

Last Call

It's about security, value and marketing



BY DAVID DOWNING II, CGCS

In discussions with other superintendents, I've heard concerns about job security, job value and lack of marketing of superintendents as professionals. GCSAA members wanted to know what the association could do for them in these areas. That's why the Professional Development Initiative was born.

The association, through its board of directors, committees and staff, tried to find solutions for these concerns. GCSAA formed the Membership Standards Resource Group (MSRG) to head a study to investigate the concerns. The group used discussions and surveys with superintendents, owners/employers, marketing specialists and other consultants to gather information. After the group studied the information, it created the plan now known as the PDI.

The process gave GCSAA great insight into what is happening in its world and how superintendents, as well as their employers, view the profession. This research will benefit us by providing us with more targeted marketing, improved educational opportunities, improved delivery of education, the Professional Development Resource and standards that were upgraded for Class A superintendents.

GCSAA did this in full view of the membership and has sought member input into the final proposal during the past year. The process has worked beautifully. Members have been involved and expressed their thoughts. The MSRG and other committees listened, and the final version as pre-

sented is a collaboration of hundreds of peoples' ideas after countless hours of work and discussion.

As I have written elsewhere, the standards required for Class A membership are nothing more than what a vast majority of us already do. Why not take advantage of it and use it as a marketing tool to help sell our profession to the rest of the world? It's as simple as that.

I've debated the PDI with others, and we have a basic philosophical difference about "being told what to do." But PDI offers an upgrade of something that already exists — membership standards. Granted, the current standards of having a title for three years and paying dues are not much, but they are standards.

We've seen the statistics that say most of us

support the new standards, especially under-30 superintendents, 97 percent of whom are formally educated. Personally, I never conceived I could become

a superintendent without first attending the two-year program at Penn State University. That was my knowledge base and is the knowledge that future superintendents will work from.

By making education a key component of PDI, we're planning for the future of our profession. We get frustrated when our employers are only concerned about what is happening today instead of planning for the future. But we're planning for our future with PDI.

The concerns first expressed when the original proposal came out, such as the lack of an alternate path, affordable education, accessible education and equality of various forms of education, have been refined in the final

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D-Day Is Here

Editor's Note: The time for talking is done. The Professional Development Initiative, which has sparked such passionate debate on both sides, is up for a vote at this month's GCSAA Conference & Show in Dallas. We hope this election doesn't require a recount.

Golfdom offered representatives from each side of the issue one last chance to state their cases. Here is what they had to say.

Yea

for PDI

It will segregate the association

BY SCOTT D. HILES

After reading and discussing many points about the Professional Development Initiative, I can't figure out how segregating the membership and mandating ongoing compliance will benefit the future of the association. I disagree with many of PDI's purposes, and here's why:

We're told the PDI is to ensure that new superintendents have adequate education.

False. Employers demand certain educational requirements, and they control the marketplace — not a trade association. I've never been asked in an interview what associations I belong to or if I'm complying with the membership requirements. Employers want to know my educational background and experiences. Employers also want a product, and I must supply it. If I am unable to supply it, they will find someone else who can, regardless of a trade association.

We are told that by meeting the PDI and its requirements, the association can then market its members as educated and up to date.

False. Do you mean to tell me that the association is unable to currently market us as educated? We are the most educated employees in the golf business. We have the most diverse set of competencies in the industry. As it stands, the association can easily promote what we do and who we are.

Those not able or willing to attend mandatory educational programs will not be penalized.

False. A demotion in classification amongst peers shows unwillingness,

incompetence or other less-desirable qualities. Next to my name and classification there is no room for: "already highly educated; 10 years of superintendent experience; Audubon compliant; really wanted to attend required educational venues, but budgetary cutbacks and family issues made this impossible." It just says, "general superintendent member or less than an A."

The association will promote the general superintendent member as much as the Class A member.

False. If this is so, why is a classification even necessary? My association should view me as a fellow superintendent and an equal — not an A, B or Z member.

We each have specific talents, needs and guidelines as diverse as our courses. There's the nine-hole superintendent with a low budget, who's also the mechanic and irrigation tech, among other things.

He's no less a qualified superintendent than an executive superintendent who hasn't jumped in a trench in years.

The low-end superintendent who works miracles with no money and poor equipment may not be able to attend conferences and other set criteria offered by the association. Are you going to tell me that these superintendents do not deserve to be categorized as Class A superintendents?

Some have the resources to attend conferences and seminars; others don't. Where does the association get off telling any of them that they are worth less because they can't?

The mandatory educational requirements will
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"My association should view me as a fellow superintendent and an equal — not an A, B or Z member."

—SCOTT HILES

Nay

Last Call for PDI

Yea

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proposal. The entire GCSAA education system has been greatly enhanced. The awarding of points for CGCS will be refined to mirror the PDI. This will make CGCS more affordable and easier to track.

“The entire GCSAA education system has been greatly enhanced.”

- DAVID DOWNING

listened to members' ideas to find those solutions. But it's up to individual members to decide for themselves what they want to do.

One should also remember that PDI is still a volun-

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GCSAA, which is a member-driven organization, has listened to its members and worked to find an equitable proposal so the entire membership can benefit. It listened to members' concerns about pay scales, security and marketing and worked to find solutions to these concerns. The association also

Nay

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show class A members as highly educated and up to date.

False. The initiative has been rewritten and grants credit for meeting attendance. It will also grant credit for community service. Wasn't the original intent to force educational requirements? Now it is reduced to this — just to get PDI passed?

This watered-down attempt at an educational opportunity will counteract what the PDI is to promote. To go with the PDI as written would be a mockery of the association.

Yes, there are plenty of gains to be embraced from attending a meeting, conference or trade show. The discussions, camaraderie and idea sharing are great things. We do it freely now. To give educational credit for this is far-fetched.

The association can attract new members by the competencies laid out in the PDI.

False. The association is doing nothing other than segregating its membership and making it less desirable for newcomers to join. The newcomer wants to be treated

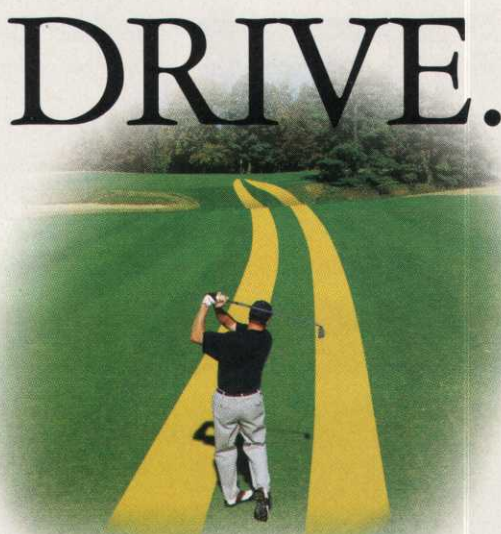
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Last Call for PDI

Yea

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tary program. If one elects not to meet the new requirements of Class A membership, that person will be a general superintendent member. The person will still have access to all the benefits he or she now has as a GCSAA member, including education, career development and information services.

GCSAA is not Big Brother working against you. It is you and I working together to enhance our place in golf. It's time to stop telling ourselves how wonderful we are. It is time to take our story to the rest of the golfing world and secure our position as a major force in the sport.

I support PDI because it can help us achieve these goals. Is it the only answer? No. Will it solve every problem? No. Just as we use varied techniques and tools to be successful at our own facility, PDI is part of a program to achieve the goals it was intended to — security, value and marketing.

Downing is director of golf course operations at Barefoot Resort & GC in North Myrtle Beach, S.C.

Nay

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as an equal, not a "less-than." What gives the association the right to tell a new member that he or she must meet its expectations?

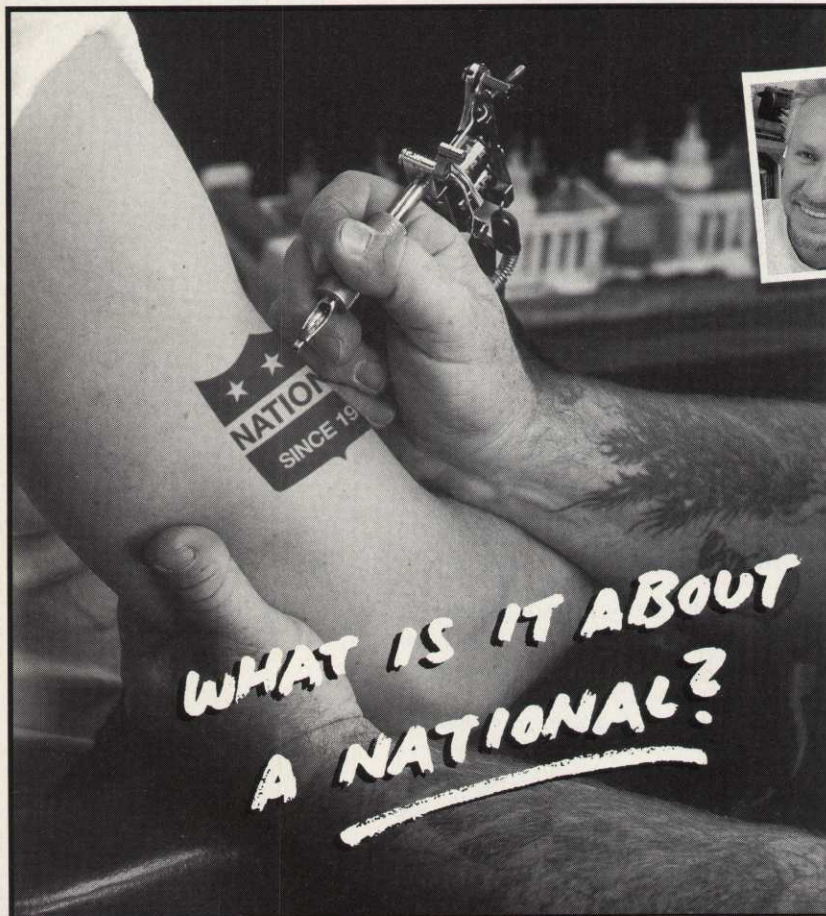
The association must meet the expectations of a potential member. The new member pays for services that the association provides. The association must attract new members by being able to help them succeed and by offering beneficial services, rather than demanding compliance.

Thank you for the PDR (formerly the HR web) as a voluntary tool to better understand our strengths and weaknesses. This is what the association should be about, and it's a benefit of membership. It's about providing *for*, not demanding *of*.

We need to promote the association by what we do *for* each other, *for* golf and *for* the environment.

Do not implement a program of segregation like the PDI. Do what is right for the membership, not what is right for the association. They are not the same.

Hiles, a superintendent and consultant in eastern Canada, is an active board member for various turfgrass associations.



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