

Success in Mentoring

As we look at our industry today and the game of golf, we should ask ourselves one question. What is the foundation for growth? It starts through “Mentoring”.

One usually thinks of “Mentoring” as teaching a younger person as a “Mentee” to help that person gain valuable knowledge and experience from someone with a more seasoned background, but that is not where it stops. Mentoring is truly where education and career development begins. But being a mentor and mentee can be one in the same. That is why it is so important to continue this process throughout one’s whole career. It will allow one to grow and develop professionally and give back to their industry as well as enhancing their own career at the same time. That is why being a mentor and mentee are two of the most important components in our industry for sustainable growth and career building.

I would like to start with the idea of “Peer Mentoring” as the most important aspect in growing one’s career as well as growing our industry in the Carolinas. Look around at every golf course. There is always a course that is setting a standard as to “What good is” relative to your own goals. If you want to be the best you can be, don’t be afraid to reach out and find a “Peer” mentor or mentors to help you achieve success – no matter what golf course you maintain. If you want great greens, seek

out the person and/or persons that may help you. Don't try and reinvent the wheel yourself; peer mentoring will expose you to different ideas and may be your secret to success. This can save you from getting experience the old fashion way and prevent you from making mistakes at your own expense. However, non-relative or misguided information misapplied can be worse than getting no information at all sometimes. So, make sure that the ideas are compatible with your needs.

With that said, there is always someone you can learn from in our industry. This is why "Peer Monitoring" can enhance your skills as well as laying the foundation to pass these skills along to someone else.

When I think of "Peer Mentoring", I love thinking about the movie "We are Marshall" when Jack Lengyel approached Bobby Bowden, West Virginia University, to help provide him with information that might help Marshall rebuild their team after the devastating plane crash on November 14, 1970 that killed all the players. Coach Lengyel was not bashful about reaching out to a peer to become a mentee to achieve his goals, even though they were in competition with each other as coaches. Certainly, this was a unique situation, but it fits. The point is, most everyone is willing to give out their knowledge and help you with your own goals if they are asked - even if they are in competition with you. Don't let pride stop you from asking anyone to share their knowledge with you. Their shared knowledge could be your key to your success. So, give peer

mentoring a chance, it might be just what you need to improve your course and your career.

In addition to “Peer Mentoring” of one’s self, the superintendent’s next biggest responsibility is “On the job Training” of mentees. This process of training is what sustains the quality and growth of our industry. Without OJT (On the Job Training) of mentees by the superintendent, our industry as a whole would be without quality superintendents in the pipe line to grow the game of golf and produce quality playing conditions.

So, what quantifies a mentor and a mentee relationship? It starts with upfront communication between the two. It is up to the mentor to find out what the goals and aspirations are of the mentee, and it is up to the mentee to explain what he or she expects from the mentor. It should not be a one-way street. There are several different staff layers on a golf course: greenskeeper on the course, interns (OJT), second assistant, first assistant, etc. If someone has never worked on a course, obviously, this person needs to experience all the ins and outs of golf maintenance to see if this kind of work fits his or her goals and/or career ambitions. This will most likely include duties that are basics to being a part of the crew and carrying out tasks as a greenskeeper; e.g., weed eating, fly-mowing, picking goose grass out of greens, changing cups, edging bunkers, rough mowing, etc. So many times, this initial work period on the course is a deciding factor that may determine if

an individual wants to pursue golf maintenance as career or not. If interest is there, it is up to the superintendent to counsel and direct this person so his or her experience and education complements one's goals. During this initial work period, expose the person to as much as possible to see if golf maintenance is truly the right fit. There is nothing worse than getting into a career that you hate. We spend more time at work than in any part of our life, so making the right career decision is critical.

Once a person has decided that golf maintenance is his or her forte, OJT as an intern is a prerequisite to success. This is the time that you need to get all the experience you can. To me, this is a when one should diversify their experience by working for different superintendents (mentors) on different courses and in different environments. It is the one time in your life that you can broaden your background through job diversity before settling into a more permanent position. For example, if you are in school working during the summers, don't just work in your back yard every year between semesters for the same mentor/superintendent. If at all possible, move around to different golf courses and work for different superintendents. This will help you enormously. If you did not receive an agronomically related education, it is even that much more important to move around. It is the one time in your life that you have the flexibility to move and diversify your work experience. Make sure when you start your OJT that you work for a superintendent that understands the role of a mentor and

your needs a mentee. Make sure your mentor understands that there is an underlying responsibility to help you and not just use you as a worker on the crew unless that is part of the job. This is an injustice to you and your career. Be prepared to explain to your mentor what you want to get out of your internship. Your mentoring superintendent should respect you for your request and also give you other ideas on how you might proceed. Make sure the both of you are on the same page.

Once someone has finished their OJT, it is time for the big step - their first job as an assistant. This is where you want to go to work for a superintendent that can relate to your needs and embrace your career goals as well as his or her goals for you as an assistant. As a superintendent, you might want an assistant for a long time if you have a small operation. Or you might be a superintendent that likes a mentoring and placing your assistants into jobs every 3 to 4 years. I have always enjoyed helping aspiring assistants to become superintendents. I felt like this was a way to give back to the golf industry. However, there are superintendents that like to train aspiring assistants to take their place once they leave a course and/or retire. Regardless of which route one chooses to take, it is important to mentor and become a mentee in the right situation to grow one's career professionally. The rewards are numerous. Think of mentoring as a means of philanthropy.

Every day we are judged by the most critical athletes in the world – golfers. This is why we should do everything in our

power to serve as mentors and mentees. This will give us the best possible chance to produce the best product we can within our industry. This will bring recognition and credibility to our industry as well as respect for us as professionals. Give mentoring a chance, and it will pay long term dividends forever. I appreciate being able to give something back to our industry!!!



Dave Prekop, Equipment Manager and mentor (middle) carefully reviews the quality of cut with Darren Ashley, Assistant Supt. (left) and Mason Rodriguez, Assistant Supt (right) as mentees at Seccession Golf Club.