

How Did I Get Along Without One?

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When I became superintendent at Stillwater Country Club in the Spring of 1985, I immediately found a lot of work to undertake with a minimal staff. I had inherited a retired, seasonal mechanic; a retired seasonal worker and a summer staff of 10. For me to get the job done effectively, some staff changes for permanent help were needed.

But since the season already was underway and the budget was set, I had to bite the bullet and make do with what I had and wait until the following year.

During 1985 I spent an excessive amount of hours finishing jobs started by my staff—spraying, watering (we had a manual system until 1989) and helping the mechanic. Then, of course, I had my superintendent duties of planning, scheduling, supervising and handling any other distractions that occurred during the season.

It is during these long hours of work that your mind has time to plan ahead and improve upon the present situation. I felt I was spreading myself too thin, and I felt the course was not progressing to the point where I wanted it to be. I tried to put more hours into work to help, but I was only fooling myself. Through all this, the membership was very complimentary of the work and really appreciated my effort.

At the end of the year, my mechanic informed me he was leaving to retire officially. I now had the opportunity to begin staff changes that were needed. Through documentation of my hours spent on the golf course and in the shop, I convinced my new green chairman of the need of a full-time mechanic and a full-time assistant superintendent. But although I convinced him, the Board of Directors only could allocate funds for one full-time position and one more summer staff.

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I realized I could not do without a mechanic, so I hired one. I really gained only one more person to supervise while a quality person took care of the equipment.

The 1986 season started out fine, but I soon found myself spread thin again. Too many projects were started. Roughs out of control from excessive rainfall and unsupervised staff resulting in inefficient work soon began to make me realize the dire need for an assistant. I continued to work long hours to meet my expectations, and the membership once again appreciated my diligent effort to continually improve the playing conditions of the course.

By the end of the season, I realized I spent too much time at the golf course, and that I needed more quality time with my family. So I went to my green chairman again with the idea of hiring an assistant. The conversation lasted 10 minutes, with his denying my request while stating that “the course never looked better,” that things in general looked good and that complaints he had received were minimal.

I needed a new strategy for 1987 to prove the need for one full-time assistant superintendent. I did what was expect-

ed of me and not what I thought should be accomplished. I went about my business to improve turf quality, but now I didn't spread myself out too much. I continued to spray and fertilize for optimum playing conditions, but projects either were partly finished or unfinished. I did not go back to these areas because we had other tasks to accomplish.

Meanwhile, it was getting very dry. Since my staff was doing all the night watering, my day staff was smaller. In addition, I put a “senior” summer staff in charge while I took a weekend off. Needless to say, problems did arise in my absence. Members, once again, noted their appreciation of my effort and course excellence, but they also began to notice areas of concern.

I assured them I was doing the best I could. At the end of the season I was not as “burned out” as other years, but I knew I did not accomplish, to my expectations, the tasks set forth at the beginning of the season. **It was time to talk to the green chairman again.**

I professionally approached the chairman with documentation for the need of an assistant superintendent, and I also wrote the job description and my expectations for the job. I felt the key points for the need of an educated assistant were to implement the pesticide and fertilization programs, to provide another set of trained eyes for course imperfections and staff supervision, project supervision and weekend supervision. He liked what he saw and brought the proposal to the Board of Directors for approval. Yes, the motion was approved.

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For the past two seasons I have enjoyed working with the assistants I have hired. They have helped me by making my job easier . . . and better. Delegation of authority has allowed the assistant to watch over the staff while they are working to help insure proper task completion. Also, with the assistant doing most of the pesticide and fertilization applications, I have been provided the time to fine tune our maintenance program and to increase the playability standards of our course. I have put my assistant in charge of a number of projects, and they have been completed with excellent results.

In writing this article, I think there is something for everyone to take home. If you are at a course that is without an assistant or are in the process of obtaining one, perhaps some of the key points that I used to create the position will help you in your quest. The end result is that a superintendent not only becomes better, but the golf course benefits as well.

In addition, if you superintendents have assistants already on your staffs, take time to really show your appreciation. Take time to teach them what you know. Include them in administrative duties. Ask for their input in decisions, and show your confidence in their work.

Take it from me. Only a short while ago I was doing both jobs. I look back on those times and wonder how I ever got along without one.