



“By participating, a whole new world opened up for me. It can for you, too.”

JOEL JACKSON, *Contributing Editor*

Assistants need an assist

I accepted an invitation from Melanie Bonds, executive director of the Alabama GCSA, to be a speaker for a mid-November assistant superintendent boot camp event in Birmingham, Ala. I quickly discovered I had no “silver bullet” solutions for the group of 28 assistants who showed up. Since the only thing you can control are your own actions, a theme emerged for my talk — participation.

By participating and being involved, you meet people and your name is out there. The old saying “It’s who you know, not what you know” is only partially correct. Being visible and active creates a lot of “who” contacts, but you must back it up by staying on the cutting edge of knowledge. So, education is a key ingredient of success. However, don’t just pursue traditional “turf management” education. Here’s why:

In a conversation with Lyne Tumlinson, a career and teambuilding coach (also a speaker at the conference) she said that two-thirds of prospective employers these days indicated they assumed the interviewee knew turf man-

agement. They were focusing on leadership, communication and management skills that a potential department head (superintendent) brought to the table. Participating in local chapters is a great first step to getting to know the successful superintendents in the area and picking up ideas on how to improve yourself.

Many of us are not at ease being in the spotlight, but you can also get recognition by being a key supporting actor. Case in point was Mr. Lee Bailey, assistant superintendent from the Willow Point CC in Alexander City, Ala. I didn’t know Bailey’s status until the end of the first day of the conference. He had introduced each speaker that day and read a short bio on each one. What I learned later was that he was an assistant, and

had volunteered to serve on the AGCSA board for several years, until at last the AGCSA changed its bylaws to create an assistant superintendent to the Board position.

I asked Bailey about the current situation with assistants and what it takes for them to progress in the business. He said, “It starts with the superintendent. They need to be willing to provide opportunities for assistants to grow in their careers. They need to be mentors and support assistants’ attendance to chapter meetings and education and be involved in the planning and administration of the maintenance department.”

Bailey has been on a couple of interviews this past year, and he echoed Tumlinson’s

comment that most of the interviewers were more concerned about his business and leadership skills and assumed he knew how to grow grass.

Bill Davidson, CGCS at the Country Club of Naples (Fla.) told me during an interview for another story that when he hires assistants he focuses on their personalities and communications and leadership skills.

“I can teach them how to grow grass on this course,” Davidson said.

I came to this profession from a non-turf background. I learned turf management and golf business from my bosses, turf seminars, and best of all, by networking with my peers at local and national conferences. By participating, a whole new world opened up for me. It can for you, too.

While meeting and conference opportunities might be limited right now, superintendents, assistants and chapters can work out some committee service, education or networking opportunities for assistants in formal or informal gatherings.

“Participation” was my mantra all day. But I confess, I opted out of the yoga class scheduled for the end of the day. The 12 hearty souls who stayed taunted me with “Participate! Participate!” as I skulked out of the room.

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