



GENERAL MANAGERS: FRIEND OR FOE?

There's no need for the often strained relationship.

Most of my speeches are to superintendents, but earlier this year I addressed club managers. Among the points I made was the need for them to show a little love to their supers and grounds crews.

My talk was met with good response, but more than one GM came to me afterward and said something like: "I'd be glad to be nicer to my super, but he makes it difficult because every time we talk, he makes it very obvious that he doesn't like the way our course/club is being run." Those comments hit a nerve because I remember how I felt when I was working at clubs and the often-strained relationship I had with management. Ever since, I've been trying to see the issue from both sides. Here's what I've learned.

WHAT SUPERINTENDENTS DON'T LIKE ABOUT GENERAL MANAGERS

- Management rarely understands what I do and how hard the job can be, particularly since it is governed by uncontrollable factors like the weather.
- The only time managers come to talk is when they want to cut the maintenance budget or "make me do more with less."
- It's common and necessary to bring in outside experts to review agronomics, architecture, irrigation, trees, and so on. But the manager is usually dismissive or disrespectful of consultants – that is, if this expense hasn't already been cut from the budget. This is very shortsighted as these experts often save the club money.
- One of the biggest enemies is time, but managers procrastinate when it comes to freeing funds to keep the course in its best possible shape. Many maintenance practices have to be done at specific times so stonewalling can cause real problems. Just because food and beverage business is down, don't take it out on the golf course.

- You don't like reporting to a general manager. In your mind, you should be the equal of the manager, since you are as responsible for the golf course as the manager is for the "house." Along with that, many supers resent the stature the manager enjoys with officers, committees, and members.

WHAT GENERAL MANAGERS DON'T LIKE ABOUT SUPERINTENDENTS

- It's not your money, it's the members' money, and the super doesn't realize the manager's most important job is to manage those funds wisely.
- There's a difference between "cutting costs" and "reducing expenses," and superintendents who don't understand that difference are asking for trouble. A superintendent and manager who work together will come up with smart ways to reduce costs without affecting maintenance. As with so much else, it's about communication.
- Speaking of communication, it has to be mutual. A smart manager wants to know what's going on out on the course so he can inform members, officials, and customers before there is a problem. In return, the manager should let the superintendent know where the course/club stands financially, as well as the board's philosophy, so an intelligent plan can be executed.
- Managers want to know why you always seem to be in a bad mood. It follows from the different natures of the jobs and the individuals who go into these lines of work. Managers tend to be outgoing, while superintendents spend their time worrying about less "human" concerns. It's a bit of a cliché, but I've observed countless superintendents who could help themselves enormously simply by smiling and waving when they see golfers out on the course. Asking members if they've noticed anything amiss out there, soliciting their opinions and questions

– these actions effect how the super is viewed and take pressure off the manager, who has to answer: "What's wrong with the super?"

Just as superintendents complain about managers who don't know anything about maintenance, managers say supers have no idea what it takes to run the club. I wrote in this space a few months ago that the superintendent and golf professional should work

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closer together; the same is true of the super and the manager.

Trust me, the manager knows course quality is a top priority of members/players, which is why the GM is all over the superintendent about maintaining the level of conditioning. A top-quality course helps sell memberships, real estate, outings, and events.

General managers and superintendents serve the same masters. They are both on call 24/7 to deal with complaints, problems, or advice. While you're hearing about slow greens and faulty sprinkler heads, the GM is hearing about all that plus not enough shampoo in the showers, problems with the pool and tennis courts, poor lighting in the parking lot, not enough chicken in the Caesar Salad, and why the switch from chocolate-chip to oatmeal raisin at the halfway house?

If you want the manager to put himself in your shoes, do the same for him. Show that you want to understand and help solve his problems and he'll probably be more understanding when you say you need a new triplex mower. **GC**