

by Bruce Williams, CGCS

Hit the ground **running**

GCI's Bruce Williams outlines what you should be doing your first day as the new superintendent.

The impression you make on your staff during the early days on the job will be lasting. When taking on a new challenge, there are a variety of items that need to be analyzed and evaluated as quickly as possible. Some of these items may have been reviewed prior to accepting the job, but that is not always the case.



TEAM. While many people believe we are in the turf business, we are actually in the people business. So make meeting and greeting everyone at the new facility a high priority. The staff that will be working for you may vary from a handful to a couple of dozen individuals. No superintendent can maintain a golf

course alone, so embrace those who will be responsible for your future success.

Within your first few days at the course review each individual on your team. This includes individual sit-down interviews and a review of each crew member's personnel file to learn his history. Interview questions should include asking them what they do for daily tasks. Find out what they like to do and what skills they either have or wish to learn.

Never forget they are measuring you up as much as you are evaluating them.



FLEET. Seldom is a full sheet of the equipment inventory offered to prospective candidates before taking a job. If the list does not

exist or is not current, then have your new staff get a quick start to bring it up to speed.

All equipment should be listed along with items such as year of purchase, brand, model No., purchase date, depreciation period and average life expectancy. A simple walk through the turf care center will not be as meaningful as the development and utilization of this list.



IRRIGATION SYSTEM.

I can't help but remember a scenario a good friend encountered when he took on a new job. He had been hired in the Chicago area over the winter months. Within a few weeks of taking the job it was time to energize the irrigation system. Unfortunately, the

previous superintendent had not blown out the irrigation lines and most of the smaller lines had frozen and broken over the winter. Talk about a rude awakening to the new job.

Chances are you won't encounter this level of tragedy during your first few days on the job. However, most superintendents are dependent on their irrigation systems to survive the summer and any other periods of drought. Likewise, successful golf course superintendents are highly dependent on the quality and efficiency of their irrigation systems.

Conduct a preliminary inspection and get answers to the following questions:

- What is the age of the existing irrigation system?



PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- What is the condition of the irrigation system?

- When was the last irrigation audit conducted?

- How effective is the system?

- Have all the corrective measures been taken to make the system most efficient?

At the first opportunity, it is essential to schedule an irrigation audit by a certified irrigation auditor. Water is a valuable commodity and a major budget item in many parts of the country. All too often courses take for granted that their distribution will never change. This is simply false. By checking the quality of nozzles, impellers and overall pressure the potential for a 15-20 percent increase in efficiency is achievable by the new golf course superintendent.



PLANS. Few golf courses have a “master plan” developed by club leaders in conjunction with a qualified golf course architect. These plans outline the direction of the golf course for any future

architectural revisions and upgrades.

Blueprints are a valuable resource and can tell you a lot about the history of the golf course if they have been saved over the years. I would hope that all golf courses have an “as-built” blueprint that would show the many irrigation pipes and wires under the golf course.

And while few courses have these, a tree inventory is a desirable commodity, as well. So how can one manage tens of thousands of trees on the golf course without knowing how many of each species and also what type of a fertility, pruning and integrated pest management program is needed?

Does your golf course have a GPS map? Every golf course requires base numbers to calculate things like mowing acreage, spray applications and bunker volume. If the base numbers used to calculate these items are incorrect, then any and all calculation totals will be guesstimates.

The same goes for golf course standards. If the golf course has no written standards, then

it would be appropriate to start developing them in the early weeks. The standards will only have value if aligned with available budget dollars. All standards should be developed jointly with ownership and governance of the golf facility.



BUDGET. The budget of the previous golf course superintendent may not be the same budget you will operate under. I am aware of several situations that new superintendents were given the budgets of their predecessors who had lost their jobs for poor golf course conditions. The reality was that there was inadequate funding to support the dreams and desires of the membership. So either prior to the point of hire or immediately after hire it is imperative to get a full understanding of what it will take to take that golf course to the “next level”.



POLITICS. In addition to your own personal team, on your first day you will meet many people in the

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organization. Those individuals will include fellow employees, members of the club and club officials who will all want to stop by and say hello. Take inventory of all of these people as most of them can and will become your allies in the years that lie ahead.

Make the time to meet with everyone and even spend some time, during that first week, working the pro shop, the grill room or the first tee. People are excited about your hire at the facility. I am sure there will be no shortage of opinions shared about what is right and what is wrong with the golf course. I have always believed isolated comments are not as large of an issue as repetitive comments that begin to show trends and require action.

Make no promises other than evaluating the property and op-

erations in its entirety. Explain there is a lot of work that lies ahead and the first few months will be spent putting together a plan of action to be evaluated by club leadership.



AGRONOMY. Golf course agronomic issues may be some of the easiest issues to manage when starting out at a new facility, if only for the simple fact that is what we've been trained to do. Look at the history of various reports that will include vital information:

- Soils,
- Water quality, and
- Turf types.

Is your turf healthy? Are all the nutrients in proper balance? Soil tests should quickly tell you what your needs are and allow you to develop a plan. Some parts

of the country have very poor water quality. This can result in serious turf decline. Analyzing water quality reports allows you to develop a plan to overcome high salts, high bicarbonate and high pH.

Be sure you are trying to grow the right turf types in the areas that they belong. It is often said that things are done because they have always been done that way in the past. A new face on the property allows for fresh input and the ability to move things in a better direction for turf types and varieties.



TREE AND LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT PLAN.

Most golf courses have a wide variety of trees and shrubbery, often planted without a lot of forethought. Likewise, decades of influential members have

often dictated the planting and landscape components at many golf courses.

One of the first questions should be to find out if there are any "sacred cows" growing on the golf course. Many of you can relate to a special tree or memorial trees that can never be touched on the golf course. Find out where they are and the history behind them before you do anything.

Trees are planted by well-meaning people and thousands came onto golf courses after the decline of the American Elm in the 1960s. Now those trees are sending their roots into golf greens, tees and fairways. Shade creates issues on greens and can be a causal factor in turf decline. Trees require more than just the cost of planting — they require actual maintenance over time.



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Most golfers are not in favor of tree removal, but competition for water and nutrients require that we pick and choose what is most important for high-quality playing surfaces.

Using the list above and by adding a few plans of your own should get you headed in the right direction in your first week or two on the job. There will be crisis to deal with and there will be fires to put out. That is a part of what we do.

Through evaluation and analysis of the aforementioned items it is time to set up the game plan for the future. This takes place by creating a clear vision of the goals and objectives for the golf course and facility. Adequate resources in manpower, equipment and other resources must be considered to move the process along. **GCI**

Bruce Williams, CGCS, is principal for both Bruce Williams Golf Consulting and Executive Golf Search. He is a frequent GCI contributor.



BE ALL you can be

By Bob Lohmann

Superintendents who arrive at a new golf course posting have plenty to keep them busy. Way too busy, in most cases. The same applies to an assistant who has been newly promoted to the facility's top spot. The last thing they need is more to think about, but I'm going to tax your brains anyway.

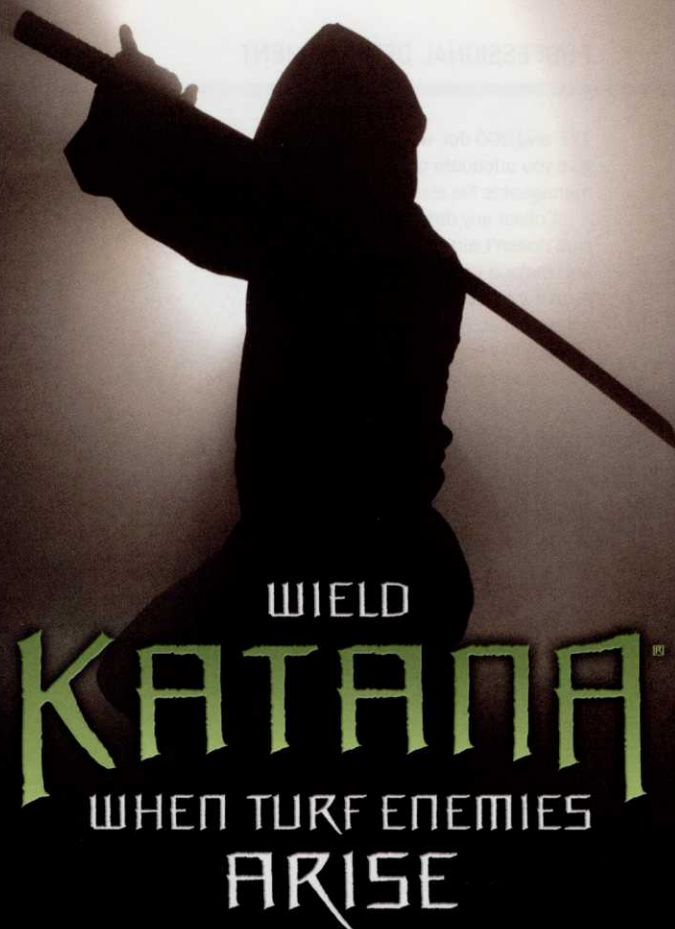
I've outlined several constructive ways to think about yourself in your new job. With more than 30 years in this business, as an architect and contractor, I have seen literally hundreds of "transition" situations where a new superintendent comes on board. It's tough duty - so much to absorb and so many people to impress right away. Aside from piling even more on your full plates, however, these calls to action will help you better adjust to and take control of your new course. In time, they will give you an edge in dealing with staff, superiors, vendors and golfers. They will also chart a wiser course for the facility that now depends on you.

Be an historian. Collect and organize all the course data you can find. Lean on staff and your new boss in order to gather all of the documents relevant to your facility. Review them, understand them and archive them. In short, take on the role of course historian.

Why? Well, because that information is the stuff you'll need, eventually, to do all sorts of important things, mainly strategizing effectively about how best to maintain key aspects of your course and making the case internally for future improvements.

Take your paper plans and have them scanned into digital format for ease of organization, space and future use (invest \$100 in a 1-terabyte external hard drive to store it all). You will learn a ton about what's gone down prior to your arrival. What's more, these are the first things architects, contractors and consultants request when working with a course client, and digital is the way to go these days for ease of sharing and, let's face it, digital is built to last. Paper is not.

We suggest scanning to .jpg or .pdf format at a resolution between



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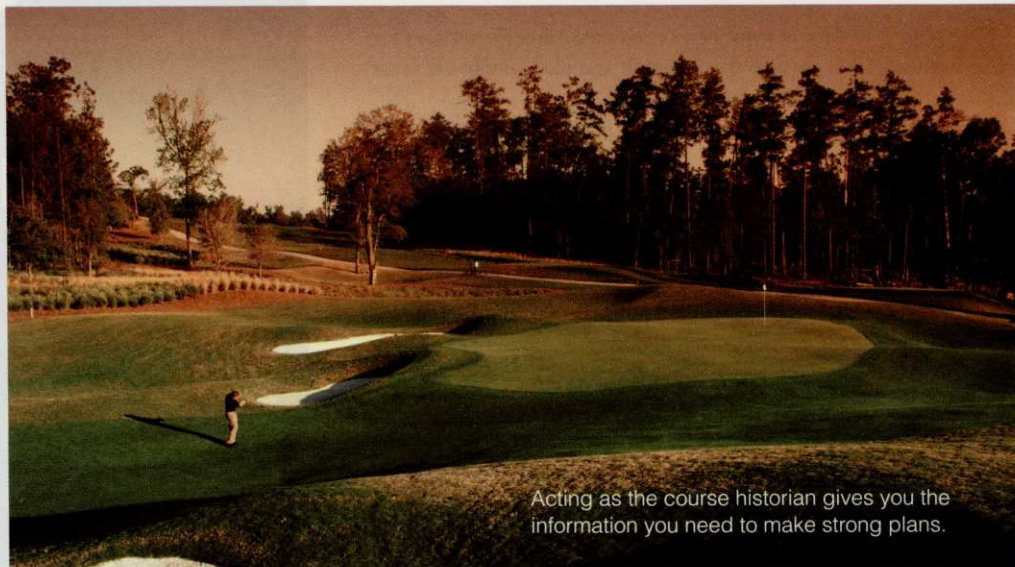
175 and 200 dpi, which will give you adequate quality at a manageable file size.

Collect any data your new club doesn't already have stored and make a record of it, digitally, even if it's a simple Word file or spreadsheet. For example, gather the information currently stored in the brain of your inherited irrigation technician, especially if he/she's the only connection to that info – then get it recorded using GPS. Hire a consultant to help, someone who understands how things are installed so they can interpret the data accurately. Request all future information in paper and digital format.

The value of archiving this sort of information is manifold. It allows you to make immediate connections to the past, which in turn allows you to understand the story behind your new club. This was vital at Poplar Creek Country Club in Illinois, a municipally-owned facility where we recently wrapped up a major storm water management project. Prior to approval, we illustrated the incredible increase in development around that golf course over the last 30 years, using documents we and the owner had archived. Our data helped paint a picture for the Park Board commissioners and the permitting agencies, so we could illustrate the value and need of our project. More important, it expedited the approval process.

Be a paparazzi. Take photos of everything. The best way to tell and/or understand a story is to illustrate it. For us aging folks, it's also the best way to remember those stories! Proper photo imaging of problem areas will make a stronger impression on your board or to your new owner better than words ever will.

Photos also allow an architect, for example, to demonstrate proposed changes to a particular hole with alarming realism. Say your first summer on the job you notice a number of areas where trees are impacting turf health. Simply removing, or even suggesting their removal could be a political nightmare, or even job-threatening. But having someone assist you in illustrating how things might be improved with them gone, via photo imaging, is a great way to sell your idea without the risk. Think about



Acting as the course historian gives you the information you need to make strong plans.

how much time, trouble and money that can potentially save.

Of course, there are all manner of projects that superintendents may wish to undertake to affect positive change. All of these projects need to be paid for and staffed. Again, this sort of digital documentation helps a superintendent sell a project to higher-ups. It's a great tool for marketing and presenting to your boss, or to your stakeholder golfers, allowing you to validate your first impressions and support your ideas on future course-improvement opportunities.

This type of imaging also allows you to start exploring materials and

proposals.

It's important to document where and when you took your photos, too. The simplest way is to mark and locate this info on a course map, either by hand or digitally. This allows you to go back later and take the "After" picture in the exact same position. It sounds tedious, but trust me, it'll add a level of authenticity to your story and presentations.

Be an executor. I think most supers develop a list of goals for their course in their heads. New superintendents need to get that list going as soon as possible.

Write those goals down in a strategic plan that stretches from daily management to long-term management to future renovation. With this list of goals, you can prioritize them, adjust them according to events, and start strategically building your case for funding and logistic support.

One helpful way to think about this planning is the living will. Create one for your new course that focuses on key features. Trees are a good example: Hire an arborist to survey and categorize your trees and assess them for value. More important, do your own assessment that includes a plan of action in the event of a course renovation or severe weather event.

This plan is essential to have on hand for discussion and remediation purposes, and the more prepared you are from the start, the easier it is to turn anything – even a tragedy – into

an opportunity. Jefferson City CC in Missouri is an example of how a tragedy jump-started an improvement project. While our firm was gaining approval for a renovation program there, which required significant tree removal, the club was hit with an ice storm. The damage was devastating, but it opened up an opportunity: the cost (and shock) of tree removal was covered by insurance money, thus freeing up some dollars in the project budget – and the newly cleared spaces allowed us to reinstate some long-held, long-planned ideas that had been nixed due to the cost of tree removal.

We turned those ideas into some of the members' new favorite holes. And that's the last bit of new job advice I'll burden you with: Be curious, because that's what leads to good ideas.

Be inquisitive. Engage your new staff, members and management in discussion and research. Reach out to your colleagues, architects and builders and exchange ideas. And try, when you can, to do all this in person. Technology is great but once you've succeeded in becoming the historian, paparazzi and executor of your new course, you can best bring to bear all you've learned in face-to-face contact with others and all their ideas. **GCI**

“Unfortunately, the previous superintendent had not blown out the irrigation lines and most of the smaller lines had frozen and broken over the winter.”

aesthetics well in advance of any construction. If you're lucky (and we all know that most luck is "made" by those who are best prepared), you'll ultimately get to enact your ideas after you've settled in at the club – then go back and review how they compare to your initial

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