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HAVE YOU HUGGED YOUR GOLF PRO TODAY?

It's August, which means the golf world's attention is on the final major, the PGA Championship, and the organization that runs it, the PGA of America. So turn your attention to your local PGA representative – your co-worker, the golf professional.

I know, you're probably jealous of the pro at your club, who gets to sit in the air-conditioned pro shop all day, stacking shirts and joking with members, while you're running around in heat and humidity slinging hoses, whacking weeds, and trying to keep your crew working.

But take a step back. Think about it. Aren't we all in this together? Don't the superintendent and the golf professional have the same goals? Don't we both want to create an environment where golfers want to come and want to return for more? Don't we want to grow the game, since that will ultimately help us keep our jobs?

The days of the super and the pro crossing swords should be over. Where once there was wariness, there should be respect. Competition should be replaced by cooperation.

Which is why our two organizations – the GCSAA and the PGA of America – should work more closely together. We both want the same things, and working together will make us stronger and more effective in achieving them.

Our organizations and their members have the biggest impact on how real golf is played at clubs around the country and around the world. Working in tandem, we can make the game better for golfers and ourselves.

We need to start by understanding each other's jobs. Don't assume the pro has it all that easy. We have more in common than you might think. For starters, we both deal with two forces we can't control – weather and people.

Weather can be the downfall of a superintendent, but it can also have it in for the golf professional, as well. Bad weather can cancel or ruin events that have been in the works for months or years and have significant financial impact on the club. A lousy day also leads to cancelled lessons, rounds, and merchandise sales, taking money out of the pro's pocket.

But where we can really feel each other's pain is as scapegoats. While we get blamed for everything from grass that won't grow to tough pin positions, the pro is criticized for the golf course, tournament formats, the merchandise selection, a bad lesson, lost balls, dying carts, rude valets, lazy caddies, even the wrong beer at the halfway house. He, or she, is the point person for everything "golf" and has to listen to, and respond to, every criticism or complaint with a smile.

But that's just what people see. Behind the scenes, especially at private clubs, we both have to deal with boards of directors: volunteers who get to oversee and manage our budgets and influence what we do, whether or not they understand just exactly what that is.

Be glad we don't have to talk to members or casual golfers about long putters or other Rules issues. I'd rather explain why we are taking down a tree along the sixth fairway than the correct stroke-and-distance procedure.

Look at the golf pro and you'll probably see someone with the same worries and headaches as you. Job security, uncontrollable consequences, poor employees, you name it. We're in the same boat.

So what should we – collectively – do about it? First, communicate. Start talking to your golf pro, and not just about where the water collects on the 11th fairway. Make him or her your friend, a confidante. Share informa-

tion you learn about the club, what's going on, who's really in charge, where the bodies are buried. Be there to help him and he'll help you.

Here's another suggestion: We should piggyback our annual industry meetings so we actually meet, talk, and learn together in a non-threatening environment. Joint educational seminars and roundtables, too.

Together we should be the ones creating plans to promote and grow the game that don't rely on the tour pros. In fact, if the pro and the superintendent are on the same page, maybe we can begin educating the average golfer as to why what he sees on television is not what he wants or needs at his club or in his game.

In teaching the golfer to play better, running events, selling merchandise, and representing the club, the pro is instrumental to the game's growth at the grass level.

Meanwhile, tending to that grass level is the superintendent, who can (and probably should) get more involved setting up and maintaining courses so they are more welcoming and enjoyable for the most golfers. That means widening fairways, picking hole locations, managing green speeds, and maintaining course conditioning that promote a good time. Talk to your pro about this and it's likely he'll feel the same way: He wants golfers happy and coming back, too.

Of all the major organizations in golf, only two – the GCSAA and the PGA of America – are really responsible for growing the game. What we do day in, day out attracts and keeps real golfers playing and having fun. This shared concern for the golfing public – and by extension, our livelihoods – forms the basis for what could be the strongest pairing in the game.

The pro and the superintendent. Now that's a winning team. **GCI**