

Positive About PDI

By Ray Davies

Our profession is tremendously rewarding. Every day, we see Mother Nature work miracles. The grass, the trees and flowers, the sunrise, the wildlife — it's a wonderful feeling to have the course respond to our efforts.

But it's also a challenging and sometimes frustrating profession. Long hours, lower-than-deserved pay, lack of recognition and mediocre job security have plagued our business for too long. How many superintendents do you know who have lost their positions because of bad weather, a poor relationship with the boss or player expectations that exceed the facility's budget?

I am among many superintendents who believe that we can address those challenges and frustrations by taking our destiny into our own hands. The question is how to enhance the image of our profession when no clear standards exist. At least part of the answer lies with the GCSAA's Professional Development Initiative.

Although you may not have heard much about PDI until recently, its origins date back three years. To examine questions of standards, GCSAA's Board organized the Membership Standards Resource Group in 1997. The group realized that before standards could be recommended, we needed to answer key questions, among them:

- What tasks do superintendents perform?
- What do employers value in superintendents and what weaknesses do they perceive in the profession?
- What educational needs do superintendents have?
- How well is GCSAA meeting those needs?

Here's what we learned:

- All superintendents, no matter what size facility — public or private — perform the

same core tasks. We hire, fire, train, schedule, review, purchase, approve invoices, irrigate, fertilize and perform other duties.

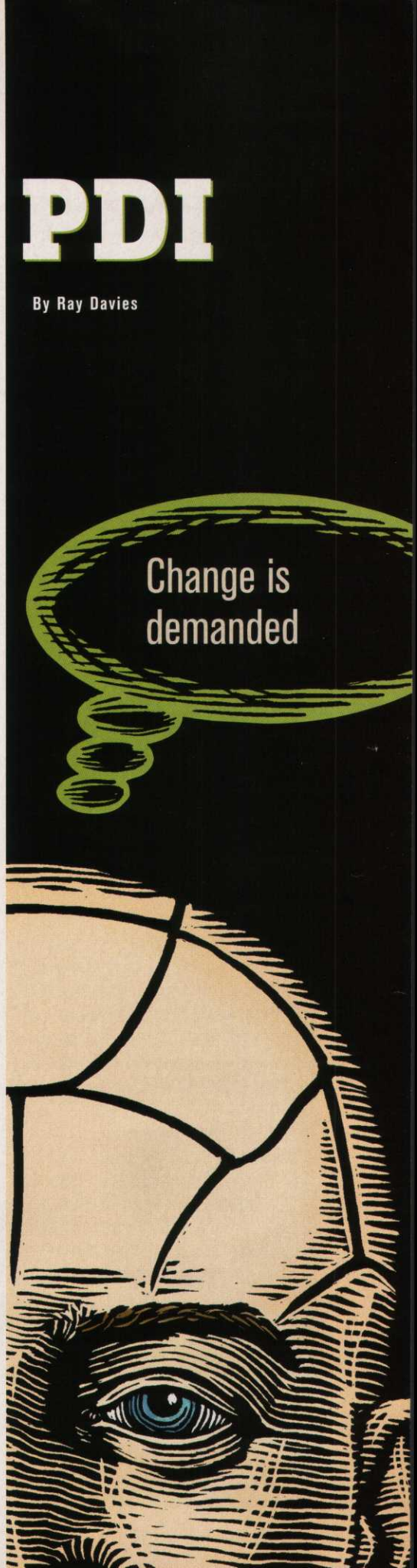
- Differences enter the equation when proficiency is considered. For example, some superintendents perform significant project management functions and others do not. Therefore, individual courses need to determine how proficient a superintendent must be in each competency.
- Employers do not necessarily understand what we do for their courses. This leaves them feeling vulnerable because they don't know if we are simply making excuses about the course conditions.
- Employers believe we have outstanding technical skills and that we work hard.
- Employers highly value college degrees.
- Employers think we don't grasp the business end of golf and make capital improvement requests beyond the ability of the business to support. We may produce great conditions, but employers fear we don't manage costs well.
- Employers believe we don't like to talk to the customers because our communication skills are often weak.
- Too many of us are unskilled in basic computer use, such as utilizing spreadsheet and word processor software.
- We would not make good general managers because we prefer to work early morning hours and go home by 2 p.m. (their words, not mine.) We do not deal well with confrontations with customers and lack effective people skills.
- We do not always manage safety training and other worker issues that leave employers open to lawsuits and workers compensation claims.

Research also suggests that our current education program needs to be fine-tuned to address the following perception issues:

- GCSAA's educational programs didn't address most non-technical tasks.

- GCSAA's educational program was

Continued on page 101



Change is demanded

PDI's Potential Pitfalls

Continued from page 38

marketed by the GCSAA. These are not our words; these are in the words put forth in the PDI presentation and used by many PDI supporters in discussions on the GCSAA "Talking it Over" Web forum. (Note: The forum has been a great communication tool. We urge everyone who has access to a computer to visit this site.)

In short, it's clear that GCSAA intends to put even more of its resources and efforts behind these "branded" superintendents in the future. Is this the role we want our association to play?

Continuing education

If passed, everyone who wants to maintain Class A status will have to accumulate a certain amount of continuing education credits/professional development units and meet other educational criteria. This will cost both money and time. No one seems to know how much, but it's hard to conceive it will be cheap. In addition, those not grandfathered in will have to prove certain competencies that must be validated by a third party. Should we agree to something without knowing what it will cost us?

What's driving it?

The PDI was initially put forth under the premise that "this is what our employers want." Later, the message radically shifted to "this is what we, the members, wanted." Curiously, the great majority of members don't even seem to know this issue exists. How could it be what "we" wanted?

Ask yourself who's really driving this and why.

Get involved

Again, we invite you to please get actively involved with where the GCSAA is headed. The GCSAA isn't just an elite group of leaders or a building in Lawrence, Kan. The GCSAA is you, me and the rest of the membership. The debate surrounding this initiative will, in some way, directly effect your future as a superintendent. This is not about "politics," it's about your livelihood.

We assure you that those of us who question this initiative are proud to be GCSAA members. Because we have chosen to voice our concerns, we have been called whiners, complainers and extremists. We have been told we may even be jeopardizing ("splat!") our future in golf course management.

But like those who support PDI, we are concerned about the future of our association and profession. We represent every region in the country, range from students to veteran certified superintendents, work at properties from nine holes to multicourse facilities, and hold positions from assistant greenkeeper to general manager.

Many of us have college degrees and some do not. We are not a vocal minority. We are simply people who care passionately about the future of our profession. But don't just

take our word for it. Get informed and get involved.

David Brandon is a Class A superintendent in Michigan who can be reached at 2buddha@mach7.com or 517-466-2653. He wrote this column cooperatively with Don Mahaffey, superintendent of Torres Blancas GC; Max



Bowden, CGCS of Cleveland CC; David Pulley, superintendent at Pine Valley CC; Sam Hocutt III, CGCS at Pawleys Plantation; Corey Eastwood, CGCS of Stockton Golf & CC; Rick Niemier, Class A superintendent and GCSAA member; Al Jansen, superintendent at Baraboo CC; and Andrew Gruse, superintendent at Monroe CC.

Positive About PDI

Continued from page 39

strong in technical training.

- Most seminar presentations didn't use the best methods or materials.
- We think of seminars as the primary way to improve skills.

Recommendations

This information led the MSRG to make the following recommendations that are the centerpieces of PDI:

- GCSAA should refine its education program to provide superintendents with the non-technical competencies employers demand.
- The association should provide a tool for members to identify those proficiencies that, if mastered, would bring additional value to their employers. This would improve tenure and compensation.
- GCSAA should teach superintendents to use the competencies in managing their relationships with their employers.
- Employers must be educated about the skills and abilities we possess.
- We should use our skills to influence employers to make hiring decisions based on their golf courses and their demands.
- GCSAA should adopt new membership standards based on what we do, instead of our title and years in service.

We did not make these recommendations without great thought. We spent considerable time working on the membership classifications. We found this to be a difficult subject on which to find agreement, but did compromise on the recommendations that you will find in the graphics in this section.

The MSRG established a one-year period to communicate the proposal to the membership through chapter presenta-

Continued on page 102

Positive About PDI

Continued from page 101

tions, information on the Web site, and a town hall meeting at the upcoming conference to get feedback from as many members as possible.

The group will meet again in April to assess what you, the members, told us and make adjustments to the proposal. The proposal, along with any revisions, will go to the Board of Directors for approval before the delegates meeting in September. A member vote on any changes to the bylaws required by the final proposal won't take place until the 2001 conference.

Concerns

Some of the concerns expressed relating to the new standards for Class A are the requirement of a degree, required continuing education and the mandatory use of the HR Web. Some would prefer that we simply leave the membership standards alone and focus only on revamping the educational program.

Golfdom publisher/editor Pat Jones asked me to write this article as part of a pro vs. con discussion on PDI. This suggests it is a black-and-white issue, but "Should we have change?" is not the appropriate question. The better question is: "What changes are appropriate to address employers' needs for non-technical skills and improve the perceived value of the su-

perintendent?"

The appropriate task is the continued development of this proposal into one that addresses the issues confronting our profession. We can't ignore what we learned from the research.

I know from our work on the MSRSG that aspects of this proposal are controversial, but that's the role of leadership. The MSRSG members welcome suggestions for improvement and will make a final proposal that takes into consideration all the comments and concerns of our members. It has been a great experience. I'm proud of my profession and especially proud of my association for taking a hard look at itself.

I invite you to find out more about the PDI and our reasons for recommending it. When you do, I believe you will come to the same conclusion: Change is demanded.



Ray Davies is CGCS at Crystal Springs GC in Burlingame, Calif., and a member of the GCSAA Membership Standards Resource Group. He can be reached at 650-342-4188 or rsd Davies@pacbell.net.

Want a new source for pest information?



www.pestfacts.org

Termites, cockroaches, rodents, even poison ivy and other nasty weeds. They're all pests, which means they can cause real problems that pose health and safety risks to children and adults. The good news is now you've got the Pest Facts Information Center at www.pestfacts.org. It's a handy resource discussing the problems caused by pests, as well as the safe and responsible use of urban pesticides and related issues. So don't just sit there...log on.

