



"I was like the fourth outfielder on a baseball team who plays when a starter needs a day off — not going to kill you but probably not going to win you any games, either."

MATT NEFF, assistant superintendent,
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Speaking from experience

After receiving my turf degree, I was hired as the 2nd assistant at the club at which I had interned. Shortly after I was hired, the 1st assistant left for another job and I was promoted, a decision my boss undoubtedly questioned a few times during that first year. ¶ Despite my glaring lack of experience, I was sure I would immediately be awesome. I didn't do too bad that first year, but I assure you, I fell quite short of awesomeness. I was like the fourth outfielder on a baseball team who plays when a starter needs a day off — not going to kill you but probably not going to win you any games, either.

No one wants to hear a preachy assistant dispensing career tips so hopefully this doesn't sound that way. But I've made plenty of mistakes, had many successes and have worked with and for several great people. As a result, I've learned a few things that might be beneficial to you newer guys. If you're interested, here's my unsolicited advice:

Communication is key. Effective communication with your boss and the crew is essential. You need to have a firm understanding of your boss's expectations and preferences in order to effectively manage the crew. Furthermore, providing ac-

curate information to your boss regarding course conditions, crew performance, daily plans, etc. is crucial in not only efficiently managing the course but also in gaining your boss's trust.

Get to know the crew. You can't manage what you don't know. Taking the time to get to know the staff not only lets them know that you value them but will also help you to learn their strengths and weaknesses and, ultimately, how to get the best out of them.

Don't get tunnel vision. When you were on the crew, your main responsibility was completing your assigned job and moving on to the next

thing. Now, you have to not only focus on the tasks you are personally trying to accomplish in a given day, you also need to be keeping an eye on the crew and planning what everybody's doing next and what they need to do tomorrow, the next day and next week.

Listen to the crew. If you're new to the course, don't be afraid to ask them what the standard procedure is for a certain task. Even if you've been there a while, listen to their ideas. Asking for their input shows that you respect them and will give them a sense of ownership, which often leads to happier, more productive employees.

Know when not to listen to the crew. Sometimes the crew can be more concerned with minimizing effort than satisfactory results. Working smarter not harder, as the saying goes, is fine as long as the smart way yields the same or better results as the hard way.

No job is beneath you. Bathrooms need cleaned and there's no one to do it? Grab a toilet brush, my friend. Just because you're a manager doesn't mean you're above doing dirty work. Plus you didn't take Theory and Practice of Porcelain Stain Removal in turf school just to delegate that task to the hungover kid who was an hour late that day, did you?

Make a decision. Develop the knowledge and confidence to make decisions on your own without calling the boss on the radio every 10 minutes. There are still times when you should consult with him first, but you need to be able to differentiate those situations from those you can handle on your own.

You'll probably feel overwhelmed at times when you're first starting out, but once you establish a routine and start getting a better feel for your boss's expectations, the crew and the course things will get easier. In the meantime, there's going to be days when you just need to grind it out.

Just remember, there are plenty of fourth outfielders who went on to become All-Stars.

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