

Join. Participate.

Get involved

The rewards are many for industry involvement. What's your excuse?

by Bruce Williams

The golf and turfgrass industries are very well organized thanks to a variety of membership associations and foundations. Each and every one of those groups is led by individuals who have chosen to step up and get involved. It seems like the old adage was never truer with 5 percent of the people in chapters and associations doing the work for the other 95 percent.

I truly believe more people would get involved in leadership positions if they knew the need, the benefits and the purpose of taking on added responsibility. I have yet to see an individual who hasn't prospered from board service and, likewise, organizations that have not prospered from what volunteers have to offer.

HOW DO WE VOLUNTEER? Superintendents often believe they are not worthy of board service. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. Every superintendent has something to offer. It starts off with a willingness to give time. A commitment to board service takes time. It's easy to calculate the number of chapter meetings and board meetings that any assignment will require. Chapter service, according to my estimates, requires an extra 10 or so hours a month. This will increase if one chooses to continue service at an officer level.

So if you can spare the time the fruits of



your labor will be bountiful. Yes, some chapters have contested elections and nobody likes to run for a board position and lose. It may take a couple of years to get elected. Hard work and persistence pay off. I have known more than a few individuals who ran three times before being elected to boards including the GCSAA. Some of those individuals went on to become presidents of their respective organizations.

First things first and you need to join professional organizations such as GCSAA chapters and turfgrass foundations. Participate and get involved. Attend as many meetings as possible and communicate the value of such organizations to your employer. While attending all meetings is an admirable goal, it must be realized that we all have family obligations and work commitments that may take precedence during the year. Pick and choose wisely and manage your time well so a balance between work, life and leadership exists.

Once you join an organization and actively attend meetings, it is best to get involved at the committee level. Typical committee involvement requires just a few extra hours per month. Superintendents serve on committees such as tournament, education, trade show, PR, communications and newsletter. Committee service is about getting the job done and making programs better. We are fortunate today to have so many talented chapter executives who carry out the direction offered by committees and boards.

Chapters are always looking for speakers at monthly meetings. They also are always looking for industry pros to write articles for their newsletters. Not only is this a great way to get involved with minimal time commitment, but it also provides exposure for a superintendent and allows other chapter members to see his/her talents. Many future chapter leaders come from the ranks of speakers and writers.

WHY DO WE VOLUNTEER? There must be some compelling reasons for wanting to step up and volunteer. Not everyone is motivated by the same things, so I hope to outline some good reasons to get involved at a leadership level.

Board service can advance your career. If you are looking to move up the career ladder I can think of no better way than to serve. It is no coincidence that some of the better jobs in

your market seek out broadly qualified people. The people who are hiring superintendents are leaders themselves and leaders are attracted to leaders.

A variety of job skills are developed and enhanced through board service. I enjoy seeing the significant improvement of professionalism that grows parallel to board service. Public speaking and writing skills are two notable qualities. Through practice, participation and learning from peers we are all better off after 8-9 years of board service.

Time management becomes a necessity as we take on more commitments. Fellow board members become mentors and show us the way to provide a proper balance personally and professionally.

Other notable learned skills include: budgeting, strategic planning, communication, technology, management and overall leadership.

Lastly, volunteering brings fun and fulfillment to your life. Some of our basic needs include getting involved and having a feeling of being in-the-know on things. Learn to work in a group, promote change, develop consensus and debate outcomes. Have fun while being involved with your fellow board members. Know that each year you serve you will become more fulfilled with the accomplishments that the board, as a group, makes on behalf of its members.

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF IT IS FOR YOU? I suggest anyone considering serving their chapter, association or foundation do a little homework before taking the leap. Seek out existing leaders and former board members to see what it has meant to them. A few of the questions that should be asked include:

- How much time commitment was involved at each level of board service?
- What was most difficult about board service?
- If you had it to do over again would you serve?
- List the advantages derived from your board service.

You should quickly see that few have any regrets. There is much more upside than downside. All we can ask for in life is to have win-win scenarios and service provides that opportunity.

Personal ROI

Volunteering brings a deep sense of return on investment, often at no cost other than of yourself and your time. Here are some additional motivating factors for getting involved.

- Feeling needed
- Sharing a skill
- Demonstrate a commitment to the industry
- Gain leadership skills
- A sense of accomplishment
- Recognition
- Making an impact
- Learning new things
- To become an insider
- A feeling of pride
- Testing yourself
- Building your resume
- Becoming a change agent
- To stand up and be counted





I have yet to see an individual who hasn't prospered from board service and, likewise, organizations that have not prospered from all volunteers have to offer and give.

While a lot of what I've outlined is focused on superintendents there are opportunities at a variety of organizations. Let's explore a few of those general categories and see what fits you best. Often leaders in one group are sought out for leadership roles in other allied organizations.

There are close to 100 chapters of GCSAA in North America. Each chapter covers a specific geographic area. Some chapters are as small in size and geography as having a 50-mile radius in a metropolitan area while others cover multiple states. Most of these chapters have been around from 50 to 80 years. They are well organized and most have paid chapter managers. Chapter managers carry the heaviest burden

and are compensated accordingly. Volunteers for board service will have time commitments, but more importantly they must set the direction for the organization. With approximately 100 chapters and an average of nine board members per chapter, that means roughly 900 superintendent members are theoretically in leadership positions each and every year. Most, but not all, chapter boards require Class-A members, so this does take up approximately 17 percent of eligible volunteers (5,300 GCSAA Class A members). Considering a potential 40-year career in this industry, if no one ever repeated in office, then 68 percent of eligible superintendents would have to serve to cover all the vari-

ous chapter leadership positions.

Beyond chapters there are a variety of regional associations that include turfgrass foundations and turfgrass associations. Recent years have also seen initiatives in turfgrass research groups and also active university alumni associations. Similar to chapters, most of these groups have paid leaders who carry out the daily and annual tasks of running the organizations. Leadership is charged with setting goals and assisting in driving the programs that make these organizations successful. With the recent economic downturn it is more important than ever before that outside funding assist our research programs at diverse geographic locations throughout the country. Each of these organizations seeks leaders just like chapters. That provides a great opportunity for superintendents and commercial members to work together to support the golf course industry.

The ultimate leadership roles would be with organizations like GCSAA, Canadian GCSA and British International Greenkeepers Association. Prior experience is required. Other than that, those major groups are looking for the same qualities in any individual. They want those superintendents who have the time, desire, talent and proper attitude it takes to make an organization better. As you might imagine, the time commitment increases at this level but so do the benefits to you and your career.

One of the challenges of governance is identifying the leaders of tomorrow. A typical board of nine individuals carries the load of 100 to 600 members. Each year there are normally one or two open positions to serve on such boards. This leaves 90 to 590 potential board members. Most boards look to existing committee members to fill open

slots. These people are involved and have shown a commitment to advancing the profession.

It is necessary for each group to encourage and entice members to get involved. Sadly, I see many groups having to go back to former leaders because new blood isn't willing to step up, and get involved. This is a problem in that we are not growing the leaders of tomorrow. However, there is some value to recycling the sage advice of those who have served before, so it is not all bad.

Boards should be diversified. That includes a cross section of low-, middle- and high-budget clubs. It should reflect the ethnic and gender diversity of the membership base. The inclusion of assistant superintendents and commercial members should be considered because they make governing groups stronger. As a side note, seldom do I see an active recruiting program to develop the talent of tomorrow.

Many of us have sat on nominating committees at the local, regional and national level and we have a difficult time coming up with nominees. This has to change. I do believe the development of a recruitment



packet would strongly benefit each organization. If a group were to provide its mission statement, goals and objectives along with a history of the leaders of the group, then that would be a good start. Use the information from this article to cover who can serve and what steps it takes to get involved. Obviously, there are benefits to service. When recruiting people these benefits should be a strong part of the push to get someone involved.

In short, step up and you will not regret it. Make leadership a priority in your career plan. It is the right thing to do. And where we would be in this great industry without all of those who led before us? **GCI**