

The Golf Course is in Great Shape... But You're Fired!

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During the past two years a disturbing number of superintendent dismissals have occurred in the western United States even though their golf courses were in good condition.

The most important function of the superintendent is to provide a well-maintained and playable golf course for the enjoyment of golfers. So let's take a close look at potential problem areas between the superintendent and other decision makers.

Some Problems. If the golf course is in excellent condition and the golfers are content, you would think the superintendent's security would be solid. This is not always the case, however. Non-turf-related problems can arise. These include:

1. Who is in charge of agronomic decisions?
2. Outside tournament scheduling or "surprise" membership events.
3. Conversations held between the golf professional(s) and players questioning agronomic decisions.
4. Comparing income rates between superintendents and other course employees.
5. Short-term green chairman appointments.
6. Personal preferences enter into decisions on course conditioning.
7. Architectural changes forced on the superintendent by the green committee that do not have majority support.
8. Superintendent failure to attend board meetings.
9. The desire to cut costs by the club or municipal operation.
10. Outside business interests by the superintendent.

Some Solutions. While the

preceding does not include all potential problems, it does represent many areas that do not deal with "grass growing." In this same vein, the following may not provide all the answers, but practical solutions can be considered to keep the ax from falling when it is not deserved.

1. Establish meetings to discuss mutual plans and how to have an effective working relationship between the superintendent, general manager and golf professional. From this meeting, the superintendent should understand exactly who is in charge. The general manager and/or golf

professional should understand that the superintendent is a *professional* and should be entrusted with all agronomic decisions.

2. Establish weekly management meetings to discuss areas of concern or upcoming events.
3. Play golf together. Include the superintendent, general manager, golf professional, and/or green chairman. If possible, play at outside facilities.
4. Make sure the superintendent attends all board meetings pertaining to maintenance operation.

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5. The golf professional must realize that he/she is not the superintendent. It is far better to direct turf related questions to the turfgrass professional—the superintendent.
6. The superintendent should not get involved in who makes how much money at the golf course.
7. When the new green chairman is elected, have an immediate meeting at the superintendent's office to begin the education process. At this time, be sure to give the green chairman a copy of the USGA Green Section Guide booklet.
8. The superintendent must realize that if the membership wants it purple, give it to them purple. But, if what they want could potentially cause long-term damage or side effects, get it in writing.

9. Establish a set of course condition standards at the board level so that quick decisions cannot be made by the green committee.
10. Don't lose a good superintendent because of money issues. Cut back in other areas such as reducing the acreage of maintained turf or accepting less than perfect roughs. A well-paid, professional superintendent is more valuable than a cheaper, but inexperienced person.
11. If the course is in good condition and the new green chairman wants the superintendent removed, remove the green chairman! The opposite is also true. That is, if the golf course is in poor condition and the new green chairman wishes to make reasonable improvements, yet is obstructed by the superintendent, then superintendent termination may be justified.
12. If outside business interests by

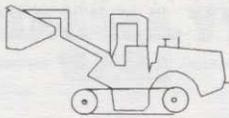
the superintendent are not affecting the golf course, allow the superintendent to be an entrepreneur. His activities in the community—such as teaching classes—will reflect positively on the golf course.

13. Provide improved stability and business sense by lengthening the green chairman's tenure to a minimum of three to five years. The policy of revolving, one-year terms for the green chairman doesn't work.

14. Always maintain open lines of communication in both directions. Diffuse problems before they reach a boiling point.

The superintendent's job is extremely difficult and there is nothing more frustrating than providing a well-maintained course while being threatened due to other problems. This should be taken into consideration any time a person's livelihood is on the line.

Terry Asphalt

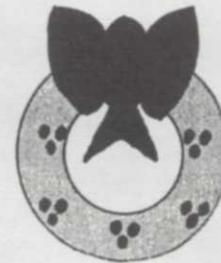


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