

What makes up a superstar? Our experts say not one isolated characteristic, but rather it's a little bit of this, a dose of that and a lot of other stuff all mixed together.

BY BRITTANY SCHMIGEL

The Superintendent's Scorecard

While everyone agrees perseverance, hard work and talent are required to be a successful superintendent, what does it take to make your mark as a real superstar in this industry? We asked our panel of experts – everyone from academics to former supers – to score (on a scale of 0 to 5) a number of key characteristics and why they felt that way. You'll find their scores on the card below and some of their reasons on the following pages, but make sure you check out this month's online extras for all of their insights.

	Latshaw	Miller	Moraghan	Shaffer	Vargas	Vogt	Williams	Zontek
Professional stewardship	4	5	5	4	3	4/45	4	45/5
Deliver tournament conditions	5	2	1	4	1	2	3	3
Understanding club culture	3	4	4	5	5	55	5	4
Management abilities	5	4	5	5	5	3/4	5	4
Vendor relationships	4	4	4	2	1	3	5	4
Agronomy	5	2	2	3	5	5	4	4
Talent recruitment	4	4	3	3	5	35/4	5	4/45
Passion	5	5	3	5	5	4	5	5
Grass growing ability	5	5	35	5	3	4	4	3
Communication skills	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4

Our experts score each key characteristic on a scale of 0 to 5.

STATS

Monroe Miller

Position: Retired

Hometown: Madison, Wis.

Bio: He spent 36 years as the superintendent at Blackhawk Country Club. He became the first superintendent to be inducted into the Wisconsin State Golf Association Hall of Fame. He received the Wisconsin GCSA's Distinguished Service Award in 1989, along with the USGA's Green Section Award in 2004.



Ability to deliver tournament conditions every day: 2

"You can't do it. It can't be done; you can't have U.S. Open or Master's conditions every day. It costs a lot of money, it doesn't improve anyone's pleasure, it doesn't lower anyone's score, it doesn't create friendships on the course among the players, and it doesn't enhance their rounds. It may give bragging rights at clubs or facilities, but it's not important."

Talent recruitment ability: 2

"Your golf course will reflect the ability of your crew, but you could certainly hire someone with not much talent, but be a good teacher and trainer. More important than recruiting talent is developing the talent you hire. There have been some valuable golf course employees who couldn't even speak English when they were hired, but had a lot of heart and were willing to learn and work hard, and you could develop them into a good employee."

Pure agronomy knowledge: 4

"You can never get enough of that, you can never be overeducated."

Passion: 5

"In my observation over many years of seeing a lot of golf course superintendents, the one things that combines the superintendents together is that we all of have passion for the job. I don't think you see that kind of passion among salespeople. I think you sometimes see it with teachers, but this job requires so much energy and has such a huge time requirement that it's really hard to do if you're not passionate."

STATS

Tim Moraghan

Position: Principle, Aspire Golf Consulting

Hometown: Long Island, N.J.

Bio: Moraghan's career began as a superintendent in Myrtle Beach at Pinehurst Resorts. Since then, he's added many achievements to his resume including, USGA director of championship agronomy, regional golf course superintendent in Miami Beach, and principal of Aspire Golf Consulting.



Professional stewardship: 5

"People still don't give the golf course superintendents enough respect."

Ability to deliver tournament conditions every day: 1

"That's not what we're here for. That's not important. I've been to 116 championships; I think details need to be organized and clean. But it's a game, we're out here to have fun, it doesn't make sense to me to have U.S. Open conditions every day."

Understanding of club culture: 4

"If you want to be successful in the private club industry, you better know what's going on because it's a whole different breed of cat. You definitely have to understand the type of people, that committees change year in and year out, and that you might have a nice relationship with someone – but they're gone the next year. It's really not easy."

Cultivating relationships with vendors: 4

"You need to have those individuals on your side at all times. If I have a good relationship with you as a vendor, and I get stuck or something happens, you may deliver after hours. You might save my butt in a bad situation, so I better be pretty nice to you."

Talent recruitment ability: 2

"You don't have to be the best superintendent or the best person, but if you have a great course, it'll attract."

STATS

Paul R. Latshaw

Position: Owner of Paul R. Latshaw Consulting

Hometown: Souderton, Pa.

Bio: Unlike most retirees, Latshaw wasn't settling down. This 40-year GCSAA member with more than 30 years industry experience began a turfgrass consultant company after retiring from his superintendent position. So we weren't surprised when his scores were pretty even across the boards. After all, nothing seems like too much of a challenge for Latshaw – except maybe retiring.



Ability to deliver tournament conditions every day: 5 "That's what they pay you for it's not easy, but it separates the men from the boys."

Understanding of club culture: 3 "Sometimes guys get in trouble because they forget their place and they get too involved with club politics."

Management/delegation abilities: 5 "You can't do it by yourself. You have to loosen the reigns and know your personnel well enough so that you can put the right person on the right job. The sooner you learn to do it, the easier it becomes. There's a lot of talent out there and you just have to let them run."

Ability to grow grass: 5 "An elderly gentleman once asked, 'Paul, what do you think is the most important thing for a superintendent to be able to do?' I said that it's a multifaceted job with a lot of demands, but what it comes down to is that if you want to have a golf course, you have to be able to grow grass."

Communication skills: 5 "You deal with three groups – your peers, your employees and your membership, you need to be able to explain why or why not you're doing things. If you can't do that you're sort of stuck in the mud."

Check out August's Online Extras for more on the making of a superstar superintendent and why each member of our expert panel scored the categories the way the did.

STATS

Matt Shaffer

**Position:**

Superintendent at Merion Golf Club

Hometown: Ardmore, Pa.

Bio: As a 2-year turfgrass graduate of Penn State University and 40-year industry professional – Shaffer didn't surprise us when he answered our questions with rapid-fire precision. But maybe it's because he's learned from the best, after working underneath Paul R. Latshaw at Merion.

Management/delegation abilities: 5

"If you're not a good delegator you're going to suffer because it's not a solo act. Five guys going in five different directions can accomplish a lot more than one guy only going in one direction."

Cultivating relationships with vendors: 2

"I have a totally different perspective. I'm the customer, they work for me. I have a lot of great relationships with my vendors, but in the end it's business. They're in it to make money and they're in it to succeed. But as far as relationships, I know I'm close to some of them, but not to the point where it affects my ability to sign business."

Passion: 5

"I always tell my guys: 'Look this is a profession of passion and you have to be married to the job.' I ask my young guys, 'Do you live to work or work to live?' There's other ways to make the same amount of money that are far less demanding of your time. If you don't love it, then you won't make it. It's an enormous sacrifice on personal time. If you're not passionate – you're in the wrong business."

Communication skills: 5

"You have to communicate up, down and sideways. Up to your members, sideways to your peers and down to your staff – so everyone understands what the mission is."

STATS

Mike Vogt



Position: Golf Course Consultant

Hometown: Saint Louis

Bio: Vogt began his industry career as a caddy at a private club in northern Chicago. Forty-one years later, he now consults on business aspects of golf management, as well as irrigation audits and planning of golf maintenance facilities.

Ability to deliver tournament conditions every day: 2

"Even the golfer knows tournament conditions are an unattainable effort, you can't have a tournament conditions every day. And to many people in this season, throughout the whole country with the hot weather, that's not an issue that's at the top of the list. It has to have good conditions, don't get me wrong, but they don't exist every day."

Understanding of club culture: 5.5

"It's so critical for superintendents to be aware of their surroundings, their general managers, their club boards and committees and they have to be able to communicate and understand the politics and inner workings. They need to almost try to predict the next step, where does the club want to go, and what direction do they want to go in? And that's key to understanding where the clubs want to be in the future and where the superintendent wants to focus his efforts. I think it's important that the superintendent understand this and the best way for him to establish himself and make gains in that area is to survey the membership. Many superintendents are doing this and finding where the gaps are in their services."

Talent recruitment ability: 5

"The turnover rate is incredible with golf course staff, even in this economy where people are looking for jobs. I was just talking to a superintendent and he's been through three mechanics this year already, they're having a hard time finding good, confident labor. If someone was trying to sharpen their skills and get a staff that's stable, that would be an effort that would pay back in the long run."

STATS

Dr. Joe Vargas



Position: Michigan State University professor of botany and plant pathology

Hometown: East Lansing, Mich.

Bio: Vargas, who graduated from the University of Minnesota with a Ph.D. in plant pathology, joined the Michigan State University faculty in 1968. Since then, he's published three books, written more than 300 articles on turfgrass diseases and received the 2007 USGA Green Section Award. If you thought Vargas wouldn't be able to deliver well-rounded answers because of his purely agronomical profession, think again – he knows there's a lot more to super superintendents than just growing grass.

Ability to deliver tournament conditions every day: 1

"It's more important that you have the course in good shape. The course should always be trimmed up, the bunkers should always be raked, the entrance to the club should look neat and everything needs to be taken care of – that's what's important."

Understanding of club culture: 5

"You have to understand the culture, you must understand it. What do they want, what is their likes, do they want fast greens or slow greens and do they want everybody out of the way?"

Management/delegation abilities: 5

"The superintendent position is really a managing position. He needs to know how to delegate and he needs to have good people to delegate too."

Cultivating relationships with vendors: 1

"Sometimes you get too close to a vendor and become buddy-buddy, instead of shopping for the best price or the best product – because you become friends with that vendor."

Talent recruitment ability: 5

"You are not the one that is growing the grass. Most superintendents are administrators. They run the facility and they run the operation, but they have to have good talent."

STATS

Stanley Zontek



Position: Director of the USGA Green Section's Mid-Atlantic Region

Hometown: Avondale, Pa.

Bio: Zontek began golfing at 5 and became involved with the industry in 1971. As a 35-year agronomist and consultant for USGA's Green Section, he had no trouble deciding what is and isn't important to being a successful superintendent.

Professional stewardship: 4.5 to 5

"You have to be clear in your mind of what people expect of you because we all know where assumptions can lead. If you don't know what people want, you're not going to do your job well and you're not going to be around for very long."

Understanding of club culture: 4

"I define that as club politics, and politics within golf courses can be brutal. People like a golf course to look and play a different way, so it's real hard to compromise on things like length of grass, green speed, firmness – or a pretty golf course that looks good but doesn't play well or one that doesn't look good, but plays well."

Pure agronomy knowledge: 4 to 4.5

"If you think you know it all, then you don't know very much. You have to have this insecurity that there's new stuff out there all the time and you have to keep learning, going to seminars and listening to people. You have to keep learning and keep at it."

Passion: 5

"To be successful you have to have a passion for the industry, grass, golf, the environment and the weather. You have to have the drive and motivation – or whatever word you want to use – you've got to have that."

STATS

Bruce Williams



Position: Director of business development at Valley Crest Golf Course Maintenance

Hometown: Chicago

Bio: And as a former superintendent, Williams knows what it takes to be successful. As a note, Williams thought he would have difficulty scoring each characteristics – not because he wasn't sure how to rate them, but because he believes each is pertinent for superintendents. This was evident when Williams marked scores of nearly all 4s or 5s. So who's to argue with his scores? Not us.

Professional stewardship: 4

"There is great value in involvement in the industry beyond one's golf course, including taking on leadership roles and participating in volunteer efforts."

Management/delegation abilities: 5

"I never met a golf course superintendent who can maintain his or her course by themselves. We all need to build, grow and develop a team of people who accomplish the goals and objectives of the organizations."

Cultivating relationships with vendors: 4

"Contrary to some peoples' thoughts, I've always felt that a golf course superintendent needs his commercial support more than they need him."

Pure agronomy knowledge: 4

"In past decades, we often relied upon a superintendent's agronomic skills more than today. But today it's so much easier to be linked and networked with a variety of individuals who are experts in their specific agronomic field. I always joke that I'm not the smartest guy in the world, but I have a Rolodex of 200 people that are."

Communication skills: 5

"I've seen a lot more superintendents lose their jobs over lack of communication than over poor turf conditions. In this day and age, top superintendents have to be outstanding communicators to those for whom they work, the golfers, the community and the team at their golf course."