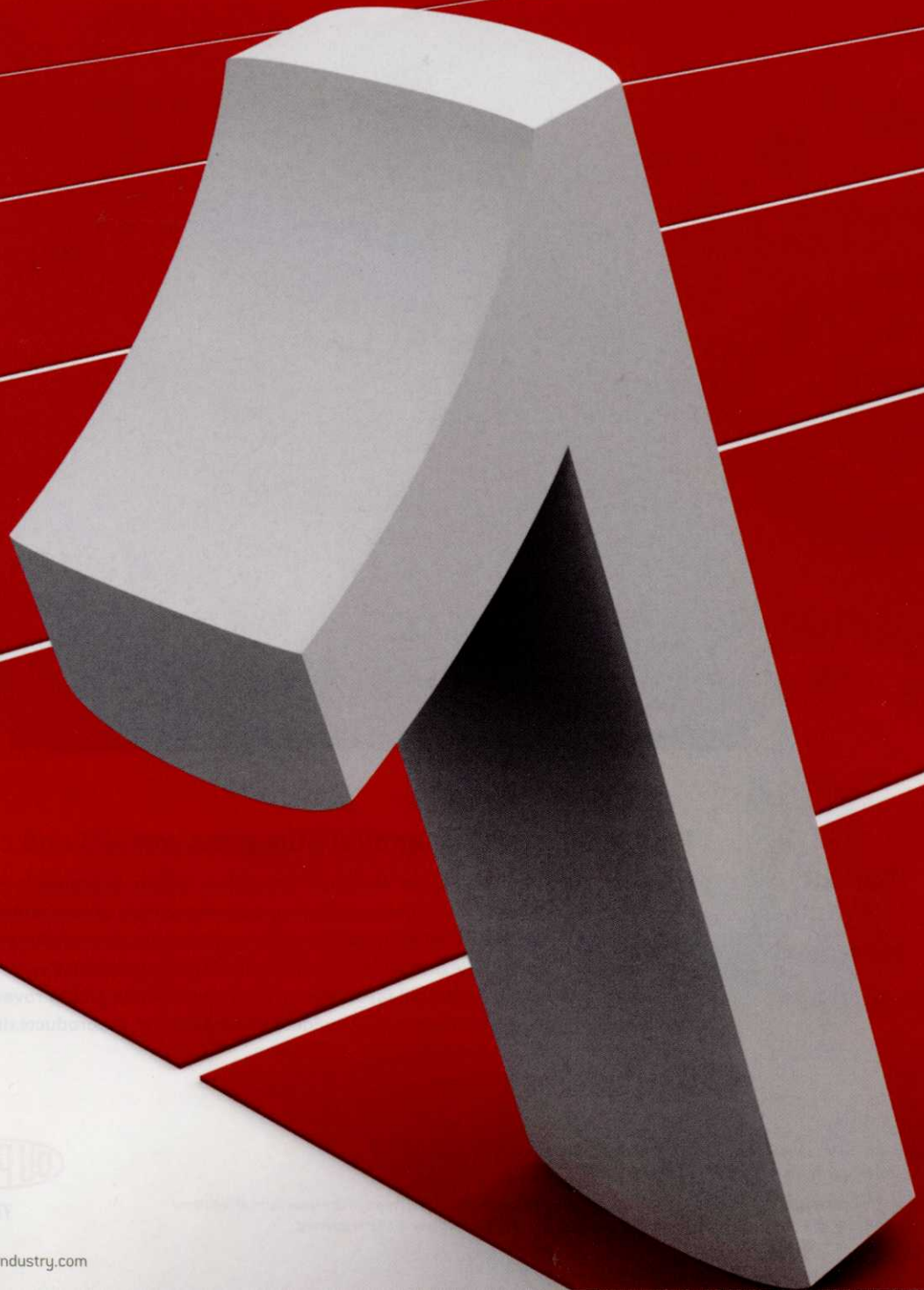


“One-hundred-plus acres can be difficult to manage with a skeleton crew, but through prioritization and planning a good superintendent can meet the facility’s needs.”





# SUPER MVP

Hone the key interpersonal skills that factor into hiring, advancement, compensation and retention.

by Bruce R. Williams, CGCS

**E**verybody is looking for value today, and this is no different in the management hierarchy of golf course facilities. We all work for someone and that may be a general manager, green chairman, board of directors, owners and management companies. Thinking you are doing a great job for your employer is no longer relative, what matters is how to position yourself as the Most Valuable Person in the management and operation of the facility. In order to do that you need to understand what the employer values most.

Some employers may place greater value on one skill set than another, but consistently I have found several skills to be the major factors for hiring, advancement, compensation and retention.

**LEADERSHIP.** There are many moving parts to any golf facility. Yes, it takes a golf course in good condition to attract customers but there are a variety of other business activities that make a facility a success. Ownership has to deal with marketing, administration, cash flow, food and beverage and golf programs. There is little time left for employers to be highly involved in the day to day operations of the golf course.

Under normal circumstances a budget is approved prior to the start of the fiscal year. It is expected that the conditions of the golf course will match the financial support. This doesn't

happen in a vacuum and it takes leadership to make this a reality.

Most superintendents are given the task to hire their team and develop them into a cohesive unit that can effectively and efficiently provide great playing conditions daily. To do that, leadership skills are essential. Surrounding yourself with the right people and having a vision for the current and future condition and development of the golf course is imperative.

**SKILLED MANAGER** . Scheduling people to get tasks done is important but much more important is analyzing operations to ensure efficiency. One-hundred-plus acres can be difficult to manage with a skeleton crew, but through prioritization and planning a good superintendent can meet the facility's needs.

Getting the most done while reducing costs is a major challenge. The ability to demonstrate the plan to do this and implementing such a plan brings tremendous value to the employer. For the most part the days of taking on a new job and seeing a budget increase are over. More often we see budget reductions,

however, with increased expectations of conditioning and quality.

It takes a very skilled manager to pull all this off. Sell yourself based on the ability to do this and then be able to show progress that you can share at your annual reviews. If you can do this you will be given strong consideration for MVP.

**DETAIL ORIENTED** . Current trends show that to be considered a superstar in the business you have to do more with less. Many superintendents do not have the luxury of having ample staff to keep the golf course as detailed as they once did. This does not mean that you can't have attention to detail. Instead, you just have to prioritize the time and cost to take care of such details and also communicate that message to the golfers so that they understand the changes.

My friends at Valley Crest Golf Course Maintenance like to use the term "from the middle out." What they are referring to is the prioritization of maintenance. Certainly greens, tees and fairways are priorities. But

## 7 Keys to MVP status

1. Identify your employer's needs
2. Build your skills
3. Become a problem solver
4. Project stability through your actions
5. Get feedback
6. Review your personal action points periodically
7. Never rest on your laurels

if you were to paint an imaginary line down the center of each hole and then work outward from that line... is it really necessary to manicure every inch of the golf course daily?

Many facilities that formerly mowed rough twice a week are now opting for just a weekly mowing. Out of play areas that formerly were groomed are now turned into low maintenance areas. Mowing of tree bases may be done less often along with tasks like blowing clippings off of cart paths daily. Every bunker may not need to be raked daily and some are only raking 3-4 days per week with touchups in between regular rakings.

Edging of cart paths is something that makes your golf course look neat and clean but in lean times it is not a necessity for good golf. Tough decisions need to be made to give up a few of the luxuries that budgets just 5 years ago provided for.

When details on the golf course are eliminated it is absolutely necessary to let the golfers and employers know the plan and how it affects them. Given the alternative of lesser quality greens vs. edging cart paths I am sure that all would agree that the greens have the priority. Communications should strongly say that the superintendent does not have less attention to detail but that he and his team are engaging in cost cutting measures to ensure the economic viability of the facility.

**PROBLEM SOLVER.** Years ago my friend, Roger Stewart, shared with me a sign that was hung on the wall behind his General Manager's desk. It stated, "Bring Me Solutions, Don't Bring Me Problems". That philosophy has always stuck with me. Employers want you to be able to solve almost any problem that you are confronted with. If you have to go to them to get the solution to golf course problems then they may not feel you are bringing value to the workplace.

Nearly every problem has a solution. It is up to us to find the solution or bring in



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people that can help us to solve problems. To instill confidence we should always be able to quickly look at problems and answer some simple questions that will always come up. Be prepared, for example, that when you lose turf you will be asked these questions:

- What happened?
- What are you going to do about it?
- When is it going to be right?
- What will it cost?
- What can we do to prevent it from happening again?

Problem solvers should be able to build the confidence that their employer has in them if they can quickly communicate those things even before the questions are asked.

**FINANCIALLY RESPONSIBLE.** Zero-base budgeting is more common today than ever before. The days of increasing the annual golf course budget by the CPI are over.

Some line items may increase by 20 percent while other line items may actually go down. If the facility is experiencing a reduction in play, dues, outside parties, etc. then the request of the employer may be to reduce the golf course maintenance budget.

As a sound manager it will be expected that the superintendent will develop a new plan to provide the best conditions with the budget they are provided.

Most employers do not want to get involved in the day to day operations of how to do that. Great value can be shown to the employer by being positive and a team player to accomplish the things that will make the facility successful over the long-term.

“Certainly greens, tees and fairways are priorities. But if you were to paint an imaginary line down the center of each hole and then work outward from that line, then is it really necessary to manicure every inch of the golf course daily?”

**COMMUNICATOR.** In the movie “Cool Hand Luke” there is a famous line that states, “What we have here is a failure to communicate.”

A Most Valued Person would be someone that doesn’t wait to be asked what is happening. Instead, that individual has a method for communicating things in a strategic and timely fashion.

The use of weekly updates to the employer is imperative. Informal meetings can take place daily, but it is extremely important to set aside a half hour each week to share information with your employer.

Remember, don’t just bring problems to the meeting. Be sure to talk about your successes that week or month and that will elevate you in the eyes of your employer. If you have made cuts, reallocated resources, overcome weather issues, etc., then it will be well to share all of that information.

Getting feedback from your employer is as

important as filling him in on your activities. Listen carefully and be sure you take some notes. You will quickly learn what your employer’s priorities are. It is the ability to align yourself with the direction to accomplish these priorities that will earn you an MVP spot that employers are looking for.

**THE TOTAL PACKAGE.** Employers are looking for the person that will give them “the most bang for their buck.” Identifying the needs of the employer is imperative.

Things have changed during the 40 years I have been in this industry. It used to be about keeping your golf course in good condition and staying within budget. No doubt those are still things that employers expect. But there is so much more to it today to create a long term value to the employer.

Build the skills that are necessary for success. If you don’t know what your employer is looking for in a valued employee then you need to ask them. Be sure to review those items throughout the year and see if you are working on their priorities and that you have mutually aligned goals for the facility.

Realize that consideration for MVP is each and every year. Never rest on your laurels. Work toward earning that designation in your 20th year as much as you did in your first year of employment. **GCI**

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

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