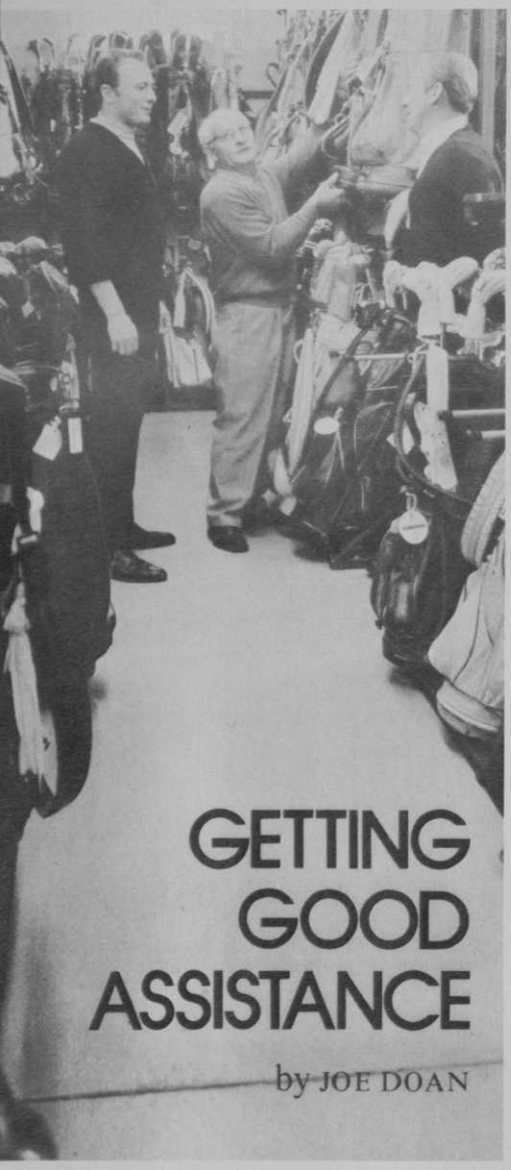

GETTING GOOD ASSISTANCE

by JOE DOAN

Investing time in good training programs could mean getting the most out of dollars spent for pro shop, maintenance and clubhouse assistants. These training programs serve the industry by providing competent people for tomorrow's administrative positions

If an assistant superintendent, breaking in under Dudley Smith of Silver Lake CC, Orland, Park, Ill., can bear up for a period of about six months, when insidious attempts are made to discourage him from making a career of greenkeeping, the probability is that he will endure his two- or three-year novitiate and go on to better things as his own man at his own course.

Discouraging a person from pursuing a career for which he has already had from two to four years college level preparation is hardly in keeping with instructional tradition. The accepted thing is to encourage or inspire the trainee, give him a view of the vistas and blow him up with illusions. When Smith is breaking in an assistant, he will have none of this method.

"I want him to be fully aware of the bad things about being a superintendent," says Smith, who although weathered by his 17 years as a superintendent, has the youthful, downy look of a trainee. "In the first season he's with me I keep reminding him of the long hours we have to put in, the need for being available 24 hours a day, all the problems and headaches associated with the maintenance of a million dollar plus piece of property.

"I really test what I guess you'd call his discouragement quotient," Smith continues. "If he can put up with it for six months and still want to stay in the business, I figure he's got the dedication to make a career of being a superintendent."

Dedication! That old, overworked word is still in business wherever and whenever golf management people talk about the indispensible quality that keeps them tied to the post as superintendents, professionals or club managers. They don't utter the word with reverence; in fact, they smile when they say it. But down deep it's dedication that makes them willing to put in those 80 hours a week when practically everyone around them grumbles if as much as a 40-hour week is imposed on them.

Teaching dedication, more obliquely than directly, has as much to do with the training of a superintendent, professional or club manager as anything else to which persons entering these fields are exposed. Dudley Smith stresses the importance of dedication in an unorthodox way. Probably very few people in the golf management field attempt to get it across via the discouragement testing route. In most cases, it isn't even mentioned, but it's there for the trainee to see. If, within a short time after breaking in on the course or in the shop or in clubhouse, he doesn't sense that it's dedication, or something like it, that keeps the superintendent, professional or manager around long after the 5 o'clock whistle, he's missing the point.

Bill Heald, the professional at Riverside GC, near Chicago, and C.C. Watson, manager of Sunset Ridge, Winnetka, Ill., who discussed their training programs with GOLFDOM along with Dudley Smith, agree that there is no substitute for dedication in a golf management job. They don't beat the theme quite as actively as Smith does, but the word is heard frequently in their conversations.

"We live the game nine months a year," says Heald. "I'm in the shop six days a week and on the seventh I play. So any young man, who is breaking in as a professional, has to be prepared to devote practically all his time to golf."

Says Watson, "It's no place for a nine-to-five man. We operate 11 months a year. A manager and his assistant put in 10 or 12 hours a day. An assistant doesn't have much choice but to be wrapped up in his work."

Heald, Watson and Smith apparently have done a good job of implanting the dedication princi-

ple, along with giving their proteges good training. Each has had four men under his wing and of the collective dozen they have trained, they've had only two dropouts. Both of the latter bowed out, incidentally, because the hours were just too much for them. They couldn't find the dedication to put in the long, demanding days that are endemic to golf management personnel and so, wisely, they got out.

Seven of the young men, who have trained under Heald, Watson and Smith, have moved up to top jobs. Each of the three currently has a trainee working for him. In practically all cases where the protege has moved up, he has had at least a two-year apprenticeship behind him. It shouldn't be any less if he is to be properly equipped to go it on his own.

It is not quite accurate to refer to the young man, who is breaking in, as a trainee. More properly, he is assistant. The course he is going through is designed to familiarize him with the golf management job, not train him for it. He does basically the same work as the man in charge. Whether he is coming in as a professional, superintendent or club manager, he has, almost without exception, the educational background for the profession he's getting into. The so-called novice superintendent is a graduate of either a two-year or four-year agronomy school. The tyro club manager has a degree from either Michigan State or Cornell University or the University of Denver or some other well-known school. The professional apprentice probably hasn't been trained specifically for shop work, but in most cases has studied business or physical education in college, has played golf and so isn't getting into totally unfamiliar work.

Thus, a rank beginner is not coming into one of the three fields. He has good credentials to start with. What he needs is experience in the profession for which he has prepared. It is hoped that he brings dedication along.

Doc Watson is a strong believer in "giving a man his head," as he puts it. A 1957 University of Denver graduate, Watson worked for five years in an airline feeding operation before coming to Sunset Ridge in 1962. Four young men have broken into club management under his direction and, for the most part, he has dispensed with the preliminaries in indoctrinating them.

"I get them exposed without wasting much time," Watson says. "Within a short time they are responsible for running any of the numerous parties that are held at the club. Maybe they're overmatched, but they soon discover ingenuity they didn't know they had and usually get straightened out. If not, they can come to me.

"All of the assistants I've had," Watson continues, "have appreciated that I had enough confidence in them to turn them loose without a lot of coaching. It's kind of bewildering at first, but they quickly get their feet on the ground and work things out. Even the young fellow who left because he didn't like the hours handled assignments well. Most people learn 10 times faster on their own than if they have to be supervised."

Ingenuity in arranging and running parties is the most important part of a club manager's job, according to Watson. That's why he puts so much emphasis on this function in training assistants. Sales have to be kept up, not only during the golf season, but in the November-March period when the members won't use the club unless there are some very strong attractions to bring them back. Weekly cabaret dances, gourmet dinners, a fall clambake, a couple of pre-Christmas parties, six "Food Around the World" dinners, held in the fall, a weekly Wednesday luncheon for the women, a formal Christmas party, a New Year's Eve dinner dance and party are among the affairs that are held at Sunset Ridge during the off-season to complement summertime patronage and spending. Otherwise, total annual volume would be so low that it's doubtful if the membership would stand for the assessments that would have to be levied by club officials to wipe out the year-end deficit.

In time, and not a very long one at that, the new assistant takes over the total running of at least 50 per cent of the social events. For instance, he handles the gourmet dinners, from selecting the menus, overseeing their preparation, giving personnel whatever training is necessary in serving them, to seeing that they are well-publicized before they are held.

Sunset Ridge closes in January, but immediately after it reopens, the round of dinners, parties and dances are started again. This spring, Chuck Braden, the assistant manager, introduced a theater-dinner party that practically had the membership standing in line to attend. Altogether, three performances were given by the Northwestern University CC players in the clubhouse dining room; there were capacity crowds at each show. Braden handled the entire project from the publicity stage through booking the theatrical group to taking full charge of the cocktail hour and dinner that preceded each show. After an assistant has staged a few theater parties, presided over several gourmet dinners as well as miscellaneous clambakes and dances, he can hardly be classified as a trainee, at least where social events are concerned.

All, of course, is not party giving at Sunset Ridge. There are less glamorous things with which the new assistant has to become familiar, such as clubhouse housekeeping, calling in the repairman and overseeing the day-to-day food and beverage operations. And, of course, there is the annual budget that has to be prepared and periodically checked to see that it is being adhered to. Doc Watson handles the drawing up of the budget and all matters pertaining to it, a vitally important job at any club, but the assistant always sits in while it is in the preparation stage and when it is being periodically reviewed.

From the caliber of young men who have trained under him in the last decade, Doc Watson can't help but conclude that the club management schools are doing an outstanding job. They are particularly strong in generating new and fresh ideas, and their academic courses, such as accounting, psychology and chemistry, appar-

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ently are being well taught. In addition, young men coming into the club manager field know a lot about beverages, partly because of what they learn in the classroom, but mainly because most of them manage to get part-time jobs as bartenders and pick up a good deal of practical knowledge.

The same, though, can't be said of food preparation. One reason for this, according to Watson, is that probably too much emphasis is being put on commercial or mass feeding. The more imaginative cooking, which is demanded in a city or country club operation, is being slighted. Too, the club management students don't get enough actual experience in cooking and baking. Mainly, they don't do much more than observe how things should be done. Watson thinks this should be changed. A person who has never had dough on his elbows or turned a roast is never really going to learn very much about food and cooking. The schools could correct this by setting up summer restaurant placement programs for their students.

One thing that Doc Watson does is something that other club managers could profitably copy. Four times a year he takes his assistant, the club chef and hostess to dinner at one of Chicago's finer restaurants. It can be classified as a working meal, because the four people are as much on the lookout for new ideas in service, decor and recipes as they are in enjoying the amenities of fine eating. Some of the ideas are brought back to Sunset Ridge, where they are used especially in the off-season when innovations are needed to bring members back to the club.

Bill Heald's training curriculum at Riverside CC starts with a course that might be called, "Teaching How To Teach." A background of 22 years in golf, five of them spent as a summertime assistant at this club while he taught history and coached in high school, has convinced Heald that teaching is the fundamental from which radiates everything that has to do with the operation of a pro shop. Certainly, it leads to a conservative 75 per cent of equipment sales and, no doubt, influences a high percentage of apparel sales. Maybe the latter would be hard to prove, because display, price and quality are considered so intrinsic to the way apparel items sell, but in a larger view, a professional's success in merchandising depends to a great extent on how well the members accept him.

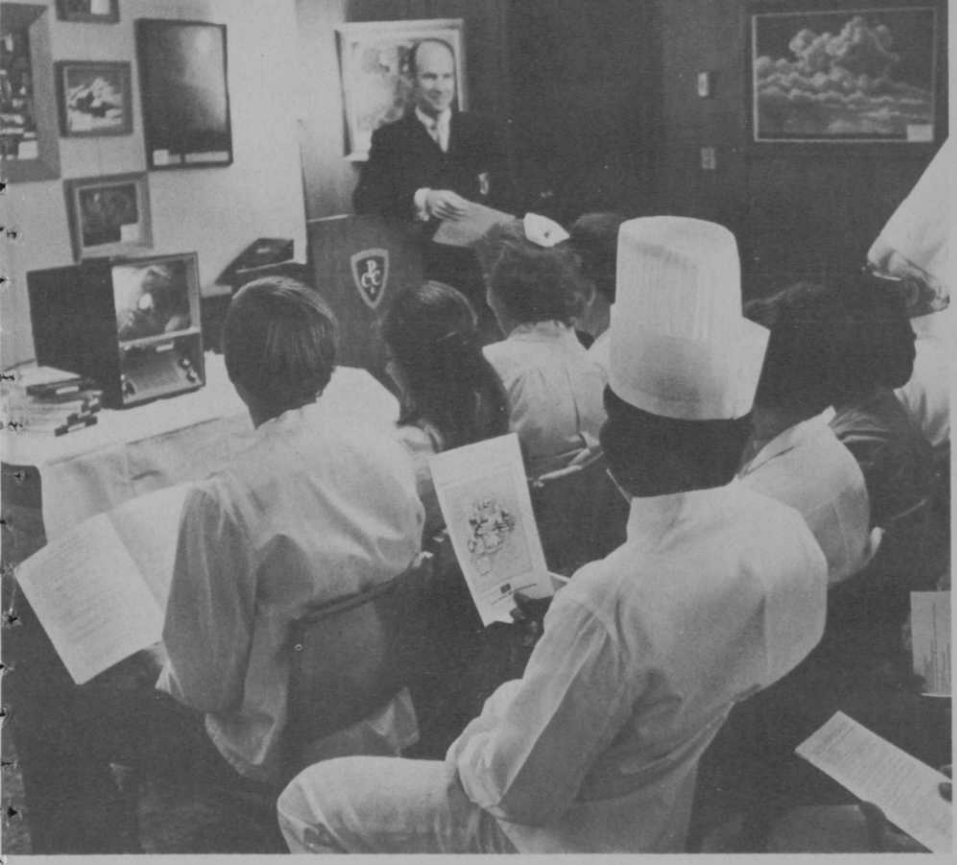
There is no quicker way to win acceptance, Heald maintains, than the lesson tee. Show a player how to shave his score or, maybe more gratifying to him, how he can hit a ball more crisply and accurately and a convert has been won. Or, to put it more baldly, a customer. It doesn't stop here, of course. Good service, promotion of golf activity, a sound merchandising program, all the pro business standbys, can't be overlooked. They are vital pieces in the mosaic, but everything, in Heald's opinion, starts with the teaching of the game.

For this reason and, additionally, because the new assistant probably hasn't been exposed to them, his training at Riverside starts with the "how to teach" fundamentals. Heald spends many hours on the tee with him and in discussing teaching methods. What he is most concerned with is getting the assistant established in a teaching routine. This isn't easy for a beginning pro to do. He is expected to be a reasonably good player, but probably he does so many things intuitively that he hasn't given much thought to analysis of the swing or to its teaching. It's confusing at first and Heald doesn't expect a new man to even begin to emerge as a teacher until his second year. It isn't until his third year at the club that the assistant is assigned to handle the junior program, which has been Heald's pet project since he started at Riverside.

What Heald ultimately works for is to have the assistant develop confidence in his instruction methods and then not deviate from them after he has established a reliable teaching pattern. Not that he should become totally inflexible and not try to refine his techniques and look for new ways to get through to the pupil. There is always new ground to be explored in both respects. It takes a lot of study, observation, discussion of theories for the young man breaking in to get his instruction methods solidified. One of the best starting points in his education, Bill Heald believes, is in the material Jim Flick of Losantiville in Cincinnati has written for the PGA teaching manuals.

Heald isn't sure he differs very much from other professionals in training assistants in the different aspects of shop operation. He wants to be sure that anyone who serves in his shop is completely qualified to move into a head pro job in no more than four years. This calls for the assistant to begin working as a starter and caddie master along with learning everything possible about the inside operation. The latter, of course, includes a little bit of everything—merchandising, purchasing, learning inventory control, running club tournaments, helping to stage the annual spring fashion show for women members and becoming familiar with the bookkeeping system. A young man, working for three or four years at Riverside, or for that matter, at most first-class golf shops, probably gets as liberal and practical business education as he could hope to get in almost any field. In fact, it's doubtful if he could find anything in the merchandising arena that offers a better opportunity to become as involved or immersed in the sales floor, office and backroom operations as the pro shop business.

Even though Dudley Smith, the Silver Lake superintendent, may go overboard in bringing the novice superintendent face to face with the realities by dwelling on the unglamorous aspects of maintaining a course, don't write him off as an ogre. His record in shepherding new men through the break-in years of greenkeeping is good—three of his four trainees have stuck it out and have their own courses. The fourth, a college English major, stayed on well beyond the six month period in which Dudley sowed the seed of discouragement, but finally decided he'd be happier in some other line of work. He was not without promise, according to Smith. The other young men, who have



worked for Dudley in recent years, are studying agronomy and plan to make their careers in course maintenance. Another, who is in the Navy, plans to get into the field after being discharged. So, Smith must blend inspiration with discontent.

As turfmen, the Silver Lake superintendent feels that the young men, and especially the four-year graduates who have come out of school in the last decade or so, are pretty close to being finished products. They need no more than a little experience to consolidate the knowledge they have absorbed in college. They should be better trained, however, as mechanics. Most know little or nothing about machinery and are utterly dependent on the course mechanic to keep the mowers and tractors running. Smith feels that this could be remedied to some extent if the schools could arrange with equipment manufacturers to give the turf students intensive, if brief, training in machinery maintenance.

"Most are completely lost when it comes to equipment maintenance." says Dudley. "Not that I was any better when I came out of school."

Dependence on the course mechanic actually goes somewhat further. When an assistant is breaking in, he not only has to have plenty of guidance from the superintendent, but has to lean heavily on the hard corps of veteran employees on the maintenance staff. Some assistants don't always grasp this latter point.

As far as Smith, a 1955 Penn State graduate, is concerned, learning to direct men is the hardest part of a superintendent's job. For an assistant, that's what most of the training period is about. He may be technically brilliant, but if he doesn't learn something about persuasion and motivation his gifts or talents aren't going to do him much good.

"Most of the training I give is psychologically oriented," says the Silver Lake superintendent. "Sure, there are some things a young guy has to learn about chemicals and grasses. And, even more about machinery. In time, this knowledge will rub off on him. But in the meantime he has to learn to handle men, to not have them resent his orders and be humble and smart enough to listen to their suggestions, because many times they are worth listening to. For instance, I've always felt that my mechanic could make or break me.

"I think most superintendents will agree that they are a little amused with the new fellows coming out of school," Smith continues. "I don't mean that we mean to downgrade them or make light of their knowledge, because usually they are technically trained and already quite competent. But I think the schools mislead them, have them thinking they are stepping into full-fledged executive jobs and maybe are going to do a fair share of button pushing. Maybe the human element isn't emphasized enough. Maybe they should be told more about the ordinary course worker and the mechanic because these are the men they are going to be dependent upon.

"The biggest shock to a young man breaking in most often comes in his contact with older course workers, Smith goes on. "Usually these fellows are 40 or 50 years old, have been around for several years, are intelligent enough to hold better jobs, but have been handicapped because they don't have much formal education. There's no doubt that they are pretty capable guys. The new assistant often isn't aware of this and makes the mistake of underrating their abilities and knowledge. So, instead of getting them to produce for him, he kind of turns them off. They just stand around and wait for him to fall on his pratt.

"I'm sorry I can't make my remarks a little more technically slanted," Dudley laughs, "but when an older superintendent trains a young one he becomes a practicing psychologist. Oh, we continually remind the assistant that he is responsible for a very valuable piece of property, warn him against the temptations to overkill, cut corners, and get into some pretty involved discussions with him about grass and greens and gearing and gaskets. But the real reason a young fellow comes to work for an older one is to learn how to handle men. If he learns that, he probably won't have too much trouble with the technical aspects."

Eventually Dudley gets back to repeating what he previously said about dedication. Dedication and the ability to handle men. They were in the business long before anyone started using fertilizer or herbicide, and they still do more to keep grass green and weed free than either of these products. □