



PDI and You

By Al Jansen, Golf Course Superintendent, Baraboo Country Club

By now, most of you have read Mark Kienert's eleven page report on the Professional Development Initiative (PDI) being proposed by the GCSAA. A few of you might have attended the Town Hall Meeting on PDI in New Orleans, and some of you attended the March 6th annual meeting of the WGCSA, where a presentation of PDI was made by Ray Davies, a Member Standards Resource Group (MSRG) committeeman.

Mark was right in his **Historical Overview of PDI**, sent to you prior to the conference and show, in that, at the September, 1996 Chapter Delegates Meeting in Lawrence, Kansas, delegates were **"told" of a new initiative** designed to advance member's professional stature. However, if any of you have been participating in, or following the "Talking it Over" discussion forum at gcsaa.org, you would have heard that Mark's rendition, taken from the GCSAA Chapter Delegates Workbook, according to GCSAA Vice President, Tommy Witt, was printed in error. It should have read, **"...a group of delegates at the September, 1996 meeting came up with the idea to have tougher standards set by the association for entry into the GCSAA membership,"** according to Witt.

What Mark's report or the GCSAA have not told you is that the PDI was born out of the frustration that the GCSAA has had for many years that your association lacked the strength and recognition the PGA and the USGA have enjoyed in the golf industry. The current Certified Golf Course Superintendent (CGCS) program,

designed to enhance our image as professionals, has not had the desired effect in improving the GCSAA's image. The logical step was to improve the "lower-class" member by changing the requirements of "who gets in" and "who stays in" Class A. Then the GCSAA's image would have to improve in the eyes of employers, the general public and influential golfers, so the GCSAA believes.

The Process

In 1997, the Board of Directors (BOD) of the GCSAA appointed members to the MSRG, chaired by Bruce Williams, past president of the GCSAA, to determine new requirements for Class A and ways to "justify" these requirements to the membership. Thus, the Member Standards Initiative was born. The MSRG felt that in order to gain the credibility lacking in the industry, Class A members must be college educated and participate in ongoing continuing education, gaining Continuing Education Units (CEUs) and Professional Development Units (PDUs) to remain a Class A member (just what was 'intended' for the CGCS program).

The MSRG felt that the only way to "sell" this initiative to the membership, was to prove that changes in classification requirements would result in higher pay, job security, increased recognition, and better job opportunities. So, in 1997, the MSRG hired SRI International, a market research firm, to study the areas of job analysis, employer knowledge and requirements, membership perception, and education. This study was intended to help the MSRG

prove that a classification change would benefit the members.

What SRI found was that members used a wide variety of skills, knowledge and abilities to perform their jobs. Employers "highly" respect the superintendent and "need" their expertise. **"Employers perceive that the superintendent is the most influential member of the management team, by virtue of a specialized and scientific knowledge base that other's cannot easily learn."**

SRI's membership review found that members are satisfied with the role the GCSAA plays in their careers and lives and the education review found that current curriculum and the availability of educational programs were lacking in many areas and members recommended numerous improvements. The cost of the SRI study: \$342,000.00.

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The positive feedback by members and employers in the SRI study regarding the perception and importance of the Superintendent wasn't what the MSRSG wanted to hear in order to sell the membership on a new classification system. So, in 1998, the MSRSG hired Mullen, an advertising and marketing firm, to study the marketability of the "current" Class A member and GCSAA's image, as a whole. To Mullen's surprise, they found that superintendents are highly respected and their image has increased dramatically over the years. Mullen learned that superintendents are in a **"better position, both professionally and socially than ever before."** Mullen did find that **"the PGA is still the dominant association in the industry,"** and that the GCSAA needed to **"promote its own existence."** (The cost of the Mullen study has not been disclosed in the PDI Expenditure Report)

With the SRI and Mullen reports in hand, the MSRSG still could not justify to the membership the need for a classification change. The reports revealed that superintendents are highly skilled, happy with the role of their association and the association's image, and proud of their increasing image as superintendents and their "top" rating on their given management teams. So how can the MSRSG **"sell"** classification changes to the membership?

Enter Franklin-Covey, a firm that specializes in self-improvement philosophies and self-motivational tools. In April of 1999, the MSRSG hired this firm to accomplish two things: to sell the initiative to the membership, and to help restructure the education system based on the recommendations of the SRI Report. Franklin Covey immediately changed the name of the initiative to the Professional Development

Initiative to completely "remove" the word "standards, which they felt the membership would be against. They [Franklin Covey] also introduced a new "tool" called the HR Web, which is a self assessment, internet-based, proficiency rating system where a superintendent can go to define their competencies in over 45 categories, rang-

ing from resource utilization, operations management, communications and leadership (a paper model has also been prepared for those who do not have access to the internet). The HR Web would be used to determine a superintendent's continuing educational direction by highlighting weak areas of competency. The new tool

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will also be used to convey competency levels to employers, whereby an employer can "require" a certain level of accomplishment in the superintendent they propose to hire for their respective operation. Franklin Covey also introduced its [HR Web] ability to verify a superintendent's competency and verify their work towards improving that incompetence.

Franklin Covey then began to "preach" the importance of allowing the membership to "buy in" to the reclassification system by letting them (us) establish a few of the details, whereby enhancing the buy-in effect by having the members become "stakeholders" in the initiative and support it as a needed improvement. The cost for Franklin Covey's HR Web development and reclassification structuring through June, 2000: \$432,000.00.

The cost for the MSRSG meetings, Cross Committee meetings (Education, Standards, Certification, Career Development and Membership) and Focus Groups (employers and other Superintendents) to the GCSAA: \$233,000.00.

So, with over \$1 million spent (not including Mullen's work) to come up with a way to reclassify its members, the GCSAA now feels confident that PDI will bring increased awareness to its members and improve its position in the industry (with the PGA and the USGA) and in the eyes of employers, the general public and influential golfers. Besides the development of the HR Web, nothing else, to date, has been spent on educational programming or new delivery systems for that education. In fact, of the \$2.5 million initiative, not even half is slated for curriculum development by 2004.

Reclassification (What You Haven't Heard)

Under the guise of what has

been named the PDI, the BOD of the GCSAA is now proposing to regulate who can be considered a Class A member of their (our) association. Background, experience, professionalism, integrity, work ethics and passion for the profession are not viable components for being considered a Class A Superintendent anymore. The GCSAA will only consider a superintendent with a four-year degree (in any field) or a two-year turf degree as a candidate for their new "branded" Class A status. Once Class A status is achieved, you will be allowed to remain Class A only if the new, continuing, requirements are fulfilled every three years. And if not fulfilled, for whatever reason, you will no longer be considered class A material and will be demoted back to Class B status.

The GCSAA will no longer promote or market all Superintendent members. They will only promote their "branded" Class A superintendent and CGCS programs. The GCSAA is proposing that all current Class A members be grandfathered into the new "branded" Class A. They will only have to fulfill the new, ongoing, requirements to maintain their status. So, why worry about the requirements for entering class A? Think it will not effect you? If you are unable, financially, to fulfill the never ending requirement for CEUs and PDUs, you will be demoted to Class B, considered second rate and not worth marketing.

The GCSAA intends to inform employers that "branded" Class A and CGCS are the only superintendents that should be hired. Another concern is the requirement that you must be employed as a superintendent at the time of renewal. If you are not, for whatever reason, let's say you are in between jobs, you may be demoted back to Class B status. With the grandfathering clause, you should

also be aware that if, for any reason, a superintendent without the proper degree (no 400 hour turf certificates allowed) loses their class A status, he or she will never be allowed to return to Class A unless the proper degree is obtained by going back to college, **period.**

The most obvious objection to the degree requirement is the exclusion of many excellent superintendents who will never be con-

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sidered equal, or even qualified for Class A status. The superintendent without a degree (or the proper degree), no matter how successful, or how many years of experience, will never be considered for Class A status. We know the value of experience in this profession and the importance of learning from each other, so why should it matter to the GCSAA where or how superintendents acquire their knowledge, whether its a formal education or from "the school of hard knocks?" Knowledge is knowledge. I was fortunate to learn under two excellent superintendents - Dick Craig of Jack Nicklaus Sports Center in Cincinnati (now, The Golf Courses at Kings Island) and Bob Erdahl of North Shore Country Club in the Milwaukee area. Thanks to these men and their belief in me, I was provided with the opportunity to succeed in this profession. There are others (without degrees) who deserve the chance to succeed, as well. This association has never, in the past, excluded a superintendent from excelling and it should not start now.

Another requirement to qualify for Class A is mandatory self assessment using the HR Web. Superintendents will be required to assess their competencies and at least "meet" the established minimal requirement level. The base level of competency is unknown at this time. Your self assessment must then be validated by someone (boss, peer, club official, Franklin Covey staff or the GCSAA itself, yet to be determined) before you can be considered Class A material.

The scariest part of the initiative is the mandatory self assessment required every three years in order to maintain your Class A status. Franklin Covey has developed an assessment chart with five levels of competencies that relate to the many different skills that a superintendent must possess. Every Class A

member will be required to assess their competencies in each category every three years. Classes will be available to help improve your competency levels. The GCSAA wants to inform employers about the HR Web tool so that your employer can assist you in determining your competency levels and recommend courses the employer thinks are necessary for your improvement. The GCSAA also wants employers to use this information as a guide for deciding what level of competencies an applicant should possess in their quest to hire a superintendent. Just think, one day you will carry your competency profile into an interview and may or may not be considered for the position, depending upon your levels in each category. Of course, once you are a Class A member, there is no validation of the self assessments. So, you can have your competency levels read whatever you need.

How about the possibility that GCSAA might decide to "help out" employers? Rather than employers having to wade through 200 resumes, they might fill out a com-

petency profile questionnaire, have GCSAA input the data into the HR Web system and then, just like that, provide the employer with five or six names. You will never hear about the job opening and, if you are not one of the people on the "list", your name will never come up in front of the potential employer. Whether mandatory or voluntary, there will be problems that arise from the use, misuse, and/or access to the data in the HR Web.

The next requirement for maintaining your "branded" Class A status is to acquire a certain number of CEU and PDU credits during a three year period. The GCSAA education department is supposed to make education more affordable and accessible, but has no idea of what the cost will be, or exactly how they will make it more accessible. Nor have they given a time frame for the implementation of their plans. This requirement should not be voted on before GCSAA has proven to the members that they can, in fact, produce affordable and accessible education. Yet a vote on reclassification



"YOU HEARD THE 6:30 WEATHER REPORT?
WELL, THAT EXPLAINS IT.
I LISTENED AT 6:45."

is scheduled for the Dallas Conference and Show in less than a year. We will be running the risk of losing good members just because they (or their clubs) lack the financial wherewithal that others, with larger maintenance budgets, enjoy. Many superintendents cannot afford to go to the GCSAA Conference and Show where most of the educational programs are offered. Most superintendents are attending as many seminars and meetings as they can afford or have time for and many of these are sponsored by organizations other than the GCSAA. I do not think that this requirement should even be discussed until the GCSAA has their programs in place and the costs are known. Only then can we make a fair, knowledgeable decision about the amount of credits to require or not require.

The GCSAA's purpose, since its inception, was to support and help educate "all" its members, and now they want to regulate and qualify who they represent. The membership has no right to act as judge and jury of their peer's qualifications. Our association should be encouraging superintendents to join and participate, but only 45% of the courses in the US have a Class A (or higher) member. If this initiative passes, the GCSAA stands to represent even fewer courses. Superintendents may drop their membership because of the education requirements, a lack of financing or time, a lack of interest or simply because they disagree, in principle, with the new requirements. Both the WGCSA and GCSAA (dual membership) will suffer financially, but worst of all, both associations will lose quality members.

The internet now provides unlimited access to educational materials and data. There are other options such as joining the WTA, or on-line associations like TurfNet and the new Golfsat.com program for fast access to information and products, etc., but many would miss the cam-

aderie from being associated with the WGCSA over the years. The most beneficial educational opportunity we have is the willingness of superintendents to help each other and share their knowledge and expertise. Will the passing of PDI affect this special relationship among superintendents? I think it will and in some cases it already has.

The majority of our members have been apathetic as to how their vote has been cast in the past. I know I have been. We gave our votes to the WGCSA's BOD to cast as they saw fit. But then, on the whole, we have not been informed or even asked how they should vote. The communication between members and the BOD has been poor in this regard. It is very likely that the dual membership would not have passed if the national membership had not been apathetic and if the local BODs had really been interested in member opinions. We are all accountable for the lack of communication and interest in the policies of the GCSAA and the WGCSA. This must change now!

PDI has already cost over one million dollars (and it is still in the developmental stage) and will affect every current and potential member for

years to come. It is the member's responsibility to become informed, express opinions, and vote on this issue. We, the members, must make certain that the WGCSA's BOD casts our vote exactly the way we want. If not, we will have to reclaim our vote and vote individually, or proxy it to someone who will. The PDI issue is much too important to allow only a few BOD members and delegates to decide the fate of current and up-and-coming superintendents in the future. Please, get involved, whether you are for or against the Professional Development Initiative. Take responsibility for the direction of both of your associations.

And finally, remember: PDI, in any form, can be implemented without a vote from the general membership. All it needs is for the BOD of the national GCSAA to pass it. The only vote we, the membership can influence, is on reclassification, which will take 2/3 of the members to pass it. So, not only is it important for you to use your vote wisely in Dallas, in 2001, it is doubly important that you become involved in the process of developing an initiative that you and your sons and daughters can live with for decades. ♣



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