



In Play

By Jack MacKenzie, Jr., CGCS
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Recently I received a request from Andy Lindquist, student in a Careers Class at the Elk River High School. Andy is considering becoming a golf course superintendent and wanted some insight into our profession. Well, here goes an attempt at answering his ten question survey:

How many hours do you work per day? Sure I could be a smarty and say "as many as it takes", but in reality, there is always something more to be done during the golf season. When I was younger I would invest all of the time I felt I possibly could to accomplish the goal of providing my members with an exceptional playing opportunity. Today, an older and hopefully wiser man, I say prioritize your life. Family first, vocation second. Achieve a productive lifestyle to allow more time with your family. My average workday in the summer is 10 hours and in the winter 6.

What are the tasks and duties to be completed during the day? In an effort to provide an exceptional track for my players, I must wear many different hats and accomplish many different tasks. There are regimented daily chores to be managed, in both English and Spanish. Political balls to juggle with the golf pro, general manager, the women's 18 hole and 9 hole groups, the "high rollers" and sweet old boys (SOBs). Each of which has agendas of its own. I must shield my members from my staff and my staff from my members. And I must battle Mother Nature in an attempt to grow grass that sometimes wants to die in spite of what I do. In the spur of a moment I am a pathologist, agronomist, politician, golf rules specialist, interpreter, manager, gardener, cup cutter, mower and rarely a mechanic.

How many people do you have helping you complete tasks on an average day? In the winter I have three additional staff members. The shoulder months of April, May, September and October witness the addition of seven bodies more. And in the peak months my crew may exceed 22 total. Employed on the green staff are several Hispanic personal, one lad from the Czech Republic, a few semi-retired experienced workers and a sprinkling of high school and college employees. Each of whom requires a different motivational strategy.

Do you report your work to anyone? Members? One of the beauties of this job is the independence that it affords me. Sure there are changing Board members who think they are in charge, and I have a real decent general manager who is theoretically in command of the whole club, but I like to believe that I work for myself. I set my expectations high and I do everything within my power to achieve and overcome the challenges presented to me on a daily basis. Of course I inform my GM and the membership of the

course conditions. But to achieve them, I make my own choices.

How much time do you spend outside of the work place doing golf work? See the answer to question one. You do your club a disservice if you cannot step away and have a life without your course, IMHO of course.

Do you spend time year round working at the course? Yes. Although my members think that when the snow flies I pack up my swim thongs and spend the winter in Cabo San Lucas, in reality I put on my Carharts and work outside. Construction projects keep me busy until the ground freezes followed by tree trimming until my finger tips tell me to get back inside and help the boys paint benches, ball washers, water coolers, tee blocks and Armor All the bunker rakes and waste baskets.

What type of personality would be best for this job? Independent, conservative, personable, retentive, ambitious, friendly, imaginative, creative, perfectionist, punctual and dynamic. I like to think that as a whole, Superintendents are great folk. We can be counted upon to do the right thing, typically without being asked. We are the glue that holds a club together during hard times and the oil that keeps the organization running smoothly the rest of the season.

What type of mental stress is found on the job? As long as I remember that there is nothing I can do about the weather, the choices other people make and the "rub of life's green," there are few stresses. When times get rough I remind myself of the serenity prayer: "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference." Good managers manage their stress by appreciating their own capabilities.

What are some of the fringe benefits you have? None of us got into the business to become rich. But if I were paid for the number of beautiful sunrises I see each year I would be a millionaire ten times over. I am witness to more rainbows in one season than many people see in a lifetime. The sound of the snow melt, the smell of growing grass, the feeling before a thunder storm and the appreciation of a course as perfect as it can be for an important event are elixirs you cannot buy at the store. The development of a "team" over the course of a season sends shivers down my spine. Watching kids grow to adults, foreign employees learn to communicate and the bliss of a retired office worker just mowing grass are all "benefits."

What are some of the advantages and disadvantages to the job? Simply this, if you don't love what you do, quit. Find what you love and excel at it. From the trenches to the club house politics, my job is a game and I like to think I'm winning!

With all of its trials and tribulations, I love what I do. Not a day goes by when I do not take a moment and appreciate all of the opportunities that surround me. My life is good and I am very happy to be a golf course superintendent.

-- Jack MacKenzie, Jr., CGCS