

Getting what you're **worth**

GCI's Bruce Williams explains how to accurately assess your value and calculate better compensation.

Defining value

Several of the key factors for assessing value are:

- Education
- Experience
- Responsibility
- Past performance
- Current compensation



by Bruce R. Williams, CGCS

One of the most important calculations you may ever make is the one that provides you with the correct information to ensure you are or will be compensated fairly for your level of responsibility, experience and expertise. Typically this is a two-step process. The first step is for you to assess your value to the specific job you are in or applying for. The second step is to develop a solid checklist that provides the basis for discussing or negotiating compensation.

Knowledge is power and any discussion regarding compensation should be backed up with an appropriate amount of facts. Those individuals who are well prepared surely fare better in these types of discussions.

What are you worth?

The easiest answer to that question is "Only what the employer is willing to pay you." However, most employers want to compensate you at a rate that is fair and reasonable. It is just a matter of providing information that will support what is fair and reasonable.

The Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA) has done a number of extensive surveys regarding compensation. They clearly show that there is a differential between base compensation for different levels of education, size of facility managed, completion of certification, etc. One of the interesting things about statistics is that they are just numbers until you take the information and make it fit your set of circumstances.

When I work with clubs or individuals I try to take the statistics that best represent similar positions in a similar geographic location. For example, golf courses in Chicago tend to pay more for the northern suburbs than they do for the south suburbs. This could be very valuable information when negotiating compensation. Please note that I am not saying that the northern suburban clubs are better than the southern, but the value is dictated more by the cost of home ownership than anything else.

In recent years GCSAA has developed compensation information by state, chapter and sometimes metropolitan area. Chapters often have their own surveys and may get an even better response than the GCSAA survey. I had participated in surveys done by a number of top 25 clubs and multiple course clubs when I was at The Los Angeles Country Club so that I had the most accurate reflection of what other similar facilities were doing.

Many surveys offer average or median compensation level information. Be sure you know how your club is positioned in the golf industry in your area. If the facility is ranked in the top 25 rankings in your state then median compensation would not be a fair comparison. It is highly likely that you would fall into the top 10 percentile. If you are certified and have a bachelor's degree you would fall into higher compensation levels than the median survey information unless you use those specific categories.

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in the industry the greater your value in general. Surveys show the greatest earning years are from the age of 30-58 in our business. There is no doubt in my mind that experience translates into value for the employer. It is just a matter of presenting the stats and coupling why that increased value is there.

Employers place a high value on education. They also place a high value on certification. Some of our peers may not have had the good fortune to receive a formal education. Never fear as I counsel my clients on providing a transcript of their continuing

education. Employers love to see a lifelong commitment to continuing education no matter what previous education you have had. All education is not defined by college credits or CEU's but can also be attained through various leadership positions, presentations made, articles written, etc. Consider this as a part of the value you bring to the facility.

What is the responsibility level of a specific job? Typically the more people you manage, the larger the budget you manage, higher staffing levels, and areas of responsibility will help you to establish the value of a job.

Calculating your compensation

Base compensation can be calculated from a variety of resources. Here are a few that I utilize when working with clients:

- Comps of similar jobs
- Surveys
- Financial condition of the facility
- Positioning among other key management staff
- Value of the golf facility to the overall business
- Potential to improve the property
- Scheduled capital improvements
- Proven savings from past positions

With each of these skill sets an individual needs to relate how those skill sets will provide the employer with value. I always prefer to utilize hard numbers of how these skills have resulted in savings (value) for previous employers.

So, does current compensation matter?

It depends. For those assistant superintendents who are accepting a first superintendent job offer I often hear that the employer is offering the individual a 25 percent or more pay increase. Actually I believe that is an unfair statement as the person is taking on far greater responsibility, will have many more hours on the job and significantly more pressure.

The situation is similar to when an individual is hired to manage 36 holes or take on regional responsibilities within a management company. That person has far greater responsibility and should be compensated accordingly.

Previously, I discussed the methods to utilize surveys and develop comparative information from similar golf facilities. Make sure your numbers are correct. If any small items are not found to be credible then it takes away from your discussion or negotiation.

I am often asked how one goes about finding the information of comparative golf facilities and also reliable data on compensation for other superintendents in the area as well as the professional or manager at that facility. Be aware that it takes some time to do this. Most of what you would be looking for is on the internet. Of course you can utilize a qualified career counselor to facilitate this for you. Golf facilities that are owned by governmental agencies are required to provide full disclosure of their compensation as well as income and expenses. By going to the website of the city, county or state you will easily find this information.

Accessing information from private clubs can be a little bit more difficult. Suffice it to say that there are several websites that will allow you to gain access to information in the IRS 990 form. Several years ago a new requirement for reporting was initiated and non-profits must now provide this information. It contains budget/expense information as well as salary and total compensation for key employees. You should be able to find out what the key economic indicators for each facility and this allows you to speak intelligently to the topic as it relates to compensation.

I had mentioned we should all know what other key management positions pay at our facilities. Seldom do these people share that info, but through the 990 Form you can get a good feel for how you are positioned. Remember that this knowledge guarantees you nothing but a smart person would know that they will likely be in a similar range to the other key employees of the facility.

All too often superintendents do not take a broad look at the overall financial position of the golf facility. Is the facility profitable? What is the trend for the volume of business? What has the trend in golf course expenses been in recent years? All of this figures in to the ability to receive fair and adequate compensation. If a facility is trending negatively and making payroll is difficult then we all have to realize that superintendents can be a big part of the solution to gain profitability. Cost reduction is a necessity now more than ever before.

Timing is everything when compensation is concerned. I encourage keeping files on this information on a year-round basis. Access surveys and info as the year goes on. It will avoid a crunch time before your annual review or contract negotiation. For those entering a new job it



Don't sell yourself short

Many superintendents manage more than a golf course. They manage some or all of the following:

- Tennis courts
- Paddle tennis courts
- Croquet courts
- Swimming pools
- Driving range
- Cart fleets
- Equipment fleets
- Building engineering
- In-house construction
- Project management
- Wastewater treatment on site
- Aquatic vegetation
- Landscape design and construction
- Director of golf (in some cases)
- General manager (in some cases)



would be quite helpful to keep a file with general information you can develop into more specific information for a single property.

Compensation discussions are best if done when it is prime time at your golf course. My value at a golf course in Chicago was perceived at a much higher level in July rather than December. Discussions should take place with the appropriate decision makers. It is not always the person that signs the checks that has the power to analyze your value or calculate fair compensation.

If you find that your compensation is out of whack with comparative golf facilities then you need to develop a strategy to attain fair compensation. It is unrealistic to look at pay increases of double digits in this economy. However, if current compensation is way

below market valuation then think of a multi-step plan to get to the right amount. That plan must be based on measurable goals that bring increased value to the facility for what you do.

Nobody wants to leave any money on the table when entering a new job. Anyone taking a job at below market value later realizes they may never be able to make up the difference with cost of living increases. I urge everyone to do their homework. If the thought of doing this analysis on your own scares you, then work with people who know how to create a win-win outcome. **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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