

by Bruce Williams, CGCS

# You can always get what you want...

... you just need to negotiate. Bruce Williams outlines the aspects of your professional life where you should wheel and deal and how to come out on top.

**E**very day of our lives we are involved in negotiation of some type. It may be with families, employees, employers or our members. Highly successful superintendents embrace negotiating because these skills serve them well in many areas of the profession.

**COMPENSATION.** There is an old adage that you should get an honest day's pay for an honest day's work. While it's doubtful anyone would refute this notion, the real question is how to position yourself financially in a vast market of superintendents.

First, know your market. What are the highest paid positions, the lowest paid positions and the median? What was the compensation of the former superintendent at your facility? What is the compensation of the pro, manager and any other key employees? Knowledge is power in any negotiation. Don't guess. Some of the best compensated areas for turf managers have had decades of sharing information between superintendents.

Timing is everything. Why would you want to negotiate a contract in the winter months if you are in Chicago? Pick your high season when golfers and employers most value your skills and negotiate then and when the course is in top condition.

If your course is one of the top courses in the area, state, or country then use the GCSAA Compensation Survey data to back up your side of the negotiation. Once you convince your employer that you are not being paid a fair and reasonable wage beginning working on the right number. Just like in football, don't try to go 95 yards on one play. Instead, develop a strategy to

get where you should be over a couple of years. If you are \$30,000 behind the average, then consider a \$10K per year raise over three years. If they balk, then indicate the out-of-pocket cost of this raise will be absorbed into the overall budget.

Remember, compensation is not always about money. It includes benefits, too. Don't overlook non-cash compensation. I have negotiated housing allowances for superintendents and even equity in homes to lock them into long-term agreements. If your club indicates they are not giving out raises and you counter with taking another month of paid vacation in lieu of a raise, then imagine the value of an extra month off during the length of your contract.

**CONTRACTS.** Contracts, when properly written, protect both the superintendent and the employer. Contracts should specify the details of employment and, most importantly, the length of employment. If you have a 3-year contract that expires in 30 days, then you have a 30-day contract. Add an automatic rollover into your contract so if neither party chooses to end the contract, it will roll over for another year or more. In essence, this gives you a year's notice of any end to the contract.

If the club doesn't do contracts, then know that as many as 80 percent of club managers reported to CMAA that they had contracts. So if you work at a private club it is likely the club has at least one contract and should be willing to have one with you.

Clubs and lawyers don't tend to like the word "contract," so an alternative is letter of agreement. Remember, it is best to have a document indicating separation terms should this occur down the road. It's always

best to negotiate severance when you are hired rather than when you are fired.

**BUDGET.** A budget is a guide for the cost to run the golf course. It dictates the course's overall plan and conditioning. All too often I visit clubs with champagne dreams and a beer budget. The budget must mirror your ability to provide the desired conditions. If all are to be happy, it is imperative to either raise budgets or lower expectations.

Consider programmatic budgeting. When trimming the budget it is difficult to trim programs than to trim dollars. When asked to eliminate a couple of full-time employees counter with the fact that X-amount of annual man-hours will be lost and that will be visible in specific areas.

Superintendents are great at doing more with less. However, there comes a time when there is no more fat to cut. If a you doesn't negotiate what you need to get the job done, then it is a matter of time before someone new fills your spot and the budget he needs to please members.

**NEEDS FOR THE GOLF COURSE.** Undoubtedly you will find occasions in which you will need to work with other departments at your facility. The kitchen wants an 8 a.m. shotgun so they can serve lunch at 12:30. The pro shop wants it even earlier so they can turn another group out at 1 p.m. and maximize tee times for the best revenue. What matters most is the success of the facility and not any one department.

Can you get the course ready by 7:30 a.m.? Where there is a will there is a way. Find ways to make things happen and negotiate the purchase of equipment or extra manpower and equipment to accommodate the needs of other departments.

Each day provides an opportunity for superintendents to negotiate. If you find yourself coming up on the short end of such negotiations, then it is time to learn how to walk away with a win-win outcome in most negotiations. Read a book, watch a video or take a seminar on negotiation. If you only come away with a few ideas, then you still are much better off in the long run. **GCI**

Bruce Williams, CGCS, is GCI's senior contributing editor.