



Interns Can Learn A lot From Old Men

By **Michael Rzadski**, Horticulture Student, University of Wisconsin - Madison

I started working on golf courses when I was fifteen years old. My first job was at The Bull at Pinehurst Farms (a newer Nicklaus design) in Sheboygan Falls, Wisconsin. After learning the ropes, I moved on to work at Whistling Straits in Haven, Wisconsin. Two years into my time working on golf courses, I decided to get into turfgrass management as a career. Currently, I am a senior at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, pursuing a bachelors degree in turfgrass management. Looking back on the past seven summers working on golf courses, I thought to myself, "wow, look at how far I have come." The funny thing is, I feel like there is so much more that I still need to learn.

Throughout my experiences working on golf courses, I have found the intern - superintendent relationship to be a very challenging one for both the intern and the superintendent. It is challenging to interns because of the short time period that is offered to us in the summer months to learn and experience all of the skills and capacities needed to become an excellent superintendent. The challenge for the superintendent in teaching his interns how to run and maintain a successful golf course, is all of the extra work and added anxiety to an already stressful position.


When I say "Old Men" I am referring to most golf course superintendents, as it is nearly an undeniable fact that most superintendents are oftentimes twice as old as the interns they hire. I do not say this to age any superintendents out there, but to honor them. For without their help and guidance, I would not be where I am today.

It seems like many people these days see "Old Men" as washed up dinosaurs, that don't know anything and can't do anything. For example, Abe Simpson, Homer's dad on the television show "The Simpsons" is portrayed as a stereotypical old man. When in reality, many older people are very wise. Many "old men" that I have met and worked for or with, are simply a wealth of knowledge and information. Once you get the ball rolling and develop a relationship with them, they are more than willing to share their experiences and knowledge with you. Remember, a little gray hair is a sign of wisdom not just age.

Three short summers ago I became serious about my work on the golf course; it was not just a summer job anymore. I realized that my time was short and I wanted to learn as much as I could. I knew to succeed in the turf-

grass industry that education would be vital. I had picked up some information from working previous summers, just from being on the golf course and from what others had taught me. But, soon after that an unquenchable desire to learn and know had come over me. I needed to know how everything worked, why, when, for how long, etc. As I learned and picked up a little information my inquisitiveness grew, and I needed to know more. It is amazing what a little bit of information can lead to, and how powerful of a tool it can be. Now that I am nearing completion of my degree here at UW-Madison, I have more questions than I know what to do with. I would like to thank all of my professors who have helped and guided me along the way.


Questioning is the main way that interns and superintendents can learn from each other. One of the great





Midwest Turf Products


1444 Bernard Drive • Addison, Illinois 60101
Office 630.268.8871 Fax 630.268.1357


Proud Distributors of:

























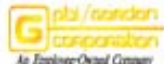












Cubby O'Brien

630.742.5124

Ed Devinger

414.801.2302

things about the aggressive and inquisitive nature of most interns is that it keeps the “Old Men” sharp. Not only do interns learn about the skills needed to run a successful golf course, the superintendents might learn something from their interns, or at least be reminded of the basic principals that govern the turf world. One of the things that I have learned is that if you want to know something about how or why something is done, always ask, always question, and always challenge whenever possible, even if it is a stupid question. Otherwise you will never know. This goes for the “Old Men” too, test your interns, question them, and challenge them, push them to be better everyday. It is only for the betterment of both the student and the superintendent.

Therefore, I challenge all of the “Old Men” to fuel our fire. Expose us to new things, if we have not yet experienced them. Don’t assume that we will learn them later as assistants, get our feet wet and teach us how to rise up to the expectations of our futures as assistants and as superintendents. Going to school and being educated in turf management is essential, but nothing compares to actually experiencing it. I think you would be pleasantly surprised at how well the experience can turn out. Share your knowledge with your interns. You would be shocked at how much actually rubs off. Shape us, mold us and guide us into our futures as great superintendents.

Not only would I like for the “Old Men” to challenge us as interns, but also I would challenge interns to take their professions seriously and to ask, question and learn from their elders whenever possible. Do it with respect and the intent to learn, these “Old Men” have been around longer and have been through a lot more than we have. Latch on to that old man, whether he is your superintendent, your father, or anyone else that you look up to, learn from their experiences and make them your own. When they are trying to tell you something, LISTEN, because believe it or not, they are telling this to you for a reason, even if it is something that you think you know, a repeat never hurts. That old man might actually know something!

Throughout our lives we all meet only a select few people that are very stiking to us. These are the people that leave a direct impression on us. That one person who knows you personally and of whom you can say, “This person made me who I am.” As superintendents, you have the opportunity to be that person and to leave that impression. You have the chance to lay the foundations as teachers and mentors of the trade, to foster in us the skills, character and grit necessary to become some of the greatest golf course superintendents in the world. Thank you, to all of the “Old Men,” for all of the time that you have put in and the sacrifices you make to pass on the “turfgrass torch,” to the next generation of superintendents.

Interns and students, take the time to recognize these great teachers and mentors. I have found that a great way to do this is to be the best that you can be everyday, at work and in life, for they will surely see the fruits of their labor in you. They truly do a great job molding us into what we are today. My dad always told me as a kid, “Whatever you strive for in life, do it to the best of your abilities.” For some reason that stuck with me all of these years. He has been my boss, my mentor and my “Old Man.” So, to you dad, and all of the others who have shaped me into the individual that I am today, I thank you and I salute your efforts.

These are all life lessons for me, and hopefully for you as well. Respect your elders and learn from them. With any luck you will be as fortunate as I have been to work with such great “Old Men.” 🌱



Don't forget to incorporate Milorganite into your next season's agronomic program and budget.

Milorganite delivers the results that golfers demand.

Partnering with: **Reinders**

1-800-785-3301

HORST
DISTRIBUTING, INC.

(920) 849-2341

www.milorganite.com 1-800-287-9645