

GENERALIZING

Pretty much every time I write about the relationship between superintendents and general managers – no matter how positive I try to keep it – I upset a few GMs and get a couple of nastygrams from good club executives. I'll try to avoid that this time as I attempt to put some perspective on Bruce Williams' excellent cover story on GM/Super relationships.

Oh hell, why even try? I know I'm going to get those emails, so here's what I really think.

GCI is, at its heart, a superintendent-centric publication. We tend to empathize with the turfheads and we occasionally joke about the blazer-wearers, burger-flippers and shirt-folders in the other departments. I think that's a function of our editorial mission, but also partly because – up until a few years ago – the supers were nearly always the underdogs in the facility pecking order. They were all too often the blue collar dudes who did what they were told and who stayed down in the “barn” away from the customers. Thus, we rooted for them the same way Cleveland fans root for the Browns or Chicagoans pull for the Cubs: with enthusiasm tempered by realism.

But, things have changed over the past decade. The balance has shifted – particularly in the post-recession golf market. There is growing recognition that a good super is perhaps the most critical factor to success in a crazy, competitive market. And, when push has come to shove (often when a GM at a smaller facility “resigned” for budget or performance reasons) superintendents are increasingly being thrust into the GM job. Why?

A growing number of owners recognize the fact that superintendents tend to be stabilizing forces internally, they already manage the facility's biggest budget (usually to the penny), and they tend to make up for what they lack in club management skill with plenty of trustworthiness and commitment.

That is NOT to say that GMs as a rule are

not trustworthy or committed. I just know from talking to a lot of supers who've become GMs overnight, it's often because ownership is exasperated by the lack of consistent quality out there and fed up with churning through managers every other year.

(GMs: Before you start composing your angry email to me, be advised that I am NOT talking about CMAA-level managers who are trained, educated, experienced professionals. I'm talking about guys who ended up managing the front of the house at a golf facility because

they couldn't hack it at Applebees. If you're reading this, you are not that guy.)

But here's the thing. Hardly any superintendents I talk with really want to be GMs. Either the job is simply given to them after the untimely departure of the previous manager or they seek it out because they're worried about what a new guy might do. In most cases there's very little additional compensation. Owners

see it as an opportunity to consolidate an “unnecessary” position and save a few bucks.

And that, my friends, is wrong. It's not fair to double the workload of the super and it's not a sustainable management structure in most facilities. A good general manager is equally as valuable to the success of a business as a good superintendent. Yes, the primary thing customers look for in choosing a facility is conditioning value for the dollar and that is a primary role for the super. But, the next most important thing on the list is outstanding customer service. And that all flows from the GM.

Today's GM – no matter what his or her background might be – should be the chief customer service officer for the facility. That means establishing a culture of really caring about the people who walk in the door and treating them like... er... customers. Tons of courses offer a good place to play. The ones that make the customer feel special will thrive in the leaner, meaner golf market of the future. **GCI**



Pat Jones
Editorial director and publisher

GOLF COURSE INDUSTRY

Serving the Business of Golf Course Management

Vol. 25 No. 11

GIE Media, Inc.

4020 Kinross Lakes Pkwy, 2nd floor

Richfield, OH 44286

Phone: 800-456-0707

Fax: 330-659-0823

EDITORIAL

Pat Jones

Publisher/Editorial director
pjones@gie.net

Mike Zawacki

Editor
mzawacki@gie.net

Kyle Brown

Associate Editor
kbrown@gie.net

Bruce Williams

Senior contributing editor

Bill Brown

Contributing editor

SALES

Russell Warner

National account manager
216-236-5802

Martha Corfman

Manager, books
330-523-5366

Ted Schuld

Account manager
216-236-5937

Maria Miller

Conferences manager
330-523-5373

Bonnie Velikonya

Classified sales
330-523-5322

Jodi Shipley

Marketing coordinator
330-523-5368

GRAPHICS / PRODUCTION

Andrea Vagas, Creative director
Jamie Winebrenner, Graphic Designer
Helen Duerr, Production director
Cara Clark, Production coordinator

CORPORATE STAFF

Richard Foster Chairman
Chris Foster President and CEO
Dan Moreland Executive Vice President
James R. Keefe Executive Vice President
Marco Urbanic Director, Integrated Data Systems
Andrea Vagas Director, Creative
Helen Duerr Director, Production
Lindsey Betzhold Audience Development
Maria Miller Manager, Conferences
Kelly Orzech Director, Accounting
Irene Sweeney Manager, Corporate Communications
Kevin Gilbride Business manager, GIE Ventures

Golf Course Industry is a member of:

Golf Course Superintendents

Association of America

National Golf Foundation

Golf Course Builders Association of America

The Irrigation Association

Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment

