

**L**et's give "environmental sustainability" a rest and talk about "superintendent sustainability." If I learned one thing from Walt Disney in my years at the Magic Kingdom as a golf course superintendent, it's that "you can build the greatest theme park (golf course in our case) in the world, but it takes people to make it successful."

As superintendents, you're those key people.

I've known superintendents who retired after decades of service to clubs and others who seemed to have solid programs only to be suddenly dumped by their employers. Not all people are the same and not all superintendents are perfect, but too often I think clubs think "the next guy or gal" has a magic wand they can wave to solve whatever imagined problem exists. The old "we want to take it to the next level" reason or "we want to change direction" excuses are so lame they need a new crutch.

If 90 percent of those clubs gave the current superintendent the resources to take it to the next level or change the direction, they probably could. Alas, I fear most of those mysterious terminations come from personality clashes by members who felt slighted or wronged and finally became ax-wielding club presidents. And there are stories of the certain general manager who didn't like being the "new guy" on staff and the old superintendent is reported to be "seeking new opportunities" soon after the new GM's arrival.

Club officials and members need to understand the value of the knowledge a current superintendent possesses about the property when thinking about making a change. Instinctively, we know that learning how to manage turf in a given location, with its micro-climate, the grass types and dealing with club politics and budget resources are key factors in meeting expectations.

Internal politics can be a real bummer in the private club sector and there aren't too many remedies for folks who act like jerks, except a strong board with good leadership. Regulatory politics like water, fertilizer and pesticide regulations, however, are a real concern that a superintendent must address. I often wonder if their effects on turf management programs are

## Superintendent Sustainability

BY JOEL JACKSON



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adequately passed up the chain of command. Getting golfers engaged on these issues could really help sway politicians.

Location! Location! Location! I doubt the members are aware of the ramifications of the learning curve that a new superintendent will face. Important local knowledge includes learning to deal with the soil types on the course, sun and shade patterns and seasonal weather stresses. For some it may mean learning how to manage a totally different strain of grass, say from bent to bermuda or paspalum.

The final reality check for meeting expectations is the budget. A good superintendent can manage the budget. However, a club's expectations must match the resources provided — if not, the club will be looking for another superintendent to "change direction and take us to the next level." During his presentation on "Leadership in Today's Club World" at the Everglades GCSA Spring Symposium in early April, Certified Club Manager Kurt Kuebler said it best, "No club ever cut its way to prosperity!"

If you're new to the profession and think you have the answers for surviving in the superintendent world, let me humbly suggest you join your local chapter, seek out the tenured veterans in your region, buy them a beer sometime and ask them their secrets to success. Timing, luck and skill all play a part in being successful. Knowing when to put up, step up and shut up is seldom taught in turf school.

Never get complacent. Learn when to be visible and also invisible. Be friendly with members, but not buddy-buddy. Stay on the leading edge of the profession. By striving to be indispensable, you'll improve your chances of sustainability.

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