



IMAGE

By Dean Musbach

Is image everything? We know this is a catchy slogan that some advertising company undoubtedly was paid millions for. Nike coined the phrase for Andre Agassi with the hopes it would help sell more shoes. If you look at any political election race, the candidates are trying to present or sell an electable image. If you look at Golf Course Superintendents what image are they trying to sell? A professional image, of course.

Professionalism, this is something that the keeper of the green and greenkeeper had strived for, and today's superintendent continues to strive for. For many years the greenkeeper worked hard to improve his professional image so maybe he might gain the same public respect that both the golf professional and club manager had.

Although not openly sighted as a reason for change, the title of golf course superintendent replaced the title of greenkeeper with hopes that it would enhance the greenkeeper's image. Even today there is talk of changing the job title again because the term superintendent is not professional enough. In the minds of some, a superintendent is some guy who wears a green uniform and empties trash cans for a living.

The New terms being kicked around are, golf course manager, and director of golf course operations. Both sound professional, but if I had my choice, I'd rather be a golf course manager because of the shorter title.

Seriously, I respect the importance of our image, but image is not everything. Image does not save one's job, ultimately everyone has to produce the desired results of the employer. What these results are and how one accomplishes them, is relative to the job.

Without question, the job has become more complex. Government regulation, environmental awareness and public relations all have added to the superintendent's work load. During an earlier era, the greenkeeper didn't worry about these things, he concentrated on the basic maintenance of the course.

The administrative workload changed both the position and the image of the greenkeeper. When this happened, the greenkeeper became the superintendent. Once the greenkeeper became an administrator, it was easier to be considered a professional.

The GCSAA and local superintendent associations saw an opportunity to promote the idea of professionalism, and they have done much in improving the professional image of the superintendent. The criticism I have of the promotion is that the GCSAA's job description for a superintendent applies only to a minority of positions.

The promoters of our professional image have forgotten what our primary responsibilities and duties are, maintaining the golf course. The impression left with me is that some people think it is belittling or unprofessional for a superintendent to change cups, mow greens or dig an irrigation hole; I think this is bogus.

Every superintendent's position has different requirements. There are positions that are strictly management positions, but they are a minority. Conversely, there are positions that require very little management where the superintendent concentrates strictly on greenkeeping; these jobs also are a minority.

Reality of the situation is that most superintendent positions fall somewhere between the two extremes. The amount of time a superintendent spends doing the actual course maintenance doesn't make him/her any more or any less of a professional. A real professional can make an observation, make a decision based on the observation and then take whatever action is required.

This is a multi-faceted profession that requires multi-talented people. Golf course superintendents are agronomists, environmentalists, financial advisors, irrigation technicians, personnel managers, and regulatory experts; superintendents also are bunker rakers, cup changers, equipment operators, green mowers, mechanics, and

spray technicians. The second list is not glamorous but it certainly cannot be ignored or forgotten because it is the backbone of the profession.

Is image everything? No; image is important, but it is not everything. Our superintendent associations have done much to promote, expand and improve the superintendents position and image, but if our profession is to be credible we need to promote an accurate assessment of what our profession is, not what we wish it were or what it might be someday.

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