



**Without a doubt,
it's going to
happen someday.**

**GCI's Bruce
Williams tells you
how to prepare
for your last day
on the job.**

Pink slip blues

by Bruce R. Williams, CGCS

Like death and taxes, every golf course superintendent will ultimately face that inevitable last day on the job. Some may work 40 years for the same employer while others may be moving on for better opportunities. Sadly, some are either terminated or pushed out the door. Each situation, though, brings a specific set of circumstances. I'll share several universal items that will help anyone prepare for their last day on the job.

Have a plan

People spend a lot of time planning on how to get a job. We also spend a lot of time doing our job. Rarely, though, do we develop an exit plan. This plan may be for retirement or it may be for something that comes unexpected. Nonetheless, I encourage everyone in our industry to take some time to prepare for your last weeks and days on the job.

Passing the baton

Many years of blood, sweat and tears are put into golf courses under the management of golf course superintendents. Agronomic plans and long-range improvement plans are a part of a process that can take five to 10 years to complete. Typically, most of these plans are recorded and should be made available to the new superintendent coming on board. Be sure to make these records available and keep them in an organized fashion. After all, they are the plans you likely developed. While your time at the helm is over, it is time to pass them along to those on the next watch.

Any and all records may be copied by the out-going superintendent for his or her personal use. Fertility programs, integrated pest management programs, better management plans, photos and such should all be kept in duplicate. I always recommend doing that just in case computers crash, so it should not be a problem to keep that info on a personal hard drive that is the property of the golf course superintendent.

Communicating the message

Many businesses today have a specific protocol for departing

You're
Fired

employees. It is not uncommon to stop any use of the computer server and email service. It is a good idea to have a separate email account for personal use. Any items you might need later should be kept in that account even if they are duplicates. Once you lose access to company computers you'll also more than likely lose access to your MS Outlook database – or similar programs – that keep you in touch with your networks.

Imagine losing your cell phone in today's connected world. It creates a nightmare for anyone. I suggest having your phone contacts backed up and it never hurts to ask the employer if you can keep the phone and take over the billing.

Making a statement

When a superintendent retires there may be consideration for a continued relationship with the golf facility. This may range from an honorary membership, club usage with discretion or even consulting at the facility.

It is best for a golf facility to write a nice farewell message showing appreciation for a retiring superintendent. Whatever the agreement, it is best to share it with the golfers and/or members at the facility.

However, in some situations it may not be a welcome departure, but it can still be done with class. I suggest that golf facilities work with the departing superintendent to have a

mutually agreed upon statement that both parties can use jointly.

Getting around town

While the title to the car or truck they have been provided with is one of the nicest things a departing superintendent can receive at the conclusion of their tenure, this does not always happen. Recent Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA) research shows that about 77 percent of its members receive a car allowance or vehicle as a part of their job. Being on call 24 hours a day, those vehicles are often used as the superintendent's main transportation.

Upon retirement or employment separation you will need to make arrangements for the future or negotiate an agreement with the employer to either be gifted the vehicle or to purchase it. Either way there will be tax liabilities that few consider because they don't have a plan in place for their exit strategy.

State of the state

Each state has a different set of laws regarding employment. Be familiar with your specific laws. Some states require that unused sick or vacation pay be paid out to departing employees. The same may be true for compensatory time for holidays worked and such.

Cardboard box rule

Most employment terminations result in a quick exit from your office and the property. This is just the standard business procedure today, and while it seems harsh, it is a reality. I often hear of people having 15 to 20 minutes to gather their personal belongings and place them in a cardboard box before leaving the property. Take a minute and think about what you might be able to fit in a cardboard box after working out of the same office for a decade.

Be sure you know what belongs to you and what belongs to the golf facility. Books purchased by the golf course during your tenure should stay with the golf course. The same is true with digital cameras that the course may have purchased for your use. Laptop computers fall under the same category.

COBRA

While human resource laws and policies vary by state and employer, many offer departing employees a COBRA option for their health insurance. Those retiring who are eligible for Medicare will have no problem. Many will need continued health and dental care



Conducting your own JOB SEARCH

For those that are unemployed it is now time to get busy in finding that next job if so desired. There are so many vehicles to assist with this today. I strongly suggest that people utilize the GCSAA Career Development department and look at the website. There are many good tools there that can help superintendents looking for a job.

If you haven't done it for your entire career then no better time to develop and strengthen your network. One person can only do so much in finding a job but with a strong network assisting you many hands make light work. Others can assist you in finding job opportunities that are out there. Use the GCSAA ERS, TurfNet, Indeed.com and other vehicles to see what is available. Have your resumé fine-tuned and ready to go. Develop a personal website or blog to showcase the many successes you have had during your career.

And since you never know when that last day might come it is best to have a resumé that is current.

You never know when you may have to move into the job-search mode. First thing that comes to mind is knowing what your employment options are. Be sure to develop a set of skills that not only required for golf course operations but also transferable to other employment opportunities. Many superintendents have found successful transitions to a variety of careers with the skills learned while managing people and resources in the golf course industry.

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coverage as a bridge until they are on a new plan. Take the time to look at what those options are before you are under stress and have to make quick decisions. Most employers' human resources departments can provide you with this info, and it is good to evaluate your options every few years.

Know your legal rights

I cannot offer any legal advice, but I can make a few suggestions for readers to follow up on. Most separations are amicable and will not require any legal assistance. However, there are instances in which some employees believe they have been wrongfully terminated. If this is the case in your situation, then you will want to consult with a labor attorney who specializes in this area of law. Be sure to supply them with the facts and, most importantly, have documentation to back up your assertions.

A couple of items to keep current are your employee reviews and any other pertinent information that will help you negotiate a fair severance.

Finishing strong

When leaving a golf course you never want to rest on their many years of hard work. Golf courses require a lot of TLC, so do the best you can right up until your last day on the job. Some golf courses merely say they choose to go a different direction and may give an individual several months notice to provide them with ample time to find new employment. Finishing strong bodes well for you and often includes a great reference from facility ownership or management.

Transitioning

In some cases the departing superintendent will be asked to assist in selecting the person that will follow as superintendent. If this is the case work hard to develop a plan for the employer. Possibly the departing superintendent has prepared a potential candidate or two on the existing staff. I do believe we owe that to our employers.

Personal finances

When individuals find themselves on a fixed income it creates a lifestyle change. Again, whether through retirement, layoff, separation or termination, it is essential all superintendents do a gut check on finances throughout their career. Do you have enough money, in savings, to go without a paycheck for six months? Do you know how much Social Security you will receive? Do you know how money in your IRA could or would be distributed? All of these are very important questions that will need to be answered.

A wise investment is to retain a financial planner who can help you answer these questions and provide a “game plan” for managing your finances that will protect you and your family.

Overall, be prepared for that last day or week on the job.

It may be three to four years off for a scheduled retirement date, or it could be as close as a few weeks when new owners take over, a new green chairman wants to go a different direction or it's just a bad weather year.

Superintendents are great planners and an exit strategy should be no different than any other. It should be well thought out and done in advance while providing a variety of options for a departing golf course superintendent. GCI

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