

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 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.

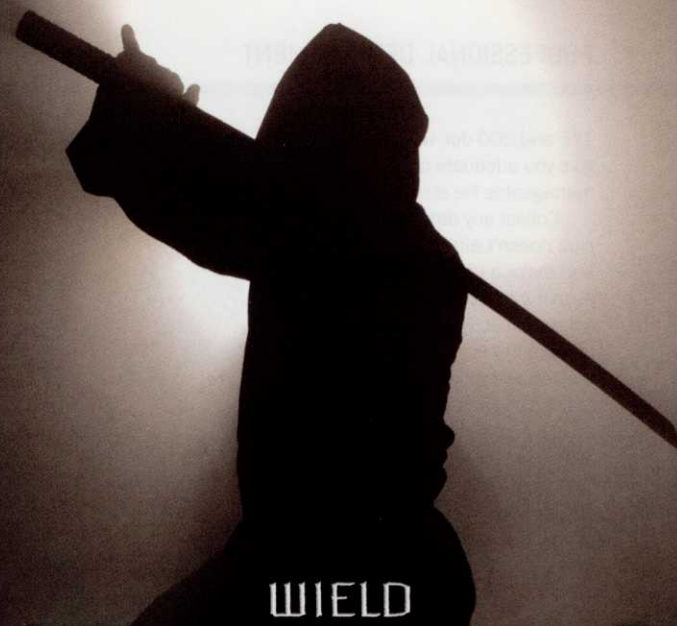
I've outlined several constructive ways to think about yourself in your new job. With more than 30 years in this business, as an architect and contractor, I have seen literally hundreds of "transition" situations where a new superintendent comes on board. It's tough duty - so much to absorb and so many 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.

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