

EL TURFO



BIG BOSS MAN



US VS. THEM

7

areas of greatest friction you and your GM will wrestle with, and how to fix them now before you're down for the count.

By Bruce R. Williams, CGCS

The relationship between a golf course superintendent and the general manager can be likened to a marriage of sorts. Two people coming together and working as a team. Inevitably there will be a honeymoon period that is pure bliss, but there will also be times that are challenging over the years together. Marriages remain strong because people work at it. Each individual knows their role and also knows what makes the other person happy. Such it is in so many ways with the golf course superintendent and general manager relationship.

There was a time in which many clubs operated with independent department heads, but that has long been trending toward the general manager/COO concept and many superintendents find themselves reporting to a general manager rather than a green chairman or directly to a club's board of directors. The general manager needs the superintendent to perform their magic and the superintendent needs the GM to help get things approved and be supportive of the initiatives of the department. Similar to a marriage, it is a give-and-take proposition. When a relationship works there is nothing better, but when it sours it becomes difficult for people to work with each other. If a superintendent does not have the respect and support of his general manager, then it is likely that a job change is on the horizon.

To understand what makes for a great relationship it is important to know the areas of greatest friction between these two key management positions at a golf course.

1. COMMUNICATION

More superintendents lose their jobs over an inability to communicate than over an inability to grow grass.

It is extremely important to meet with the general manager as often as possible in a formal setting to discuss what has been accomplished and also what is planned for the days, weeks and months ahead. Knowing what the membership/players want is often expressed through membership comments to the board of directors or general manager directly. Like it or not it is imperative that they be shared. Through proper communication the general manager can become an advocate of the department and the work that is being done to meet or exceed expectations.

2. UNDERSTANDING CLUB GOALS

Golf course superintendents are trained to provide exceptional golf course conditions. Anything that stands in the way of that is counter-culture to most superintendents' way of thinking. However, the goals of the club are more important than the goals of any one department head. Superintendents should never put the goals of the department ahead of the goals of the business. While tee times with 7-minute intervals or hosting Monday outings may not be met with open arms by superintendents, if they provide the finances that support an operating budget and buy adequate equipment then it all contributes to the success of the facility.



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For more

Check out this issue's app version, as well as the Superintendent Radio Network, for an exclusive podcast between SRN Host Kyle Brown and Bruce Williams that continues the discussion about how to improve your relationship with not only your general manager, but with other department heads at your facility.

“Loyalty is not something that you can turn on or off. You are either loyal or you are not. **Be honest and be supportive.** It is very important to be there working alongside the GM not only when times are good but when they are bad as well. Be the go to guy that gets it done”

3. INTERDEPARTMENTAL COLLABORATION

A general manager who I worked for told me how important it was for his department heads and departments to get along. One of the roles of the general manager is to keep as many people happy in the organization as possible. With any type of disharmony this can create major problems for the GM. The golf professional, superintendent, chef, HR department head, controller and all must work cohesively. Superintendents should go out of their way to make this happen.

4. TEAM CONCEPT

There is an old adage of “together we win and divided we fall.” Every department is a part of the success of the operation of a club. From the receptionist at the front desk to the locker room attendant each and every person and department adds to the experience of a member. Thoughts of giving blame to others and compartmentalizing things with the thought of “that’s not my job” will encumber operations and develop ill will in the organization.

5. BUDGET ADHERENCE

It should always be important for any department head to meet their budget expectations. Clubs are a business. General managers run the business and are often judged partially on adherence to the overall club budget. Golf course maintenance is a big figure in that overall club budget. Many managers are given a bonus that has a component they are graded on for meeting their forecasted budget. When the golf course superintendent’s portion of the overall budget is greater than forecast then it could cost the manager some money.

6. LOYALTY

In a beautiful relationship there is a huge amount of trust between the superintendent and GM. There are often private discussions of a sensitive nature and those comments need to be considered privileged information. There will be times to disagree behind closed doors but it is very important that the two individuals be supportive of each other and work with a united front when dealing with the board and committees.

7. PROFESSIONAL ANIMOSITY

Nobody likes to talk about it but egos can get in the way of superintendents and GMs. There is no room for this and ultimately it is seldom that a superintendent will win the battle of egos. Set the egos aside. If the facility succeeds there is plenty of room for accolades for all and that often ends in above-average compensation or bonuses.



Advancing your career

Some superintendents desire a long career at the facility where they work and stay there for decades. Others

choose to move up the career ladder and move on to greater responsibilities and much higher compensation levels. I have found that the general manager can be so important in helping the superintendent in his career advancement.

I consider all of the managers who I have worked with and the general managers that I have worked for as key people in mentoring me over the years. Watching, listening, learning from how they manage people and handle leadership responsibilities has been important. Those GMs that take the time and have an

active interest in helping you grow are the best kind of people to work for.

What are your existing skills and what skills might you need to move on in your career? The gap that might exist can be learned when given opportunities to take on more responsibility or learn new skills through external education and support of networking opportunities and service through industry associations.

Some of my peers have attained certifications, received graduate degrees, learned a new language and managed other departments and projects beyond the normal scope that they were hired for. All of that bodes well to advance within the organization you work for or if you will need those skills on your next job.



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MAKING THE MAGIC. If we know what the major potential issues are in a relationship then what can be done to be sure the honeymoon lasts forever? Several ideas that will work should be put on a checklist to evaluate each and every year.

As a superintendent use effective communication with weekly meetings with the GM. It is best to also play the golf course or at least tour it so there are no surprises. I have never met a general manager that likes surprises. Hearing about a mainline break in the irrigation system should not come from golfers but be reported immediately to the front office.

With today's technology we can be in touch almost instantaneously with our supervisors.

Early on in my career I was told of a general manager that had a plaque on her wall, behind her desk, that said “Bring Me Solutions, Don't Bring Me Problems.” Any superintendent that follows that premise will surely have a great relationship with their GM.

Be sure to understand the mission, vision and goals of the facility. This should be shared with your staff and explained thoroughly to all new hires. If those items don't exist then departments may be headed in different directions and the left hand won't know what the

right hand is doing.

Check your ego at the door. I worked for a wonderful GM in Jim Brewer who was at LACC for 37 years. Not a day went by in which I would tell myself that I was entering Mr. Brewer's kingdom and he was King! He was the boss and I had the utmost respect for him. The buck stopped with him and while we both were well respected in our industries there was no room for any level of discord. Department heads worked in unison and that was all a part of what made The Los Angeles Country Club the great club that it was.

Budgets are guidelines that a superinten-

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dent tries to adhere to. Through the use of proper purchasing, labor management and resource management most years' budgets should be met. In the years disasters take place, or unexpected circumstances, then it is important the GM be informed monthly of any variances and also if the board needs to make overall adjustments due to down revenues.

Loyalty is not something that you can turn on or off. You are either loyal or you are not. Be honest and be supportive. It is very important to be there working alongside the GM not only when times are good but when they are bad as well. Be the go to guy that gets it done. When the superintendent is the guy you can count on and also the guy that has your backside covered it is the glue that holds the relationship together.

TIES THAT BIND. The happiest of superintendents are those people who love going to work each and every day. A major part of that

The benefits

Some of the benefits of a strong relationship have been discussed. But none is more important than having the general manager serve as an advocate for the golf course superintendent.

Each club has a different governance structure but most utilize the general manager as the conduit for information from department heads to the board of directors, finance committee, etc. Therefore the GM should be serving as an advocate and spokesperson to advance the needs of the greens department.

If the superintendent communicates effectively, is a team player, is loyal and runs his department with fiscal prudence then it is likely that the GM will carry the proper message to the leadership of the club to get the resources required to meet the goals and expectations of the club.

is liking the people you work with and who you work for.

We don't always get to choose who we work for but we all get to choose whether or not we want to make that relationship work. There are so many upsides for you, your career and the success of the facility to not want to work hard to make the superintendent and

general manager relationship work. Make it a priority each and every day and you won't be disappointed. **GCI**

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