

A Golf Superintendent

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by PAUL N. VOYKIN, Golf Superintendent, Briarwood C.C., Illinois

A trend in our golf course profession is perturbing me; this month I would like to expound on it. I may be mistaken, but I think I see our golf course superintendent's profession turning from its true direction. I am speaking of the recent trend of green superintendents slowly encroaching on the field of managership and away from our true profession of greenkeeping. This situation, I believe, has developed from the managers becoming general managers and taking charge of the whole clubhouse-and-grounds operation. As a result of their yet unproven venture, we have become panicky and think that by acquiring new titles and certificates, by attending bookkeeping and finance seminars, and urgently seeking further clubhouse property responsibilities, the situation will change.

I don't think so. A Golf Course Superintendent is a Golf Course Superintendent, and a Manager is a Manager, and the only way this fact will change is if you wish to change your profession completely. If that's what you want, go ahead, but do it full turn, please. Do not play games-you're only fooling yourself.

In my case there is no conflict. I know what I want to be - a good greenkeeper and nothing else. I'll be happy with that title, because, you see, I know something else - call it a basic managerial premise, if you wish. That is, unless the golf course superintendent is in complete charge of all and total bookkeeping, and unless all money passes through his office, he can never be top dog or in full control at the club: at least not in the eyes of the board members. This fact is as sure and true as the fact that the golf professional will always be the glamour man at the country club no matter how many double knits you own or how well you groom the grass.

Clouding up our true identity by seeking out extra jobs and taking more responsibility for a little more money has nothing to do with our real profession and skill of growing and manicuring grass. This is futile hypocrisy.

General managership is not our business. The managers who have taken over completely and are now total general managers have sold down the river their true responsibility to the club. They have taken on too many responsibilities and have gone into fields that they know nothing about. Let's not play their ambitious game. As in the past top clubs will learn that it's not going to work, and there really is no money saved.

Let me be absolutely blunt. Become a manager or stay a golf course superintendent, but whatever, be true to yourself - you can't be superb at both jobs. Declare your hand. Don't get into a mixed-up ball game unless you want to change jobs every few years as some general managers are doing. The wise ones (and we have a few outstanding ones in the Chicago area) work with us, cooperate with us, communicate and coordinate with us, and they are smart enough to keep out of our areas of responsibility - something they know nothing about. That's the way it should be.

I would like to say something else. I am not, nor is anybody else, impressed by greenkeepers calling themselves property managers, golf engineers, turf managers and other nonsensical names. Golf or green superintendents - yes, greenkeepers-lovely, "grass growers" or "grass farmers" is fine with me. I know what I am and I make good money at it. I don't need to seek extra "janitorial" jobs around the clubhouse to tarnish my true professional image. My direct responsibility is the golf course and that load is

heavy enough for me. And please don't give me that old business about shrinking my duty as a breadwinner, or not being able to take on extra responsibility, or not trying to uplift our profession. I take on more responsibility and I am more involved with exciting things than I know what to do with - for my family and for the image of my profession. And I know many of you are the same. Long ago I could have become manager, but that's not my forte. I am a GREENKEEPER, and in this field of endeavor I strive for perfection.

There is something else I must tell you that is in me (and unless you have a touch of the same, you might as well become a manager or go into something else). I would miss the soft warm rains that fall on the turf that I grow. I would miss the white snow that covers the golf course in late fall for the first time, melts, and then softly comes again. I would truly miss all the challenges of nature that go with my profession. The hot sun of summer heat and the salty sweat of humidity on my brow. I would miss the pleasure of admiring turf manicured and maintained under both good and adverse conditions and knowing that I had a hand in keeping the verdant picture that way. But of course there would be other things, also, soothing the frustrations of working with nature. I would miss her many gifts to us greenkeepers, the trees changing in the seasons and the flowering shrubs in spring. I would miss the daisies and other wild flowers hiding from our mowers next to the majestic elms, and I would miss the pheasants calling to their mates in early morning. I know I would miss the honest faces of commercial friends calling on me and old greenkeepers advising me. But most of all I would miss getting up each early morning and playing the endless chess game of man against nature, or perhaps more truthfully, trying to work with her and relishing the achievement and, oh, the satisfaction and the pleasure that comes once in a while each season when just for a short time I have won the battle.

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Improve Your Decision-Making Process

The golf course superintendent makes decisions every day in every area of his work. Most are good decisions, or he wouldn't be where he is. But some aren't so good, and then the superintendent should review his decision-making process. Here are four suggestions for making good decisions.

First, ask others for their opinions. Incorporate worthy ones into your thinking but don't base your decisions solely on someone else's opinions.

Second, approach decision-making with creativity, as explained above. Don't assume that what worked in the past will still work today — check it out.

Third, use your intuition and play your hunches, but temper them with facts. Legitimate hunches can be easily confirmed by seeking out relevant information.

Fourth, attack the problem. Don't procrastinate, hoping it will go away or solve itself. Fight problems with action, not inaction.