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HOW THE TIMES ARE CHANGING

A few years ago looking for an equipment technician was one of the toughest tasks to accomplish in our industry. Why? Quite frankly, because there were so few of them. I don't know if this has changed today, but one thing I am certain of is the role is attracting a new audience.

Recently, I began searching for an assistant technician at our facility and anticipated a long process with one to four candidates. Well, it's still a long process, but made more challenging because the number of candidates has quadrupled. What's interesting is many of these candidates are superintendents. At least half of the 15 applications I received are from former superintendents. Most of them cite the economy and the tough job market and their desire to remain in the industry but go in a different direction.

Here's another good indicator of this trend. When the economy sinks, college enrollment spikes because more people seek training for new careers. This year, Florida's Lake City Community College has between 13 to 15 technicians enrolled in class, whereas a few years back they have had three to five students.

A few years ago the IGCEMA called for an industry meeting where we invited instructors, manufacturers, associations and equipment distributors to discuss the "future of technicians" program. This meeting, designed to compel the industry to push the equipment manager or equipment technician as a viable career path, was put together due to the severe lack of technicians in our industry. At that time we asked whether there were too many assistant superintendents in the industry, and was it possible to attract some of these individuals to the technician's field? While at the time this seemed unlikely, now it seems to have become a reality.

One thing is evident: Despite any change in the amount of interest in technician job openings, this side of our industry still needs qualified equipment managers. We still see more equipment technicians retiring every year than coming into the industry and the need for educated technicians is even greater. The transition from being a superintendent to an equipment technician is not a seamless process. Individuals must understand ever-changing technology and the expectation that doing more with less is now a requirement. It's important that

proper training is available to ensure success. Employee numbers are dwindling and managers are taking on more and more responsibility to fill those gaps. Superintendents who decide to transition to the equipment side of our industry need to pursue the proper education and have the required interest level to succeed in the field.

With business models changing it's easy to get in the mind-set that the expectations are lower since we don't have the same budgets that we have had

Out of the 15 or so applications I've received for assistant technician, half of them are from former superintendents.

in the past. This is wrong – if anything expectations are much higher. Clubs today are struggling to find players. The most significant action we can take as an industry is to maintain or raise the quality of the product. People are spending money based more on what they need vs. what they think they want. Many people don't have the financial luxury they once enjoyed to buy the things they want. Instead, they look for better quality things that they need. People's mind-sets have changed – what sells now is quality conditions. The person who can afford to play needs to see the reason he should pay to play your golf course over the one down the road that doesn't look as well maintained. Today, people want to get every penny out of the money they're spending, and if the quality is off, the revenue will be, as well. And I don't need to say where that road leads to.

These last few years many articles have been published about how we need to cut back and do more with less. In some respects they are not wrong. However, if you choose to pursue that course of action, you must determine how to maintain the same quality to keep your business vibrant. Anyone can make financial cuts, but not everyone can reduce costs and ensure players won't notice. If you can find the balance between cuts and quality conditions, we will see you on the other side of this economic downturn. **GC**