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## WHAT'S IN A TITLE?

Dr. John argues that titles should be reserved for positions that deserve titles.

I recently wrote an article in the Green Section about developing an internship at your golf course. In the article, I hinted to the fact that the demand for interns far exceeds the supply of students. This discrepancy in the numbers has given students the upper hand when it comes to the decision-making process. So how do interns and soon-to-be grads ultimately make their decision on which job to take?

**THE LURE OF A TITLE.** In an effort to attract students and recent graduates to their club, superintendents have creatively developed various titles indicative of the leadership roles so desperately desired. Take a look at the various job boards and you'll find the suitably named assistant superintendent and a slew of secondary titles such as second assistant, assistant in training, graduate assistant and foreman. There are also several other titles for specialized leadership like spray technician, irrigation technician, and turf technician. Many of these names aren't new, but they (for some reason) can be highly attractive to the younger generation.

As director (yes, even I have a title) of the golf turf management program at Penn State, I find the students often clouded by the necessity of a title upon graduation. Perhaps the thought is that if a classmate gets a better title that he or she is going to become more successful. If it's anything like most of the younger generation, perhaps they are thinking that they ALREADY made it.

**WHAT'S CAUSING THE SENSE OF ENTITLEMENT?** In what seems to be an increasing trend, many students from what is often thought of as the entitlement generation feel that they DESERVE a title. In some cases,

they actually do while in others they couldn't be farther from reality. In a discussion with friends over a few pints, we used the example of little league sports around the country. One friend pointed out that they don't keep score at their child's sporting match. Another made fun of the fact that although they keep score at their son's game, that "everyone is a winner since they all get trophies at the end of the season."

So although many feel that they deserve a title because of their 2 to 4 years of "hard work" at school and their two summer internships, they soon find out that the hard work is just beginning.

**WHY OFFER THE TITLE?** When thinking about it from the perspective of the golf course superintendent, I can completely understand why titled positions are created and offered. I would be doing whatever I could to get a competitive advantage in the hiring process over another course.

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Building an army of turfgrass graduates with a string of titles from 1st assistant to AITs to graduate assistants would be a logical choice if the finances were there to back up the titles. I would be even more creative and create new positions to woo a potential grad.

I can see the interview process when they look to work at a different course. "I see on your resume that you were traffic coordinator at your last position. What exactly does that entail?" asks the superintendent.

Quick and energetic to respond, the applicant describes how he "was responsible for diverting cart traffic on worn areas throughout the course." In his head, the traffic coordinator is thinking, "Surely my meticulous roping skills make me a perfect fit for the 1st assistant position."

So if I suggest that the students overthink the importance of a titled position, but go on to say that I would create as many titles as possible then what's my point.

**A SATURATED MARKET?** We in academia often hear about a saturated market and are asked "Why are you continuing to send so many students out in the industry?" I even had a student applying for an internship position receive an email from the superintendent questioning the student's career choice and describing advancement in the industry as "challenging for about two decades with many sacrifices involved along the way."

On the surface, I actually agree

with the superintendent's misguided advice. The road to becoming a superintendent is long and full of sacrifice. For this reason, many graduates never make it to the level of superintendent. The bottleneck at the top means that only those good enough, patient enough and lucky enough make it to that level.

Despite the long road to the top, job placement for graduates is about 100 percent. Referring back to my opening

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They do. But only when they know what they're talking about and have first made an effort to understand the situation, talk to the superintendent, and ask intelligent questions.

Because as I said above, the golfer is just as responsible for a course's condition as the superintendent is. (Among the best things you can do is help others in your group understand their effect on the course and take better care of it.)

Finally, please thank your superintendent every once in a while for the terrific job he or she is doing under difficult, and constantly changing, conditions. Say hello, strike up a conversation, and you never know what you might learn. You might even get some helpful tips for that backyard garden you have at home.

Enjoy your game, enjoy your course,

Tim Moraghan  
 Principal  
 ASPIRE Golf GCI

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statements and my Green Section article, the demand far exceeds the supply.

So what's the solution?

I'm not even sure what the problem is to be honest, so it's hard to come up with a solution. I tend to focus more on what it takes for students to reach that highest and often unattainable goal rather than the title of their first position following graduation. My focus with students in the 2-year program is about setting and understanding goals.

Often falling on deaf ears, I try to explain how sacrificing titles and even financial gain early in their career may be necessary to reach their career goal. We even have superintendents in as guest speakers who share their stories of personal and professional sacrifice that ultimately led them to their current position. The host of the recent U.S. Open at Merion comes to mind.


If there's no solution (and possibly no problem) then what's your point?

I guess I don't really have a point. My general feeling is that the market is still strong and that although the road to success is a long and difficult one, the cream will ultimately rise to the top. Those that don't have the intestinal fortitude will leave the business, making way for those that had the patience and luck to stick it out.

If we really want to help our early career (and future of the industry) professionals, perhaps titles should be reserved for positions that deserve titles. Giving new employees a false sense of leadership and position within the club through watered-down titles only continues to reinforce an entitled generation who grew up receiving a trophy just for showing up.

Success in this business is tough. Showing up isn't enough. GCI

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