

## THE INTERPERSONAL ARTS

Chris Carson is without a doubt one of the smartest superintendents in the industry. And while I don't doubt he has impeccable turf maintenance acumen, he by far has an impressive amount of street smarts.

I was fortunate to receive an invite to attend the 2012 Green Start Academy, which took place in early October at Bayer's research facility in Clatyon, N.C. Green Start is an annual educational program, jointly supported by Bayer and John Deere, that brings together 50 of the nation's top assistants for two days of mentoring and executive-level training.

It was the second year I've attended the program and Chris, who is the superintendent at Echo Lake Country Club in Westfield, N.J., gave the send-off speech to a captivated audience of 20-something assistants.

In a nutshell, Chris talked about the things they don't teach superintendents in turf school that included a healthy dose of practical lessons to land that first big job. With a mix of humor and Scared Straight, Carson breaks down and dissects the art interviewing and how assistants can use practical interpersonal communication skills to land their first superintendent's position.

For example, Carson advises in a cover letter or during an interview not to spend undue time focusing on what every other assistant is engaged in. Rather, highlight what sets you apart from the crowd and why an employer wants you on their staff, or at the very least in for an interview. Or, knowing a little something about the golf course operation or its parent company prior to the interview is a great way to show your interest in the job. The best one: always say "Thank you" at the conclusion of an interview. Hey, it's not just good manners; it's good business.

It really struck me how important many of Chris's core points are and how they transcend into the workplace, especially those that deal with how individuals interact and communicate with one another. Regardless of your title at your golf course facility or the nature of the meeting, here are some of Chris's key tips that really enhance professionalism and help to get your point across.



**Mike Zawacki**

Editor

**ENTHUSIASM.** Express conviction when you communicate. Why do you want that job, want the best price possible for a herbicide program, require a new fryer in the clubhouse kitchen, or think it's in the long-term best interest of the course to engage that irrigation upgrade in the offseason?

**EYE CONTACT.** Not looking someone in the eyes is a major no-no. In addition to conveying a feeling of ambivalence toward the other person, a pair of unfocused, wandering eyes sends the message that you may be less than truthful, or maybe just full of it.

**EXPERTISE.** Be a know-it-all, literally. Regardless of the problem, be the guy at your club

who either knows all the answers, or knows how to get them in short order. Be one of the first people consulted when there's a problem.

**LEADERSHIP.** This almost goes hand-in-hand with the previous point. Always know what direction your department is headed and how the decisions you make support that course heading. Even better, always have a three-year plan in play.

**EXPAND YOUR NETWORK.** Make a point to forge networks with all of the key players within your facility. In doing so, make sure they understand not only what you do on a daily basis, but the problems you might try to overcome. Players and club members don't see boundaries. They complain to anyone about at a facility about playing conditions. It's good to have people who have your back and can explain why things are the way they are.

It struck me that in this digital age we've lost the art of a good handshake. Carson deals with the handshake issue with a good dose of humor, but his point is no laughing matter. A good, solid handshake is make-or-break moment for a lot of people. Think of the last time you met someone and got the dreaded "dead fish." That first impression is a lasting impression, so meet it with a firm sense of confidence. **GCI**

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