

COUNTERPOINT:

You will only benefit yourself by becoming a certified superintendent

BY RAFAEL BARAJAS, CGCS

If you don't carry the certified golf course superintendent designation (CGCS) behind your name, your employer is probably fine with that. In fact, it might be the reason they hired you in the first place. For years, I've heard people say, "My employer couldn't care less if I get certified." If that's the case, they probably couldn't care less about a lot of things. In turn, your unwillingness to challenge yourself to attain certification status says you agree and expect nothing more from your employer, your course or yourself. If your

employer does not support the time, cost or commitment required for your certification, that view would also likely be reflected in every aspect of care at your course. Is that how you want to spend your career?

There's a difference between those who understand the importance of continuing their education and those who choose complacency or the status quo. Lack of professional certification through the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America can be used as justification for a lower salary or fewer pay increases. That's good for your employer, but what about you? It can also be used as leverage to keep you in place at your current course, rather than looking for the best career opportunities that may lie ahead. Again, that's good for your employer, but it's not good for you.

We all know there is a return on most every investment; in this case, the statistics of the GCSAA salary survey show the positive difference in salary of a certified golf course superintendent versus a superintendent who isn't certified. You can question the statistics, metrics and the survey methods all day long, but the bottom line is this: Most of us who chose to challenge ourselves and attain certified status enjoy the rewards of our investment through some combination of better job satisfaction, respect and recognition among peers, higher pay, and/or better career opportunities.

Superintendents attain certification status for many different reasons. On paper, the letters CGCS stand for a lot more than ego or status. In the golf

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course management industry, this is a globally recognized symbol that proves you are committed to the highest level of professionalism in your field. The game of golf along with the environment and the economy are always changing. To be the best, you need to continuously learn, adapt and improve. Certification is a measure of your ability (and willingness) to do that by achieving and maintaining high standards through education and experience.

Becoming certified isn't some rubber stamp you get simply by paying a fee. Certification begins with meeting eligibility requirements, based on your level of post-secondary education. This determines the number of years of experience and continuing education required to become a CGCS program applicant. Once you meet the requirements to apply to the program, you'll complete an educational worksheet and send it with an official copy of your college transcript. If you are verified as eligible to apply, you have one year to complete your examination and the attesting of your golf facility.

The certification will validate your competencies through three methods:

**"TO BE THE BEST,
YOU NEED TO
CONTINUOUSLY
LEARN, ADAPT
AND IMPROVE."**

A portfolio, which can be started at any time in your career; a closed-book, multiple-choice exam, which must be successfully completed within one year of application; and the attesting of your golf course facility.

Some people will counter my argument by claiming I'm saying you can't be a good superintendent without a CGCS certification. This could not be further from the truth. But don't you want to be the best you can be?

The accounting, aviation, health care and construction industries all have professional organizations that keep members at the top of their games. It is the same with golf course management. Do you want somebody monitoring air traffic who doesn't have Federal Aviation Administration certification? Wouldn't you rather have a Certified Public Accountant monitoring your finances than somebody who simply knows how to use a calculator? With certification and

the GCSAA behind us, we are stronger and more able to share information and emerging trends. We also challenge each other to think more, do more and achieve more both individually and as a group.

There's a difference between just having a job and being part of a profession. A job



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is something you have to do, and you do it regularly for a paycheck. You might sort of slog through it every day and not care much, or you might be very good at it and you may learn through experience and trial and error over the years. Either way, when or if that job ends, what will you have left?

With a profession and certification, you have all the benefits of a job plus the proven ability to achieve a stated set of educational requirements for initial certification, as well as the continued ability to meet and adapt to new challenges within your industry. Plus, you have a strong community of fellow professionals with whom you share knowledge and camaraderie, and a network of support if the time comes to look for a new employer.

Typically, when a superintendent attains CGCS status, his or her employers will offer congratulations. But that

person — like me when I attained certification many moons ago — isn't guaranteed a pay increase. A lucky few superintendents will be financially rewarded soon after achieving CGCS designation — good for them!

Understand that employers are looking for those they feel are the most qualified in today's highly competitive market. If you're currently in the job market, you've likely noticed that most, if not all, the prime jobs being advertised have a “GCSAA Certified Preferred” notation on them. Does that mean you won't get hired if you aren't certified? Probably not, but why not get moving and begin today, so you can walk into the interview and tell them you are already seeking certification?

No one can argue the fact that having more experience and respected certification will give you the edge and advantage in today's competitive market, especially in a challenging economy.

It's easy to make excuses as to why we can't achieve certain things — we're too busy, we don't have the time, etc. You can keep talking about all the things you don't have, but I believe it's better to focus on what you want to have, and it all boils down to whether you are willing to look ahead.

I think you can and should move ahead, and I'll be among the first to congratulate you on your achievement and welcome you as a fellow certified golf course superintendent. ■



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