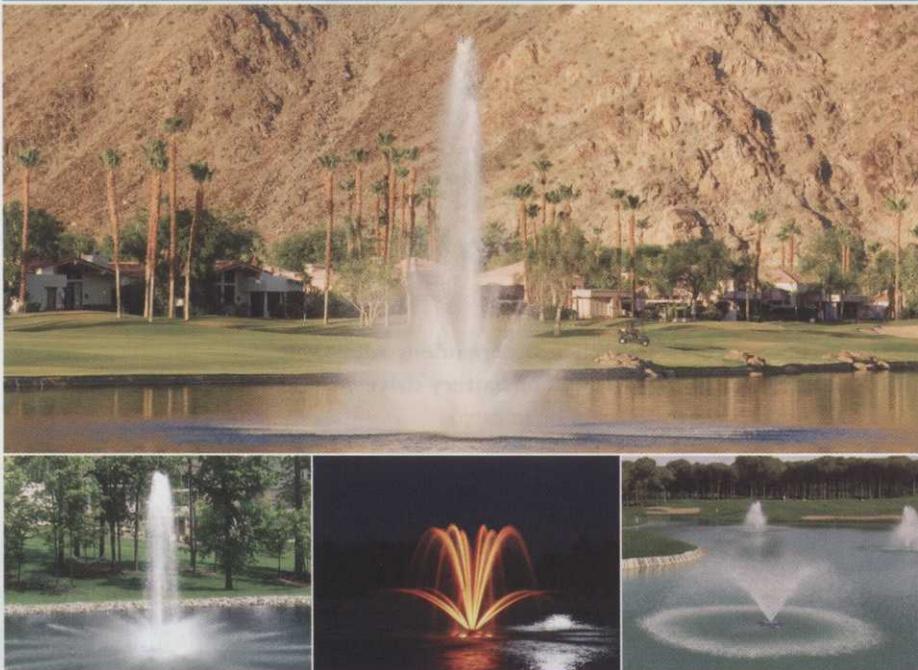
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communication skills and social graces will have a significant advantage.

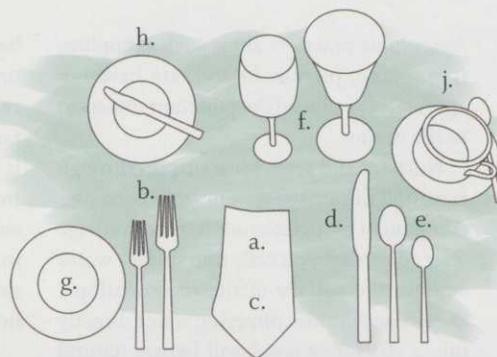
“A lot of it is common sense and I just put it into a package,” Zeisky says, adding that the nuances of etiquette are more important than people think. The class benefits future assistants and superintendents and many former students have sent Zeisky e-mails over the years thanking her for the valuable lessons.

“Although students have a hard time recognizing the importance of this class during the semester, it’s usually one of the classes that returning alumni say has helped them the most in their career path,” Kaminski says.

“In this era of Facebook, Twitter and other social networking sites, students need now more than ever to understand proper etiquette and professionalism,” he says. “Being able to

grow grass is a given and expected of anyone seeking a superintendent’s position. A successful career is going to be more influenced by a student’s ability to communicate and interact with others than their ability to grow grass.” **GCI**

*Leonhardt is a freelance writer based in Medina, Ohio.*



## NAVIGATING YOUR PLACE SETTING

A handy diagram to prevent you from fumbling with your utensils at conferences and club dinners.

Though the Emily Post Institute considers this place setting an “informal three-course dinner,” it’s a common arrangement at mid- to upscale restaurants and at formal banquets you may attend at the club or association events where the following menu would be served:

- Soup course
- Salad or first course
- Entrée
- Dessert

The typical place setting includes these utensils and dishes:

**a. Dinner plate:** This is the ‘hub of the wheel’ and is usually the first thing to be set on the table. In the illustration, the dinner plate would be placed where the napkin is, with the napkin on top of the plate.

**b. Two Forks:** The forks are placed to the left of the plate. The dinner fork, the larger of the two forks, is used for the main course; the smaller fork is used for a salad or appetizer. The forks are arranged according to when you need to use them, following an ‘outside-in’ order. If the small fork is needed for an appetizer or a salad served before the main course, then it’s placed on the left (outside) of the dinner fork; if the salad is served after the main course, then the small fork is placed to the right (inside) of the dinner fork, next to the plate.

**c. Napkin:** The napkin is folded or put in a napkin ring and placed either to the left of the forks or on the center of the dinner plate. Sometimes, a folded napkin is placed under the forks.

**d. Dinner knife:** The dinner knife is set immediately to the right of the plate, cutting edge facing inward. (If the main course is meat, a steak knife can take the place of the dinner knife.) At an informal meal, the dinner knife may be used for all courses, but a dirty knife should never be placed on the table, place mat or tablecloth.

**e. Spoons:** Spoons go to the right of the knife. In our illustration, soup is being served first, so the soup spoon goes to the far (outside) right of the dinner knife; the teaspoon or dessert spoon, which will be used last, goes to the left (inside) of the soup spoon, next to the dinner knife.

**f. Glasses:** Drinking glasses of any kind – water, wine, juice, ice tea – are placed at the top right of the dinner plate, above the knives and spoons.

Other dishes and utensils are optional, depending on what’s being served, but may include:

**g. Salad plate:** This is placed to the left of the forks. If salad is to be eaten with the meal, you can forgo the salad plate and serve it directly on the dinner plate. However,

if the entrée contains gravy or anything runny, it’s better to serve the salad on a separate plate to keep things neater.

**h. Bread plate with butter knife:** If used, the bread plate goes above the forks, with the butter knife placed diagonally across the edge of plate, handle on the right side and blade facing down.

**i. Dessert spoon and fork (not pictured):** These can be placed either horizontally above the dinner plate (the spoon on top with its handle facing to the right; the fork below with its handle facing left); or beside the plate. If placed beside the plate, the fork goes on the left side, closest to the plate (because it will be the last fork used) and the spoon goes on the right side of the plate, to the right of the dinner knife and to the left of the soup spoon.

**j. Coffee cup and saucer:** The illustration shows a table setting that’s common in an establishment serving many people at once, with coffee being served during the meal. The coffee cup and saucer are placed above and to the right of the knife and spoons. At home, most people serve coffee after the meal. In that case the cups and saucers are brought to the table and placed above and to the right of the knife and spoons.

Source: *The Emily Post Institute*