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JACOBSEN

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INDUSTRY

Leading the business of Golf Course Management

Vol 25, No 21

Oct 2013

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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

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FEEDBACK

We'd like to hear from you.

E-mail us at gci@gie.net with your thoughts and opinions.



More mellow

Thank you for putting Basil in your magazine. I thought the entire article was great. Turf needs more of these stories to keep things more mellow than the turf industry is most of the time.

Trevor Morvay
Golf Resort Superintendent
Sawmill Creek Golf Resort and Spa
Camlachie, Ontario

Old vs. new

There are flaws that exist among the professional staffs in our industry. I will touch on the pro shop, which you mentioned in your article about the poor attitude of many pro shops ("Have you hugged your golf pro today?" August, 2013). This is a serious issue which the PGA must pay attention to in the future. There are many professional club pros, but by and large pros at public courses lack management ability, customer service and business capability.

As for superintendents, at one of my courses I have an older

superintendent who has been in the business for decades. He is excellent in his management abilities, his ability to manage his employees and care for his equipment, and order only chemicals and other necessary ingredients for caring for his course. There are many who are like this superintendent. Most are mature in age and have learned the trade by facing the day-to-day battles of golf course grounds operations. This group is very secure in their job.

On the other hand there is a group of younger superintendents who do not belong in the industry. They are good in agronomy, but totally incapable of managing their personnel and making and meeting budgets. They treat their machinery as a daily replaceable item. Many of these new entries into superintendent positions cost owners or members far more than is comprehensible due to their lack of caring, knowledge, and experience.

The superintendents' association should be very careful who they bestow a Class-A designation. The GCSAA has been a dismal failure in sending Class-A superintendents into the workplace, especially the younger ones who are just not trained to take on the responsibilities that are expected of them.

Name withheld on request

