

Off The Fringe

Sound Advice

HUMBLE COURSE WORKER/COLLEGE STUDENT OFFERS
VITAL COMMUNICATION TIPS TO SUPERINTENDENTS

By Luke Wagner

As a college student who spent the last six years roaming the fairways, greens and roughs as an employee at a local country club in southern Indiana, I've learned a thing or two about this crazy business we call golf course maintenance.

But while I'm only a journalism student and about four years short of a turf degree, I'm more concerned with the human element of the industry than the Xs and Os of what makes grass grow. One important element is leadership, and I believe I've experienced my share. My situation involves working for five superintendents in six

years. If my observations are correct, that's a lot.

I kept my eyes open enough to observe what works and what doesn't work when it comes to molding an existing crew around a new authority figure. I think my experiences enable me to provide advice on how to help bridge the communication gap between regular seasonal/full-time workers and their new superintendents.

My first piece of advice falls under the use-what-you-have heading. It relates to two superintendents I worked for — one who used what he had and one who didn't.



After working on a golf course for six seasons, Luke Wagner knows a few things.

Consider that most golf courses have one or two workers who've been employed for 10 to 15 years and could practically run the course themselves. No amount of college education could supply a new superintendent with 10 to 15 years of history on a certain course. So my first suggestion to new superintendents is to use those veteran employees as assets. Don't be afraid to ask Billy Bob if he remembers the last time that 180-degree sprinkler head on the No. 8 approach was changed.

A new superintendent, who's unfamiliar with a course, will fail if he tries to do the job himself. I've seen it happen.

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My second piece of advice revolves around worker morale. It's common knowledge that worker morale is higher if the workers have respect, or at least a professional respect, for their bosses. My suggestion to a newly hired superintendent is to display your knowledge after the formal interview. Just because the interview is over and you've secured the job, doesn't mean it's time to stop selling your qualifications.

One superintendent I worked under constantly boasted of the many years he'd put in as "one of us," the normal worker. But he still had a problem convincing me that he knew the difference between a fairway mower and a Zamboni. Because of his lack of knowledge or display of knowledge, many of my coworkers decided it would be just as easy to slack off on detail work because "he'll never notice because he doesn't even know what's right."

Do yourself a favor and sell yourself to the workers. Make them know that if they don't make that green look like a checkerboard, you'll show them how.

My third piece of advice expands on selling yourself. Specifically, sell the product you know you have. One superintendent I worked for sold himself the first day he walked in the door. He told all of us that he did things the right way, and he didn't accept anything less. He promised raises, Christmas bonuses and employee outings to all of us who took our jobs seriously. Everything that came out of his mouth that day landed pin high with me.

But when it came down to reality two months later, his promises had wicked backspin. When nothing he promised panned out, he became a hated individual on our crew. He was gone after less than a season. So when selling yourself, make sure you're selling something you can deliver. Honesty may not get you high fives on the first day of the job, but it will in the long run.

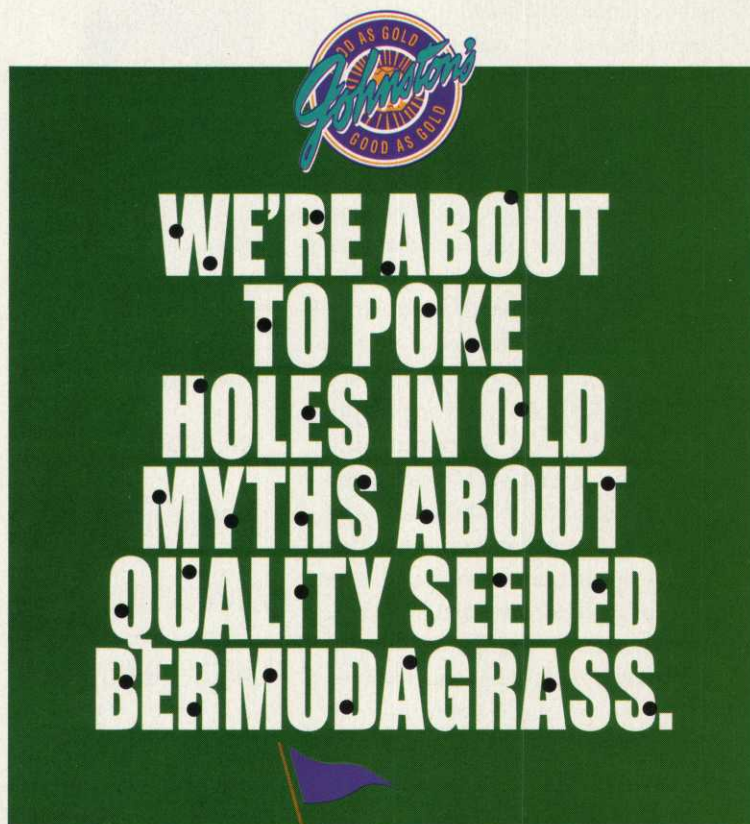
While I only have one suggestion for workers tired of taking orders from a new face every season, it's just as important as the three others. It's crucial

to be patient and accept that no one sees eye-to-eye with his or her boss. While superintendents can do things to dull the pain of this situation, disagreements will arise. Workers must understand that the two sides together must choose whether to make the process a 280-yard par four or a 300-yard par three.

To all you newly hired superinten-

dents, your course may be no Pebble Beach. But with a levelheaded crew along with some sound advice and open communication, the adjustment period will be a day at the beach.

Wagner, a student at the University of Southern Indiana, worked at Oak Meadow GC for six seasons.



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