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## THE VALUE OF A GOOD SUPERINTENDENT

We still undervalue and take for granted what you do. This must change.

In the past, my column has addressed the value of master plans, contractors, architects, tree removal plans, and other things. In looking through my titles, while I have written about the things superintendents do, but I have never addressed the value of a good superintendent.

I put myself through college working golf course maintenance. As a result, I have always favored the superintendent's viewpoint on all things golf related. Right or wrong, I have developed the opinion that golfers all too often overlook the difficulty of the superintendent's job.

While it's hard to summarize, I can give you a few ideas, even if quoting others. Some of my favorite pithy quotes concerning superintendents:

*"You'll never be able to define a great superintendent until you had one."*

*"A really good superintendent is much less expensive than a mediocre one."*

*"Anyone can maintain a golf course with a big budget. A great one can do it on a modest one."*

*"Your superintendent is part scientist (entomologist, meteorologist, agronomist, edaphologist (soil science), environmentalist, etc.) part engineer (drainage expert), part financial manager and part purchasing agent. Budget management is important – and time consuming – but they still need to make time to get out and ride their golf course. No one can manage a golf course from an office."*

Of course, he/she is also an HR director who needs to hire, relate to, and inspire lower paid workers (who often don't speak English) every day. I am always amazed at the productivity differences I see between similar golf course crews. A good superintendent

gets a lot out of a crew.

On most days, they also need to work with corporate chieftains with equal aplomb, often switching gears in a matter of seconds. Personnel management isn't taught in turf schools, and probably only lightly touched on in even business schools.

Short version, example No. 1 – growing grass is easy, managing people isn't.

And yet, for all of the above, most people hear "superintendent" and see Bill Murray in Caddy Shack, and many expect to see him (her) in overalls and driving a tractor.

eyes... if not immediately, then soon. But, rising expectations blind most golfers to the "right" and they usually see only the wrong or mistake the best that can be attained given the superintendent's prime assistant is none other than Mother Nature with a mistake by the superintendent.

Superintendents are inventive problem solvers. When they have a problem, they don't call an outside consultant. They usually call the superintendent next door or across town, who more often than not willingly shares all the information – and sometimes equipment – they

“When they have a problem, they don't call an outside consultant. They usually call the superintendent next door or across town, who more often than not willingly shares all the information – and sometimes equipment – they have.”

As regular readers of this magazine know, fellow columnist Terry Buchen can spin a phrase while talking course maintenance. He puts his respect for the qualifications of a good superintendent this way, "All you need is brains and common sense... and the ability to be a team player... and work long hours... and love and understanding of golf....and..."

Short version example No. 2 – the list of things a superintendent must do – and do well – goes on and on.

The hardest part about the job is that it's so easy to measure the results – you can see absolutely everything they do, right and wrong. Nothing doesn't show up. All actions are reflected on the ground and in golfers

have. They may not have invented networking, but they have perfected it for their own use.

Somewhere in the average superintendent's routine, is taking time to mentor their fellow superintendents, including the next generation. Most attend local, regional and national meetings of their associations to further their education, and share what they know with others.

We still undervalue everything a good superintendent does. We take them entirely too much for granted. We think we understand their job as well as they do... and often let them know that. It's time for that to change, and I nominate 2014 as the right time to do it. GCI

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# Engage Plan B

**Your career as a golf course superintendent hasn't worked out. Never fear, says Bruce Williams, you have options.**

**by Bruce Williams, CGCS**

**P**eople aspiring to be golf course superintendents spend a lot of time and money to move up the ranks in the profession. It is not uncommon for superintendents to spend four years in college and as many as 10 years working on the crew, learning as an intern and eventually joining the management team as an assistant golf course superintendent. Golf course management is a very specialized industry and it does require a lot of training and education to manage facilities worth millions of dollars with equipment fleets at close to \$1 million and budgets from \$300,000 to \$2 million for an 18-hole golf course.

I often get calls from people who are looking to the future, some are just planning ahead, and others find themselves unemployed and looking for a new job or even a new career path. Typically, golf course superintendents are good planners when it comes to their courses, but they are lacking when it comes to thinking ahead about their careers. With more golf courses closing than opening it's obvious golf is not growing. This has made employment into a game of musical chairs. Fewer jobs are available and many of those are being filled internally or with recent grads. Considering all of this, there is no time better than the present for superintendents to develop Plan B in their careers.

Plan B may or may not be a direction you currently want to go, but it provides alternatives should the need or desire arise to make a switch in your career plans.

**TYPICAL RESPONSE.** Whenever I ask a superintendent what he would do if he wasn't a superintendent there are always the typical answers. They usually start off with the main three answers of selling equipment, fertilizer, or chemicals in the turf market. Yes, that is a viable career path and many have been successful in those endeavors. We all know how many of those jobs open up in our areas in any given year and it may be even less than the amount of open superintendent positions. If one goes that route it is beyond knowing the products and managing turf.

Good salespeople will be successful when they learn how to sell, build a book of business, service their clients, and bring value to their customers. It may take time to grow sales to make the new boss happy and don't expect it to happen overnight.

**MOVING UP.** Another obvious career alternative is to move on up in the management structure and become a director of golf or a general manager. I am seeing more and more clubs taking a good look at their superintendents to fill the top jobs when they become available. Owners and boards

recognize the commitment, education, expertise and skills superintendents have qualify them for a top job. As costs are being cut it is not surprising to see more golf facilities downsizing at the management level. Where it once was standard to have a pro, manager and superintendent, now there will be fewer people in management providing opportunities for supers to vie for the top job.

Consider moving outside of your comfort zone to open up new career opportunities. For example, some people are very good at their hobbies and could easily transfer those skills into a new business. A fellow who worked for my father enjoyed the outdoors and flying. Eventually he turned his offseason job of being a bush pilot into being a full-time pilot and guide in Alaska. Another fellow was an avid photographer. He took those skills and has risen prominently into one of the best landscape and outdoor photographers around. A neighboring superintendent in Chicago loved to fish. He liked it so much he started a charter boat business to take clients out fishing on Lake Michigan and it became his full-time job. These are a few examples of people who have taken a passion and turned it into a business venture.

**THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX.** One we run out of the standard alternatives and the few


## TRANSFERABLE SKILL SETS

**S**adly, many believe all they know and can do is to be a golf course superintendent. Being a superintendent is a wonderful career path. But things are changing in the industry and I suggest people look at what skills they have and what skills they need to develop to be marketable in the current economy and employment picture. Here is a list of typical skills many superintendents possess that transcend into other employment opportunities:

- Scheduler
- Administrator
- Logistics
- Fleet manager
- Purchaser
- Planner
- Organizer
- Communications
- Tech savvy
- People manager
- Motivator
- Trainer
- Budget management
- Resource manager
- Negotiator
- Educator

Of course, there is advanced training, as well. These specialized areas include:

- Horticulture
- Environmental science
- Plant diseases
- Vegetable and crop production
- Tree care
- Landscape
- Drainage
- Landscape design
- Soil



**Typically golf course superintendents are good planners when it comes to their golf courses but lacking when it comes to thinking ahead in their career.”**

hobbies or passions we might have it is time to do some real thinking. As usual, I don't intend to tell you what to do. Rather, this article is intended to get you to think about other possibilities should you choose to change career paths or have hit a dead end at your facility.

The easiest examples of successful transition come from friends. I admire their entrepreneurial spirit and for having the courage to take the leap to think outside the box. Some transitioned before leaving their superintendent positions while others had to do it on the spur of the moment.

Greg Wojick is a well-known superintendent in the Connecticut market. At the height of his career he opted to step back and build a business. Greg used some of the skills he needed as a superintendent and added a few more. Currently, his business develops websites and also works with planning and mapping for golf courses.

Wolfgang Mueller was a neighbor of mine in Chicago. He managed Onwentsia Club for many years. Wolfgang had some very prominent members and one decided to develop his farm into a wonderful golf course (Conway Farms Golf Club) and also to develop part of the parcel into housing and commercial real estate. It took quite a few years for Wolfgang to develop the site for Mr. R.D. Stuart and his partners, but land planning, project management and such were the skills that allowed Wolfgang to manage the process and the property. In addition, Mr. Stuart also had other properties in Wyoming and South America that required attention so Wolfgang became a property manager in several states and around the globe.

You may remember Danny Quast who did a great job as superintendent at Medinah CC in Chicago. After his stint at

Medinah, Danny decided it was time to use his business and organizational skills to develop several businesses in Wisconsin. Danny has a tree nursery and landscape business and also has a very successful distributorship from which he sells a variety of materials to the horticulture industry.

Mike Harmon was working for Toll Bros. building Moorpark Country Club. Once that course was built out there were several opportunities to work in other areas of the organization. Mike had the right skills to move into such a position. Today, he still works for Toll Bros., but his days are spent negotiating contracts, obtaining permits, planning infrastructure. Mike's story is a case of not leaving an organization, but rather changing roles and utilizing a number of his superintendent skills to take on greater responsibility.

We all spend considerable time communicating. Now that may be as a writer, a blogger, a speaker or as a planner. It is easy to see a few of us who have taken those skills and put them to use after our superintendent days were over. Publications are always looking for solid writers. Hone your skills and submit articles to publications like Golf Course Industry. Then there are some writers who have gone on to develop complete books like Mike Bavier and his book "Practical Golf Course Management – The Magic of Greenkeeping."

Superintendents are problem solvers. Thus, there are times when we must invent new tools and equipment to accomplish the tasks at hand. A few superintendents have turned that into a viable manufacturing and distribution operation for their products. Some have even sold their patents or rights to a few of the major manufacturers. Recently a new product has been developed and is sold as Sun-Screen. This product is superintendent driven and sold. Without Gary Grigg, who was a superintendent at the time, there

would not be Gary's Green and a variety of other products from that company. Gary walked away from a prominent job as a superintendent to start his own business which has become very successful in the last 17 years.

**A FEW MORE TO ADD TO THE LIST.** Several of my friends gave up their jobs to venture into golf course architecture and design work. Now they may never equal the heights of Tom Fazio or Robert Trent Jones as architects, but a few have found sufficient work in smaller projects and remodels that bigger firms may turn down.

Lots of businesses hire professional trainers. These people learn the technicalities of a product line or principles that they share with audiences. Good communication skills prepare you for this and it is an easy transition.

I have met a fair number of former superintendents now working in the government sector, especially for water agencies. We understand water. We understand projects. We understand processes and we understand project management. Altogether, those traits makes for a good fit.

While not all turf is the same it is fairly easy to switch the type of grass areas we maintain. Superintendents have become sports turf managers for minor league teams, parks systems, school fields and even cemeteries.

For those wanting to stay closer to golf, consider becoming an agronomist for the USGA or a regional agronomist for a management company. Start your own management company or golf course maintenance outsourcing? Better yet, buy a golf course at rock bottom prices and you can be your own boss.

Superintendents have many skills. We do many things inside or on the peripheral of our existing jobs. Think about your alternatives and develop a Plan B. It is always nice to have options, especially when it comes to our careers.

*Bruce Williams, CGCS, is principal for both Bruce Williams Golf Consulting and Executive Golf Search. He's GCI's senior contributing editor.*





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## THE MORNING AFTER

As the Golf Industry Show hype wears off and the adrenaline returns to normal, how to best maximize your show experience.

**B**y now we have all returned from hopefully a warm and sunny Orlando and a very successful 2014 Golf Industry Show experience. So it's not unusual to come off that show high and now have to deal with an unusual sense of emptiness.

Think about it. You're invigorated and ready to keep going. You've spend a week meeting friends for breakfast or coffee. You've participated in networking that spanned throughout the day and night.

Now what?

It's similar to the morning-after feeling superintendents have to deal with following a major professional golf event. In some cases, the preparation takes years. In the months leading up to the event the controlled chaos begins to kick in. And during the week of the event the feelings of excitement and elation are difficult to describe to those not in the industry. With the event over the tents come down and the attention fades just as quickly. You're almost left with a lingering sense of event withdrawal. You're left asking: "Where did everyone go?"

Attending the Golf Industry Show has a similar effect on our psyche.

Social media allows the hype of an event like the Golf Industry Show to steadily build well in advance. Vendors create and launch their campaigns to show the latest and greatest in equipment and chemistry. Attendees are busy discussing with friends and colleagues what they plan on doing during show hours. Classes, trade show booths, and even planning the week's evening entertainment becomes all-consuming.

If you have never attended a Golf

Industry Show, the feeling I get inside is hard to explain. For me, it seems like one really long, exciting day. You get tired, your feet hurt, your back groans from the constant stretching, and your throat goes hoarse from the seemingly endless conversations. Nevertheless, you just keep pushing forward – learning, networking and having fun.

So what do you do when you get back home? Here are some ideas for you to consider, and hopefully implement, in the days following your show experience.

“With the event over the tents come down and the attention fades. You're almost left with a lingering sense of event withdrawal.”

**TO THE CLOUD!** For those who attended, you spent the week networking with like-minded individuals from all over the world. If you didn't utilize a mobile app at the show, you are probably emptying out that portfolio bag with at least a hundred business cards. Let's get them into the cloud so you can continue networking with these individuals.

You can utilize an app called World Card Mobile. This app for both Android and iOS lets you literally take a picture of a business card and have it entered into your address book. This will save you hours.

Attending educational seminars and sessions, or just walking the trade show floor, can leave you with a mountain of pamphlets and packets when you arrive home. If you did not

utilize Evernote at the show to collect all this, no problem. You can use an app called ScannerPro. This application allows you to photograph documents and automatically load them to either Dropbox, GoogleDrive or Evernote or all three. Having these documents uploaded into Evernote allows them to be completely searchable for future reference.

**GET SOCIAL.** For many of us, we will exchange social media contact information. When you arrive home, be sure to update your lists on Twitter to continue to remain connected with your growing network. Remain engaged with those you meet because they will become not only a valuable resource, but also great friends.

For vendors attending the show, arriving back home means it is time to see how successful your social media campaigns were at the event. Download the metrics and analytics to look closely at how your social media campaigns were received by show participants. If you utilized multiple platforms and hashtags to engage your target audience, then be sure to understand what works and what didn't. Likewise, you have the opportunity to expand your social media network, and remember those individuals following you are going to be hungry for more – and new – information. Take advantage of the excitement and increased social authority you gained at the show to continue to engage and grow your business.

Getting back to the office the first day after a big show and doing the things I've outlined will soften the inevitable post-event letdown. It'll also ensure the value of attending the show remains high and leaves you hungry for San Antonio and #GIS15. **GCI**



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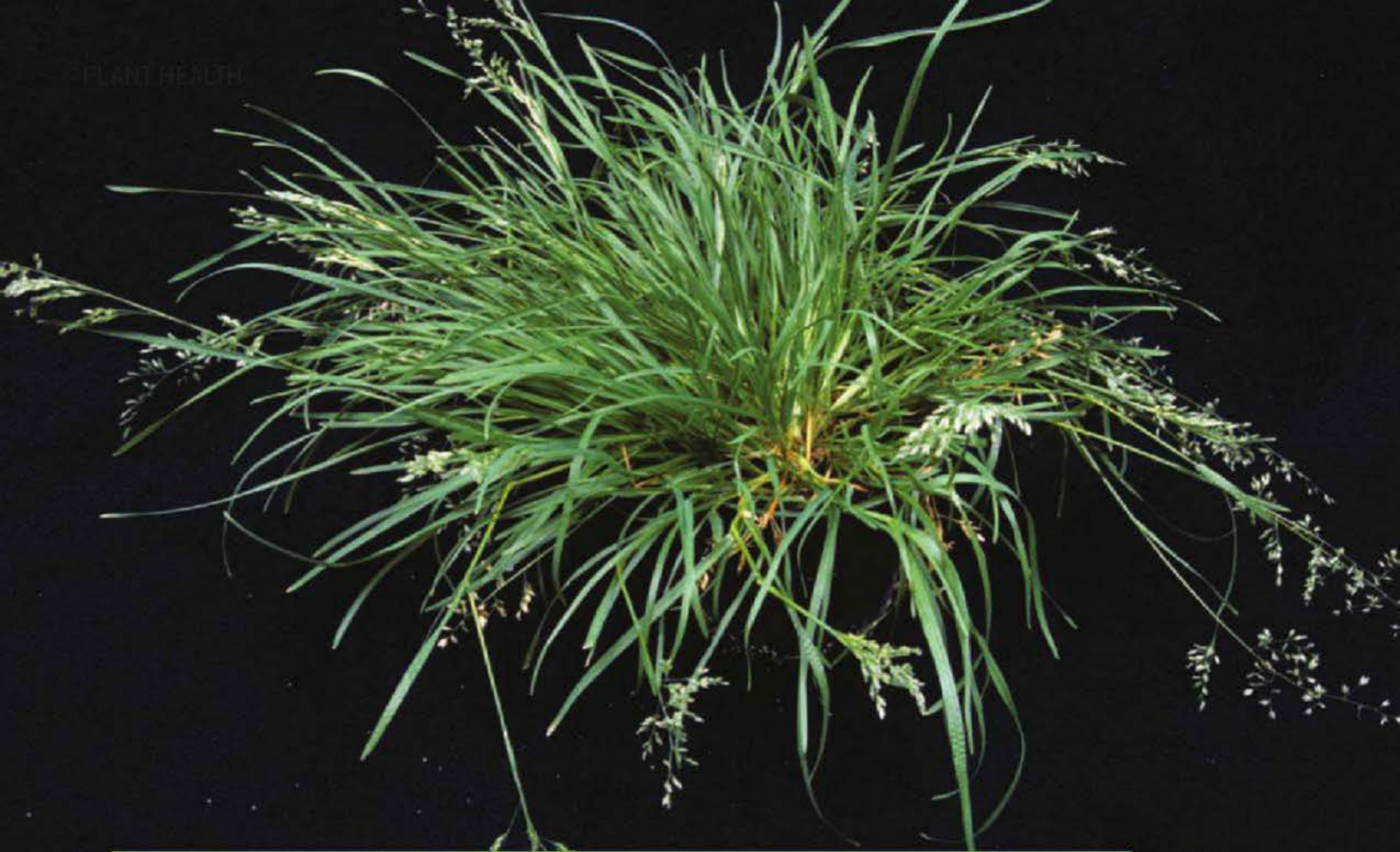
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# Poa particulars

**Knowledge is the best weapon in controlling *Poa annua* on your course. Our experts give you the rundown on what you need to know to deal with this formidable foe.**

By John Torsiello

**C**ontrolling *Poa annua* remains on the stickiest problems superintendents face on a year in and year out basis. Eradication, where desired, is extremely difficult, while management in areas where superintendents must live grudgingly with the grass by incorporating it into the spectrum of their course's strains is equally challenging. But that hasn't stopped researchers and superintendent from continuing to study the issue as they seek ways to, if not conquer their testy foe, then at least allow turfgrass managers to live somewhat amicably with *Poa annua*.

A recent report by Dr. Zac Reicher and Dr. Roch Gaussoin, professors in the department of agronomy and horticulture at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, calls *Poa annua*, or annual bluegrass, a "formidable foe." They say chemical controls have evolved over the years and are to a degree

effective, but controlling any grass strain is difficult because of similar physiology and a lack of selective herbicides.

What makes *Poa* such a stout opponent is the simple fact that it is one of the most widespread plants in the world, with the grass found near the Arctic Circle to near the tropics. Obviously, *Poa* has learned to adapt and indeed thrive in a multitude of environments. If, as wags say, cockroaches would be the only animal or insect to survive a nuclear winter they might be munching on *Poa annua* to stay alive.

The UNL report says that controlling annual bluegrass starts with cultural controls because chemical controls have shown to be effective only in the short term and without solid control controls aimed at omitting annual bluegrass re-infestation. And, control is often regional and even course specific.