

They have grown together like a devoted couple. You listen to Gregg Guynan and you get the impression that he and O'Bannon Creek GC were made for each other. Guynan mentions the word "commitment" often when talking about the track.

On March 18, Guynan celebrates his 26th anniversary as superintendent of O'Bannon Creek in Loveland, Ohio, near Cincinnati. The course opened a year before the 49-year-old Guynan arrived in 1977. They were both babies to the business then.

If Guynan has his way, he'll stay at O'Bannon for the rest of his working life. He's like one of those throwback baseball players ("Where have you gone, Joe DiMaggio?") who longed to play for the same team for his entire career and did.

Which brings us to the topic of longevity in the golf course maintenance business. These days, it's not that hot of topic when you consider that the average superintendent stays at the same golf course for about seven years.

But there's something to be said for longevity, as Guynan's career attests. He's successful and happy at O'Bannon. He knows he could probably make more money at another course, but that's not the most important issue to him. As the Beatles song says, "Money can't buy me love."

But there are also two sides to this street. While Guynan wants to stay at O'Bannon because he loves it, he knows they (his bosses and the members) must *want* him to stay. In essence, longevity is about achieving personal goals as much as it's about maintaining solid interpersonal relationships.

So if you desire to stay at your course for more than the norm, you're wise to listen to Guynan's recipe for longevity. Its ingredients have to do with personal satisfaction and respect for others. And even if you're not looking to stay at the same course for 20 years, you can learn a lot from Guynan's philosophy. Here are his secrets for staying power:

The Secrets to Staying Power

BY LARRY AYLWARD



GREGG GUYNAN
KNOWS A THING
OR TWO ABOUT
ACHIEVING
LONGEVITY IN
THIS BUSINESS

Look for a course that's you.

"It's important you look for a course that fits your style and needs," Guynan says. "I'm a project-oriented type of person. What I enjoy most is building something new on the course. That's exactly what this course needed when I came here — there were a lot of unfinished projects.

"That's also what will help keep me here," he continues. "We've got projects planned for the next 10 years."

Work with what you're given.

Guynan advises a superintendent not to stomp his foot and throw up his hands if the green committee rejects his pitch for more money to complete a project.

"I've always been willing to work with what I've been given without complaining," he says. "As a whole, superintendents have to be efficient people or they don't last very long."

Learn to pinch pennies.

"I always watch what I spend," Guynan says of his maintenance budget. "We do a lot of projects in-house. We did our own fairway irrigation system for a fraction of the cost of what it would cost a contractor to do. It's a challenge for me to see how far I can stretch a dollar."

Take care of your crew members.

You're the boss, but you don't have to rule with an iron fist, Guynan says. Let crew members have fun in their jobs and empower them so they feel like they're important. In turn, they'll respect you and most likely stick around for more than a summer.

"You have to make the job enjoyable for

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them,” Guynan says. “I think I’ve done a pretty good job of that. A big part of my longevity here is that I’ve had good people working for me.”

Do the right thing.

“I don’t always do what [members and committee people] ask me to do because I know it’s not the right thing to do,” Guynan says.

For instance, if a few members bark at Guynan to cut the greens shorter to make them faster — and it’s mid-July and hotter than the inside of a steel mill — Guynan won’t heed their calls.

“You just have to do what you know is right,” he says. “That’s part of the survival process — keeping the golf course alive and in good shape.”

Bite your tongue.

It’s 95 degrees, it hasn’t rained in three weeks, and you’ve been tending carefully to three of the course’s greens that are stressed to the max. Meanwhile, a green committee member is complaining to you about untrimmed grass around the ball washer on No. 9. You want to tell that committee person a few things, but Guynan advises you to bite your tongue.

“You have to learn not to speak everything that you would like to say,” he says. “You have to hold back. Sometimes the best quality is to keep quiet and listen to what the person is saying. A lot of superintendents get themselves in trouble by overreacting too quickly to a situation.”

Don’t get too low.

If the green committee has you on the ropes with a flurry of criticisms, learn to roll with the punches. Guynan says he’s come out of committee meetings after being pummeled for an hour and muttered to himself, “There has to be a better way to make a living than this.”



But he tells himself to remain positive and not to overreact about the criticism.

“I’ve learned not to react to my immediate feelings too quickly,” he says. “I’ve been in the business long enough to know when I’m doing a good job and when I’m not doing a good job.”

Take compliments to heart.

If someone pays you an atta-boy about the condition of the greens or the fairways, don’t think twice about not feeling good about it, Guynan says. Pats on the back are good for self-esteem.

“A single comment can make a huge difference,” Guynan says. “Those are the things that help keep you going.”

Try to get along with everyone.

Sometimes, a newly appointed green chairman is bound not to like you, Guynan says. But that doesn’t mean you don’t have to like him. In fact, respect that person and try to get along with him or her. You may win that person over.

“I’ve had a few green chairmen come in, and they didn’t like me,” Guynan says. “But after we worked together for a while and they understood my operation, they ended up liking me.”

“It bothers when somebody doesn’t like me, but I also realize it’s part of life. And it doesn’t stop me from trying to change that person’s mind.”

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GREGG GUYNAN, SUPERINTENDENT OF O'BANNON CREEK IN LOVELAND, OHIO

Pray.

Sometimes, when life on the golf course gets to be distressing, Guynan will pray for strength and the intelligence to make the right decisions. “It has helped keep me from over reacting to certain things,” Guynan says.

Family time is quality time.

Guynan knows you’re busy, but he advises you to make time for your family and friends. You won’t regret it, he says.

“I spend a lot of time here, but I never let this job be all encompassing to my life,” Guynan says. “I have a wonderful family. I don’t get to spend as much time with them as I’d like, but it’s quality time when I do.”

“A lot of times I’ve come home, and I’m stressed out from something that’s happened here, and someone in my family will say something that takes all the stress away.”

Keep a fresh outlook.

Twenty-six years have been a blur, Guynan admits. But he’s had time to watch the course mature into a veteran track — and himself into a seasoned superintendent. He wants to keep watching and learning.

“I hope that I retire from here,” Guynan says. “This course is my baby.”

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