

Seamless Transition

Hard as it is to believe, there *are* jobs outside of being a superintendent. Here are tips about how to switch careers from those who have done it successfully

**BY FRANK H.
ANDORKA JR.**
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Ever had one of those days when you wanted to scrap the whole superintendent gig? Maybe you just *can't* take another complaint about greenspeed. Or maybe your pig-headed owner chewed you out for not producing perfect conditions after it rained for 40 days and 40 nights.

Randy Zidik knows the feeling. After 25 years of being a superintendent, he was worn out. He frequently disagreed with the membership at Rolling Hills CC in McMurray, Pa., over maintenance practices. The constant pressure to keep the golf course in perfect condition, no matter what Mother Nature threw his way, gnawed at him. The daily battles left him depressed and he was having trouble sleeping. That's when he started looking for a way out.

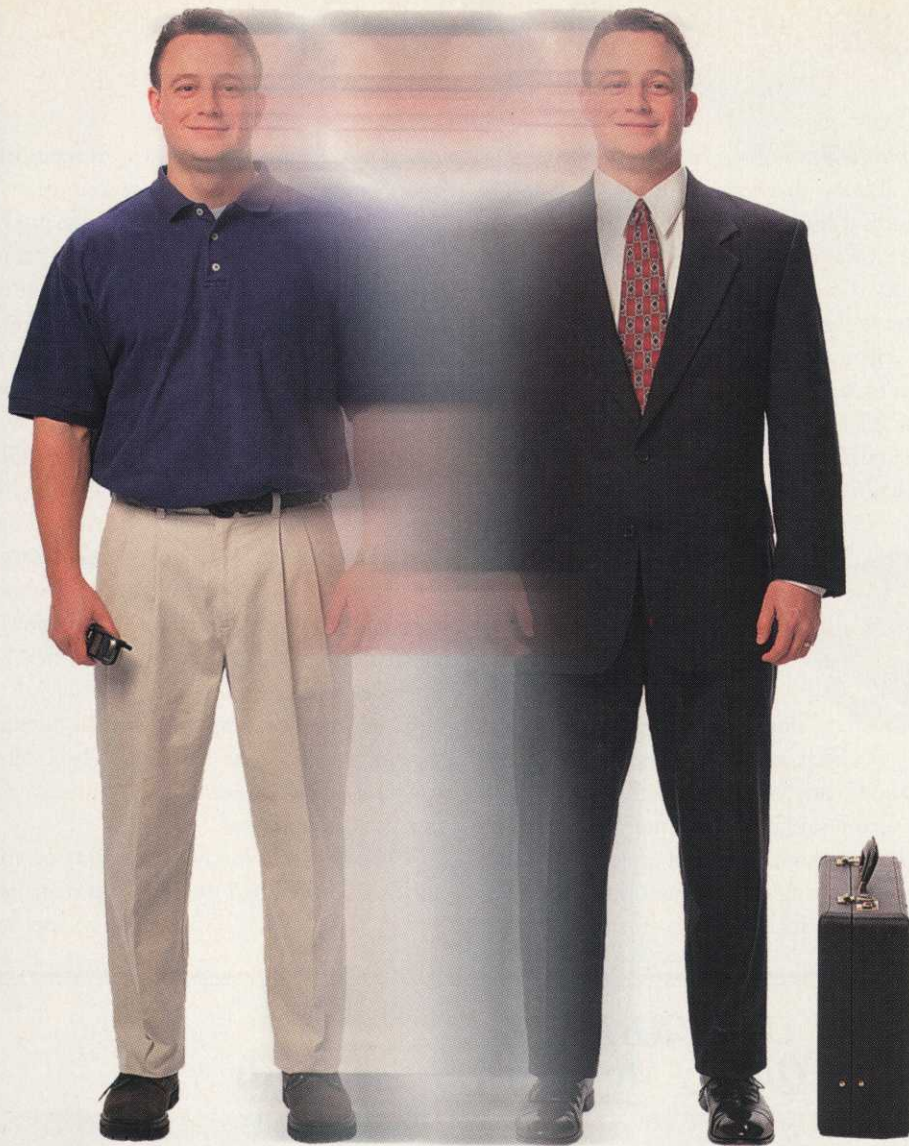
"It was a classic case of superintendent burnout," Zidik says. "The job wasn't fun anymore. I didn't get excited about the prospect

of getting up and going to the course. That's when I knew it was time to get out."

Zidik's refrain is heard often from superintendents who have moved on to new careers. The pressures of being a superintendent are immense and can take a toll, physically and emotionally. But a superintendent can't expect to move into another career without carefully planning his or her transition long before it becomes a necessity. Those plans should include networking at trade shows, researching other job possibilities and assessing what you *really* want from your new career.

Gary Grigg, a superintendent for 32 years before becoming an agronomic consultant in his own business, Grigg Bros., says superintendents need to plan their future careers from the day they enter the profession.

"Keep your eyes open for other opportunities and prepare to leave your superintendent's job from the beginning," Grigg says.



“Realistically, the odds are against you. Few people who start out as superintendents end their careers as superintendents.”

Zidik agrees. He says that all the stars aligned when he joined E.H. Griffith Co., a distribution company, based in Pittsburgh, as a salesman. Just when he had reached his saturation point with the stress of being a superintendent, a sales representative for E.H. Griffith in his area retired. Zidik had used the products for years as a superintendent, so he applied for the job and got it.

“Being a superintendent really helped prepare me for this new venture,” Zidik says. “I can explain the products we offer more easily to the superintendents.”

Zidik says he would advise superintendents who want to leave the profession to research the new jobs they’re considering extensively. Sometimes, it may not be the jewel the superintendent thinks it is.

“The grass always appears greener on the other side of the fence,” Zidik says. “But that may be all it is: appearance.”

Sam Green, an agronomist for Rocky Mount, N.C.-based Aqua-Aid, followed that advice early last year and looked closely at his current position before he took it. Green wasn’t sure he wanted to stop being a superintendent, despite the headaches the job caused him. After all, he’d only been in the industry since 1993 and he’d only been at Dataw for 20 months.

So when Aqua-Aid approached him to take over its Roanoke, Va., territory, he asked company representatives for some time to make the decision. It took him six months. Green says he’s grateful to Aqua-Aid for giving him the time he needed to make his decision. Superintendents should never leap into new jobs simply because they hate their old ones, Green adds.

Continued on page 42

Seamless Transition

Continued from page 41

"I knew that making this move would be a radical step for me, and I wanted to make sure it was the right fit," Green says. "I didn't want to make an emotional decision I would later regret."

He says he understood the company culture of Aqua-Aid because he'd known the owners, Bill Eason and Bert Brace, for seven years before he joined the company in October. He had used their products extensively as the director of golf at the Dataw Island Club in Buford, S.C.

"I wanted to work for honorable men, and I wanted to work for a company with a good reputation," Green says. "Aqua-Aid had both, so when I burned out, I decided I could work for the company."

Green says it was definitely time for him to leave the superintendent profession. He had started waking up in the morning at Dataw with a sick feeling in his stomach because

the political battles he fought with members about course maintenance were so intense.

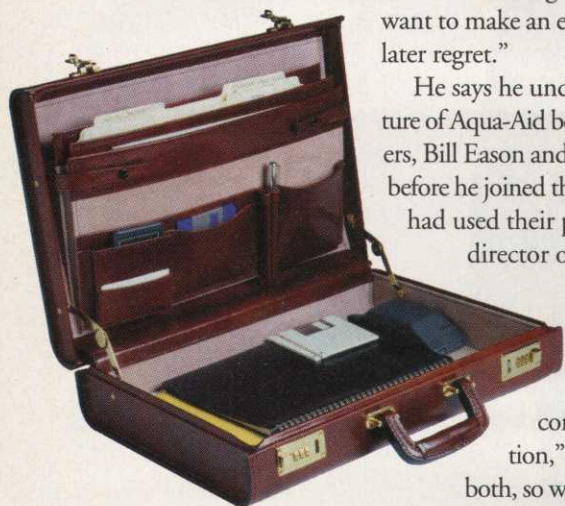
"I didn't want to go into work in the morning," Green says. "I never thought I'd get to that point. But after you're fighting the same battles day in and day out, it gets hard to work enthusiastically at it."

Not all transitions are forced by the pressures of the job, however. Gary Dorsch spent five years as a superintendent at Springbrook GC in Naperville, Ill., near Chicago. During his tenure there, he was approached several times by the Scotts Co. to become a regional sales representative. He says he didn't take the offers seriously at first, but Scotts representatives slowly persuaded him that it was something he'd be interested in doing.

Dorsch says he wasn't burnt out; he just saw the business side of the golf industry beginning to flourish. He decided that he wanted to get in on the ground floor.

"The salesperson who was calling on me always told me I had the perfect personality

Continued on page 44



Consider your decision carefully before moving to the business side of golf.

PHOTODISC

OTTERBINE®.... Your Water Quality Management Specialists



Surface Aerators

- Reduce the problem of algae, aquatic weeds and odor.
- Introduce O₂ into the pond.
- Available in a variety of spray patterns and sizes.



Sub-Surface Aerators

- Introduce O₂ into the pond bottom via Sub-Surface or Diffused Air.
- Perfect for shallow ponds.
- No visible spray pattern.



Bunker Pumper

- Removing water from bunkers, excavation sites or swimming pools.
- 280 GPM pumping rate.
- Floating, self priming portable - only 85 lbs!



Ottershield Lake Dye

- Transforms muddy water into **healthy blue water**.
- No stained clothes or hands - you never touch Ottershield.
- Neat, clean, packets.



Replace your old Otterbine with a new one and receive a discount of up to \$600.00!! Call 1-800-AER8TER for details.

OTTERBINE, INC. • 1-800-AER8TER (237-8837) • (610) 965-6018 • FAX: (610) 965-6050

Seamless Transition

Keep that Rolodex updated because networking can provide you with your best new job leads.



Continued from page 42

for sales," Dorsch says. "I thought it was the perfect time to make a move."

So Dorsch started with Scotts in 1982 and has been in sales since. He represents Professional Golf Commerce, an e-commerce vendor that will expand its offerings to include course maintenance products this year.

Dorsch's advice for superintendents is to evaluate themselves and find out what they're looking for in jobs and what they value as an employee. Once you discover those things, you can decide if a company's culture is right for you, Dorsch adds. If you can't find a company whose culture fits, Grigg says you shouldn't be afraid to start your own company.

Grigg Bros., a company Gary and his

brother Mark started five years ago, produces a line of foliar fertilizer. Last year, the business grew so large that Grigg could no longer do the job part time.

"There are niches out there that aren't being addressed," Grigg says. "If you have an idea about how to fill one, you should seize the opportunity."

Although Grigg misses working on a golf course, he says he doesn't miss the headaches that can push superintendents to the brink of despair.

"The day-to-day hassles were becoming more and more difficult to deal with," Grigg says. "I don't miss the unlimited expectations of golfers."

So next time your members complain about the brown grass on No. 14 after 10 days of 100-degree heat, don't fret. If you expand your horizons, you might just find another job that you will enjoy even more. ■

The Party's Over ...Or Is It?

By David St. John

Yesterday, you dealt with the daily demands of tending a golf course with fervor and confidence. Nothing could you bring you down — not the weather, temperature, insects, fickle members, demanding boards, scarcity of good help, budgets, equipment problems or the never-ending requirement to put on an upbeat face.

Today, however, the job is taking its toll on you. You feel the loss of youth and the pangs of age. The calls and problems that used to be challenging are now annoyances. You spend more time puzzling over decisions that used to be made in a heartbeat. There are moments during which you feel isolated and overwhelmed.

You may not realize it, but you are now an official entrant in the race between retirement and obsolescence. Some people are happy with a photo finish, but that doesn't mean you have to be.

Folks are living longer and enjoying themselves more today than ever before. The smart ones recognized the fact that they were in a race and

chose to adapt to the course and adjust their position in the field. Here are some of the things they did — and that you can do — to go the distance:

■ Get a handle on your financial status by considering projected income from social security, retirement plans and investments. The degree of financial independence you can project has a lot to do with the timing of your retirement and your second career choices.

■ As a superintendent, you have acquired a number of valuable skills and experiences. You've been on the firing line and become adept at crisis management. You've developed a knack for handling multiple priorities under pressure.

When you break these experiences down into their smallest components, you start to see a set of marketable and transferable skills. But when was the last time you pulled out a piece of paper and wrote these experiences down? This little exercise will help define your strengths.

■ Experience and know-how are valuable commodities. You'd be amazed how much people will pay to learn what you know. Don't shrug off

the fields of teaching, consulting or even a small business opportunity.

■ Sometimes second careers are influenced by hobbies. I have a friend who used to be an engineer and loved to play golf. He now runs a thriving business building custom-fitted golf clubs.

■ Seek out people who have made successful career and retirement transitions and find out how they did it. Do this *before* your time comes.

The superintendent performs many of the same tasks that general managers do in other industries. Thinking of your position in these terms creates a different picture of the job itself.

Superintendents are the ultimate producers of a well-defined end result — an impeccable golfing experience that makes club members proud to support. There are plenty of alternatives to a successful retirement and/or alternate career embedded in that job description.

Dave St. John is a principal in GreenSearch, an Atlanta-based management search and human resource consulting firm. He can be contacted at info@greensearch.com.

PHOTODISC