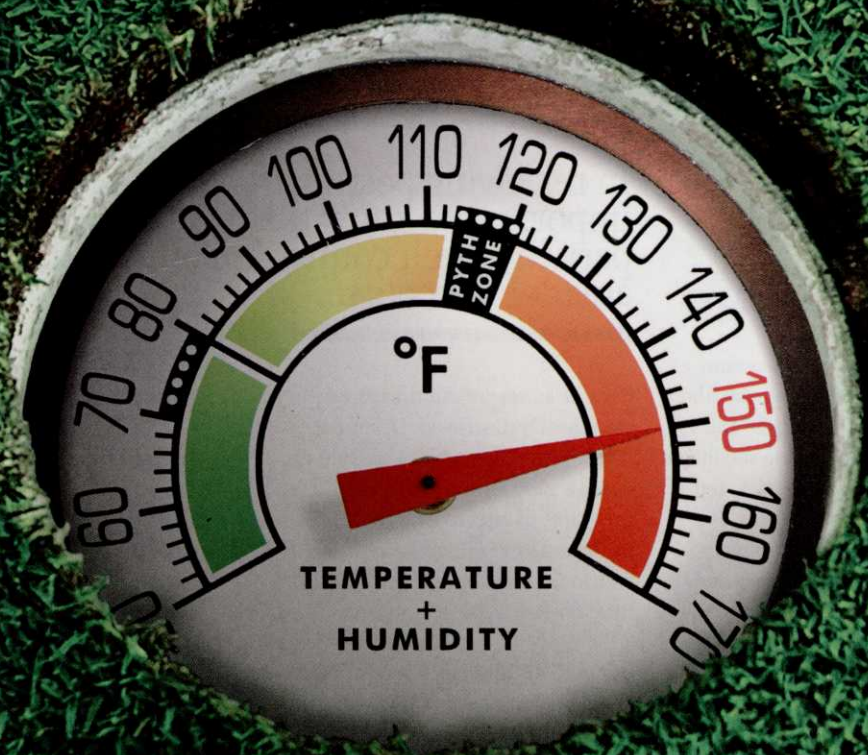


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John E. Kaminski, Ph.D. is an assistant professor, Turfgrass Science, and director of the Golf Course Turfgrass Management Program at Penn State University. You can reach him at jek156@psu.edu.

DOCUMENTING WHAT YOU SEE

I recently finished my 17th and final internship visit; a one-day trip to the West Coast where I spent more time on the plane than I did in California. These trips have been ongoing since mid-May and during this two-month period, I've been able to see first-hand some of the problems superintendents have been dealing with.

EARLY IN THE SEASON. My first trip took me south to North Carolina where things were really just getting going. The obvious diseases like spring dead spot and large patch were apparent. However, an unusual problem that was observed on at least one course was caused by an early spring green up of the warm-season grasses followed by a few hard frosts. The limited rooting caused some serious damage to the newly emerging roots and setback the turf into the season.

In many areas where cool-season grasses are grown, the spring was about 3 to 4 weeks ahead of schedule and the *Poa* jumped early making seedhead control difficult. As for diseases, red thread was as about as severe as I've ever seen it and many courses were dealing with it. In fact, some courses had it so badly significant damage to the fairways occurred. Dollar spot was also early and although it came on fast, it fizzled in many areas until later in the season.

DISEASES HITTING THEIR STRIDE. June was met with a screeching halt to disease activity. Trips around the Philadelphia, New York, New England, Canada and Chicago were, however, met with different biotic and abiotic challenges. Although several diseases like brown ring patch, dollar spot, anthracnose and that nagging red thread were causing some minor problems, Mother Nature was the big story.

On the East Coast, we were getting

some decent rains, which seemed to come in a timely and appropriate manner. In the Midwest, however, the burnt and dried-out grass could be seen from the airplane's window seat. These conditions were keeping diseases to a minimum, but keeping up with wilt and drought became difficult. Add the record-breaking heat and supers had their hands full.

BACK ON THE HOMEFRONT. During my routine absence from the Penn State campus (trust me, it was a good time to be away), diseases started to ramp up in our test plots. Anthracnose

In reviewing pest-control programs, it is important to know the major problems at a particular golf course and even within specific areas of the course.

became so severe our untreated plots were nearly destroyed. Despite its intense pressure, we saw excellent disease suppression when rotational programs of effective fungicides were utilized. Other diseases, however, continued to progress slowly with little fanfare.

HEADING ABROAD. Into July, conferences and an internship visit took me to Europe and different issues. The UK weather had been miserable all spring and continued during my trip. Temperatures hovered in the 50's and rain seemed continuous. Red thread was probably the most problematic for them with fairy ring a close second.

FINAL ROUND OF VISITS. It wasn't until returning from the UK where things really heated up in our lab and around the region. Samples started arriving daily and diseases around the research facility increased, as well. Dollar spot

was a major problem, and although we have many options, one misplaced application – usually with a fungicide where resistance is an issue – and the control breaks down quickly. In addition to the usual suspects, summer patch was severe and thatch collapse, southern blight, and fairy ring made rare and/or impressive appearances.

What lies ahead? Don't let your guard down. This is the perfect time to reflect on what actually happened this year in terms of pest pressure, what worked and what didn't, and what changed in your program that may have influenced activity.

Now and into September is a good time to fill in the timeline of what happened at your course this season. Although I have been fortunate enough to see a wide range of problems, these issues aren't the same for everyone.

Basic recordkeeping principles are an essential ingredient when it comes to planning for next year. In reviewing pest-control programs, it is important to know the major problems at a particular golf course and even within specific areas of the course.

Don't rely on your memory when it comes to building next year's program. Consider the specific issues dealt with this year, the conditions surrounding those issues, and past historical data to "fine tune" rather than radically change your program year after year. These small adjustments may be the difference between a successful season and one you wish you could forget. **GCI**

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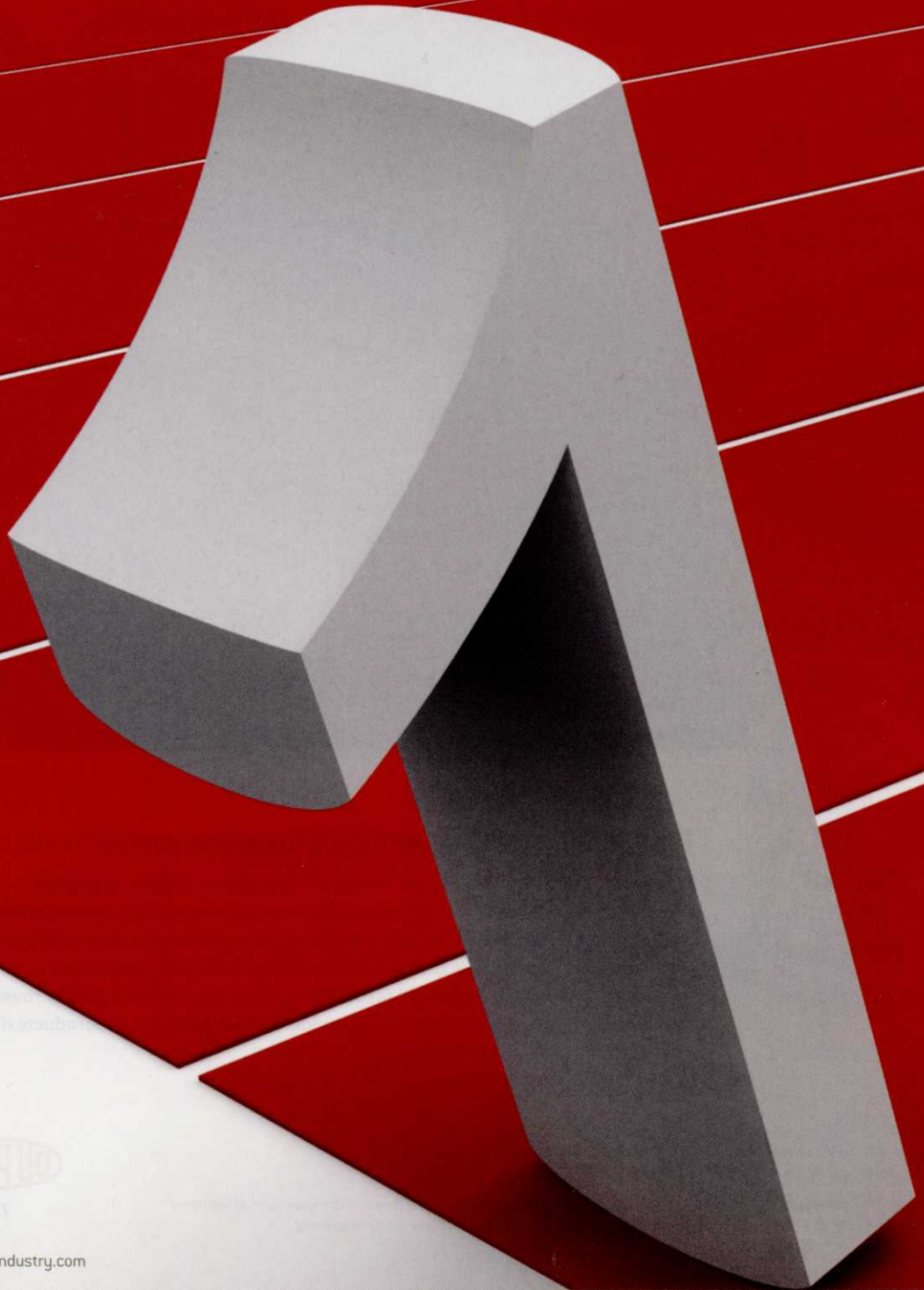
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“One-hundred-plus acres can be difficult to manage with a skeleton crew, but through prioritization and planning a good superintendent can meet the facility’s needs.”





SUPER MVP

Hone the key interpersonal skills that factor into hiring, advancement, compensation and retention.

by Bruce R. Williams, CGCS

Everybody is looking for value today, and this is no different in the management hierarchy of golf course facilities. We all work for someone and that may be a general manager, green chairman, board of directors, owners and management companies. Thinking you are doing a great job for your employer is no longer relative, what matters is how to position yourself as the Most Valuable Person in the management and operation of the facility. In order to do that you need to understand what the employer values most.

Some employers may place greater value on one skill set than another, but consistently I have found several skills to be the major factors for hiring, advancement, compensation and retention.

LEADERSHIP. There are many moving parts to any golf facility. Yes, it takes a golf course in good condition to attract customers but there are a variety of other business activities that make a facility a success. Ownership has to deal with marketing, administration, cash flow, food and beverage and golf programs. There is little time left for employers to be highly involved in the day to day operations of the golf course.

Under normal circumstances a budget is approved prior to the start of the fiscal year. It is expected that the conditions of the golf course will match the financial support. This doesn't

happen in a vacuum and it takes leadership to make this a reality.

Most superintendents are given the task to hire their team and develop them into a cohesive unit that can effectively and efficiently provide great playing conditions daily. To do that, leadership skills are essential. Surrounding yourself with the right people and having a vision for the current and future condition and development of the golf course is imperative.

SKILLED MANAGER . Scheduling people to get tasks done is important but much more important is analyzing operations to ensure efficiency. One-hundred-plus acres can be difficult to manage with a skeleton crew, but through prioritization and planning a good superintendent can meet the facility's needs.

Getting the most done while reducing costs is a major challenge. The ability to demonstrate the plan to do this and implementing such a plan brings tremendous value to the employer. For the most part the days of taking on a new job and seeing a budget increase are over. More often we see budget reductions,

however, with increased expectations of conditioning and quality.

It takes a very skilled manager to pull all this off. Sell yourself based on the ability to do this and then be able to show progress that you can share at your annual reviews. If you can do this you will be given strong consideration for MVP.

DETAIL ORIENTED . Current trends show that to be considered a superstar in the business you have to do more with less. Many superintendents do not have the luxury of having ample staff to keep the golf course as detailed as they once did. This does not mean that you can't have attention to detail. Instead, you just have to prioritize the time and cost to take care of such details and also communicate that message to the golfers so that they understand the changes.

My friends at Valley Crest Golf Course Maintenance like to use the term "from the middle out." What they are referring to is the prioritization of maintenance. Certainly greens, tees and fairways are priorities. But

7 Keys to MVP status

1. Identify your employer's needs
2. Build your skills
3. Become a problem solver
4. Project stability through your actions
5. Get feedback
6. Review your personal action points periodically
7. Never rest on your laurels

if you were to paint an imaginary line down the center of each hole and then work outward from that line... is it really necessary to manicure every inch of the golf course daily?

Many facilities that formerly mowed rough twice a week are now opting for just a weekly mowing. Out of play areas that formerly were groomed are now turned into low maintenance areas. Mowing of tree bases may be done less often along with tasks like blowing clippings off of cart paths daily. Every bunker may not need to be raked daily and some are only raking 3-4 days per week with touchups in between regular rakings.

Edging of cart paths is something that makes your golf course look neat and clean but in lean times it is not a necessity for good golf. Tough decisions need to be made to give up a few of the luxuries that budgets just 5 years ago provided for.

When details on the golf course are eliminated it is absolutely necessary to let the golfers and employers know the plan and how it affects them. Given the alternative of lesser quality greens vs. edging cart paths I am sure that all would agree that the greens have the priority. Communications should strongly say that the superintendent does not have less attention to detail but that he and his team are engaging in cost cutting measures to ensure the economic viability of the facility.

PROBLEM SOLVER. Years ago my friend, Roger Stewart, shared with me a sign that was hung on the wall behind his General Manager's desk. It stated, "Bring Me Solutions, Don't Bring Me Problems". That philosophy has always stuck with me. Employers want you to be able to solve almost any problem that you are confronted with. If you have to go to them to get the solution to golf course problems then they may not feel you are bringing value to the workplace.

Nearly every problem has a solution. It is up to us to find the solution or bring in



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people that can help us to solve problems. To instill confidence we should always be able to quickly look at problems and answer some simple questions that will always come up. Be prepared, for example, that when you lose turf you will be asked these questions:

- What happened?
- What are you going to do about it?
- When is it going to be right?
- What will it cost?
- What can we do to prevent it from happening again?

Problem solvers should be able to build the confidence that their employer has in them if they can quickly communicate those things even before the questions are asked.

FINANCIALLY RESPONSIBLE. Zero-base budgeting is more common today than ever before. The days of increasing the annual golf course budget by the CPI are over.

Some line items may increase by 20 percent while other line items may actually go down. If the facility is experiencing a reduction in play, dues, outside parties, etc. then the request of the employer may be to reduce the golf course maintenance budget.

As a sound manager it will be expected that the superintendent will develop a new plan to provide the best conditions with the budget they are provided.

Most employers do not want to get involved in the day to day operations of how to do that. Great value can be shown to the employer by being positive and a team player to accomplish the things that will make the facility successful over the long-term.

“Certainly greens, tees and fairways are priorities. But if you were to paint an imaginary line down the center of each hole and then work outward from that line, then is it really necessary to manicure every inch of the golf course daily?”

COMMUNICATOR. In the movie “Cool Hand Luke” there is a famous line that states, “What we have here is a failure to communicate.”

A Most Valued Person would be someone that doesn’t wait to be asked what is happening. Instead, that individual has a method for communicating things in a strategic and timely fashion.

The use of weekly updates to the employer is imperative. Informal meetings can take place daily, but it is extremely important to set aside a half hour each week to share information with your employer.

Remember, don’t just bring problems to the meeting. Be sure to talk about your successes that week or month and that will elevate you in the eyes of your employer. If you have made cuts, reallocated resources, overcome weather issues, etc., then it will be well to share all of that information.

Getting feedback from your employer is as

important as filling him in on your activities. Listen carefully and be sure you take some notes. You will quickly learn what your employer’s priorities are. It is the ability to align yourself with the direction to accomplish these priorities that will earn you an MVP spot that employers are looking for.

THE TOTAL PACKAGE. Employers are looking for the person that will give them “the most bang for their buck.” Identifying the needs of the employer is imperative.

Things have changed during the 40 years I have been in this industry. It used to be about keeping your golf course in good condition and staying within budget. No doubt those are still things that employers expect. But there is so much more to it today to create a long term value to the employer.

Build the skills that are necessary for success. If you don’t know what your employer is looking for in a valued employee then you need to ask them. Be sure to review those items throughout the year and see if you are working on their priorities and that you have mutually aligned goals for the facility.

Realize that consideration for MVP is each and every year. Never rest on your laurels. Work toward earning that designation in your 20th year as much as you did in your first year of employment. **GCI**

Bruce R. Williams, CGCS, is principal for both Bruce Williams Golf Consulting and Executive Golf Search. He is a frequent GCI contributor.

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Monroe Miller is a retired golf course superintendent. He spent 36 years as superintendent at Blackhawk Country Club in Madison, Wis. Miller can be reached at groots@charter.net.

GEOFFREY CORNISH WAS ONE OF US

One of the best friendships I have had in my life was the result of chance. Geoffrey Cornish had traveled from his home in Amherst, Mass., to Milwaukee to speak at our annual Wisconsin Golf Turf Symposium, and at the meeting's end, he had the chair ask if anyone was going to Madison. I hustled to the speaker's podium and offered him the passenger seat of my F-150. Mr. Cornish quickly accepted, noting, "It will cost me \$50 to fly!"

Although at that moment I didn't know, but by the time we reached our town one and a half hours later I realized what a lucky break had fallen my way. This guy was going to be a lifelong friend of mine. That was back in the mid-1980s.

Geoff wanted to go to Madison to visit close friends of his and Mrs. Cornish – Professor Ted Kozlowski. Kozlowski left UMass to accept a faculty position at Wisconsin, and Geoff didn't want to miss a chance to see them. As it turned out, their home was close to my golf course, and I dropped Geoff at their front door.

There wasn't a silent moment on our trip. My interest in genealogy had led me to New England any number of times, and that led to an annual leafpeekers trip each fall. Mr. Cornish had become the quintessential New Englander after spending his early years in his native Canada. He was so easy to talk to, and I later learned why. His early career was spent with Canadian architect Stanley Thompson and Geoff worked as an apprentice architect, a construction foreman and as a superintendent. He knew golf course management inside and out. And in 1940 he was the golf course superintendent at Winnipeg's St. Charles CC.

We were both veterans; he was of the greatest generation. I never was

able to draw much from him about his WWII experience other than his service was with the Canadian Army and he went into mainland Europe on the first day of D-Day. He fought his way across Europe and into Germany, leading troops as a Major. In my eyes, that service made him a real hero. Like American boys in WWII, his term of service in the military was the duration of the conflict; he was in the service from 1940 – 1945. He suffered an injury but would never give me any details about it. Like so many of that generation, he simply didn't want to talk about it.

Geoff earned his undergrad degree in soil science from the University of British Columbia before the war, and a M.S. degree from UMass in agronomy

“Many times I tried to get at ‘How many courses have you designed?’ He never really gave an answer.”

after. It was there he began his association with Lawrence Dickinson and Joseph Troll in the Stockbridge Turf Program at UMass. He may well have known more about golf turf management than any other architect.

He also knew golf course design, and taught the subject as well as practicing it. He was a popular seminar instructor for the GCSAA, and for years taught golf course design at the Harvard Graduate School of Design. In 1987, UMass honored him with an honorary Doctor of Science degree, the same day the governor received one. After that, I addressed my correspondence to him as “Dr. Geoffrey Cornish.” He was honored, certainly, but every once in a while he would remind me “I didn't earn that degree.”

I always disagreed!

I had a chance to walk a piece of property under consideration for a golf course with Geoff. I had heard about his “quick pace” but I had no idea how fast that really was. And he was talking the whole time, leaving me behind and exhausted despite his 30-plus years my senior.

I love stories Rod Johnson tells from his time working with Geoff on a master plan for Pine Hills CC. Geoff was hesitant to tackle the job – he was busy in New England and Sheboygan was a long way from Amherst. Rod finally persuaded him by sending him a fresh air photo of his golf course and a premier gift box of Wisconsin cheese. Geoff's response was typically brief – “You win.” Two other habits point to Mr. Cornish's frugality – he painted dots rather than lines “to save paint.” And he would travel with only a duffel bag – “it has everything I need, including a sport coat for the board meeting.” Ron Whitten and others have written about his disinterest in money, an unusual and refreshing attribute.

Many times I tried to get at “How many courses have you designed?” He never really gave an answer. But there were plenty – his partner and friend Mark Mungeam estimated it at 200 or so. Geoff never knew what to count – new designs, remodels, added nine, etc. – so he simply didn't count. I am sure it didn't really matter to him.

For years, his address was simply “Fiddlers Green, Amherst, Mass.,” Later, the post office must have insisted on his street and number. His home faced a village green in an area of southeast Amherst. A church was on one end of the green and Geoff's green shuttered white house was next to a comfortable library. My wife and I loved to stop in the fall; he always

(continued on page 57)

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Weird weather this year has been a double-edged sword when it comes to micro aeration.

Time to Vent

By Jason Stahl

Micro aeration proponents are battling a reactive mindset among superintendents. But they hope to see a shift once the industry understands the benefits.