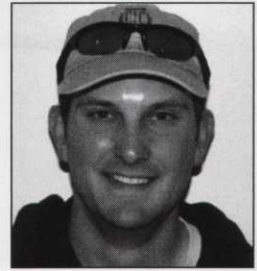


# The Roles of the Assistant Golf Course Superintendent



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Years ago the job of a Golf Course Superintendent was much different than it is now. Golf Course Superintendents used to be called greenkeepers or the more degrading term, grass farmers. As the golf course maintenance business has become more sophisticated, the job description of a Golf Course Superintendent has moved further from grass farmer and closer to business manager. Because of this, the role of the Assistant Golf Course Superintendent has also changed over the years. There is no doubt the Golf Course Superintendent will always hold the greatest responsibility and in turn face the greatest pressure when maintaining a golf course, but the

person responsible for playing the most roles on a turfgrass maintenance crew might be the Assistant Golf Course Superintendent. On any given day an

morning job before being able to start on the next project. I always consider this flow for each day, week and even month.

I spent my early years in this business working at Albany Golf Club. Golf Course Superintendent Tom Kasner and his assistant Mickey Saatzer created a great working atmosphere. Working at Albany Golf Club on a crew with great camaraderie showed me how important crew morale is to both working and course conditions. Coming up with ways for the crew to interact is a great way to improve the camaraderie and morale.

*"Most of us currently working as Assistant Golf Course Superintendents have yet to achieve our career goal. There is the next level out there for which we strive."*

Assistant Golf Course Superintendent may need to be a manager, agronomist, student, teacher, and even a mechanic. These days a superintendent's attention is being pulled in many different directions leaving him or her unable to focus all of his or her attention on the golf course. This makes it necessary for the assistant to play all of these roles well to ensure the superintendent can return to a smooth running golf course.

The most important and traditional role an Assistant Golf Course Superintendent must fill is that of a manager. It is also a role for which there is really no technical training. Being a manager requires strong leadership and people skills and while these skills come naturally to some people others have to work hard at them. Most assistants are given the task of organizing the crew and their daily assignments.

Each day Town & Country's other assistant, Jeramie Gossman, and I work to come up with the most efficient crew flow. We make sure the morning jobs are assigned, while keeping afternoon tasks in mind. For example, if two crew members are going to be working on the same project in the afternoon, we give them morning jobs that will finish at the same time. This way one worker is not sitting around waiting for the other to finish his or her

One of the ways many courses do this, is by having "shop games". Last summer I made a game called "polish horseshoes" out of PVC pipe and golf balls. The crew challenges each other and games are often played during our lunch break. A good game always seems to send the crew back to the course in a good mood.

The next role an Assistant Golf Course Superintendent must fill is that of agronomist. Unlike managerial skills, agronomy is where most assistants have received their education. In most cases the superintendent is going to make the final decisions on matters of agronomy but, it is important for the assistant to be able to identify problems including disease, fertility and irrigation.

I usually like to use my time in the morning to scout the golf course for problems. As I make my way around the golf course doing quality control and checking on the crew, I make an effort to see every green and tee, paying special attention to problem areas. Over the years I have found it is easier to see all areas of the golf course if I follow the holes in order, rather than just following the maintenance route. Driving the course this way forces me to not only see every green and tee, but also the fairways and other areas between the tees and greens.

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Another great way to scout the golf course is by playing golf. This allows you to see the course from a golfer's point of view without being interrupted by something that might come up during the workday.

Another important role the assistant superintendent must play is that of a teacher. During the course of a season an assistant superintendent may be asked to teach by training new crewmembers or by helping a student intern learn something new about the business. Good teaching skills will result in a better crew

because when training you will be better able to communicate the level of quality expected for each job. When they get proper training, the crewmember learns how to do the job right the first time rather than picking up bad habits, which usually lead to poor work quality.

On occasion an assistant might have the opportunity to help a crewmember, even though that person might not be heading for the golf course business. For example, we had an employee at Town & Country who never wanted to put forth that little bit of extra effort. This person would mow over sticks, neglect to whip clippings after mowing, or fail to stop and pick up a piece of trash. After many failed attempts to correct the problem I became frustrated and lost my cool. Later, after calming down I went to the crew member and told him, someday you will be looking for a job and employers are going to be looking for someone that goes the extra mile without being asked. I said a habit of passing up opportunities to go that extra mile is not going to serve him very well in the future. From that day on he was much better at putting forth a better effort. A situation like this is what I usually find to be the most rewarding.

As important as it is for an assistant golf course superintendent to be a good teacher, it is probably more important to be a good student. An assistant superintendent must always look for opportunities to learn something new. The quality of your current golf course and more importantly the quality of your career depend on it. Anytime someone new joins our crew from a different golf course, I try to find out how he or she may have done something different at the

other course he or she worked at. While it might not be possible to implement a new idea at your current course, there may be a day when you have your own course and can use the idea. As an assistant, you may not always feel as though your voice is heard on different matters. If I have an

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idea that does not get used, I try to think about why this was the case. Would my idea have worked? Why or why not? Is there something that comes up down the line that would have made my idea more or less successful? I try and get myself to think outside the box in this way whenever I get the chance. There are many variables affecting every decision on a golf course. If you can train yourself to think outside the box, taking all variables into account when making decisions, the chances of those decisions being successful will increase greatly.

In anyway I can, I am always trying to find out more about the business. Whether it be reading trade magazines or talking to people in the business. It is great when I get the chance to pick the brain of someone who has been in the business for many years. Just the other day I was talking with a person who used to be a superintendent and now has his own business. Sitting and chatting with a person like that is so valuable to a young person looking to move up in the industry. You just never know when something

you hear may benefit you down the road.

I also enjoy opportunities to pick the brain of our equipment technician at Town & Country, Mike Romundstad. I have learned a lot about equipment and reel maintenance, engine care and painting from him over the years. Helping out and asking questions are great ways to learn. Anytime you have a chance to learn from people in this business, be it superintendents, sales people, turf students, or equipment technicians it increases your own catalogue of knowledge. Finding ways to build your catalogue of knowledge will give you a great chance of being successful in the future.

Most of us currently working as Assistant Golf Course

Superintendents have yet to achieve our career goal; there is the next level out there for which we strive. Becoming a Golf Course Superintendent is not an easy goal to reach and with more people gaining turfgrass degrees it is only going to get more difficult. As assistants we should be looking for an edge, something that is going to get us where we want to be a little bit faster. This business does not offer a guarantee of making lots of money and praise from employers is often in short supply; dedication, passion and a love of the job are what push us towards our ultimate goal. If you have these traits you must take every opportunity to learn as much as you can to help yourself reach the next level. One of the truly unique things about this business is that even though we compete against each other for jobs and our courses compete against each other for business, we are always looking out for each other. We are always trying to help the next guy be as successful as possible.



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