

The 12th Man



Normally when we think of the 12th Man, we think of Texas A&M Football. Their 12th Man is a powerful part of their team that represents thousands of fans and is always there for them at game time. The golf course superintendent also has a 12th Man supporting their team in the form of Sales Consultants (SCs). No matter how big or small the golf course team is, the SCs are a very important part of one's operation. These individuals can serve the team in so many ways other than just promoting a product / service or quoting a price. Most individuals in sales are highly trained with lots of experience, education, and knowledge in their area of expertise; and most of them are very passionate about helping you be successful. If you look good, that makes them look good. Think of SCs as a conduit to the whole turf industry. These individuals travel from golf course to golf course seeing everything that you cannot see in a lot of cases. The SCs can bring new ideas to the

table, new methodology, innovative techniques, creative thought processes, research and development concepts, unbiased advice, and sometimes just plain old moral support. And depending on their background, they may provide your operation with lots of insight that otherwise would require an expensive consultant. Yes! Sales Consultants can be of great value if you choose the right ones. So, who are these SCs and what do they bring to the table when it comes to game time? Fertilizer and pesticides, organic products, equipment, equipment parts, golf course accessories, grass, sand, seed, contractors, irrigation, etc. The list can go on depending on one's situation. These individuals can bring a lot of specialized value to a golf maintenance team. In a lot of cases, they can bring a single idea to you that can be a game changer. Good Sales Consultants to a golf course are no different than a good Financial Consultant to you personally. Working with the right ones are critical and can be a game changer. And guess what, they are all looking for a team to join. This is where you must pay attention to who you bring onto your team as a 12th Man. So, what constitutes bringing Sales Consultants on as a 12th Man?

Experience must be a major criterion. They are individuals that have seen lot of what works and doesn't work in the golf course

industry. They can save you from getting experience at the expense of making painful mistakes yourself. For example, applying a root pruning preemergent herbicide to a sandy soil profile with a low CEC could potentially create a whole lot of misguided agronomic challenges. An experienced Sales Consultant would guide you away from making such a tragic decision or warn you of the consequences. This person would go over the pros and cons of the product and not just sell it to you to make a sale.

Products and Services. Most superintendents don't have the time to sit around and read about products or services all day long and figure out what is best for their operation. Most of one's time is spent managing their staff and their golf course. This is where a qualified SC can be an asset to your team as a partner, educator, supporter, and researcher. SCs can do a lot of leg work for you and save you an enormous amount of time and money and make your operation look good. We live in a world of information, and a lot of this information comes through your relationship with SCs. These individuals are usually representing companies that are on the cutting edge of innovation and new ideas. So, working with SCs that can cultivate information and bring it to the table is important. It

can mean the difference between success and failure depending on what you are trying to accomplish.

Dependability and Communication. When a Sales Consultant tells you something is going to happen, you need to know that they are going to do everything in their power to guarantee it. Have you ever heard the saying, “A Man is only as good as his word”? You must have SCs that understand this statement. Your operation depends on it. Things must happen in a dependable manner to ensure success. Good SCs understand this. When the sand SC tells you the delivery is going to be there two days before aerification, it cannot show up 3 days late. This is a confidence killer!! All SCs realize the process can break down sometimes. So good communication is all too critical. No superintendent wants to be in the dark with unwanted surprises that show up at the last second. So, working with SCs that do what they say they are going to do and follow up on what they say is going to happen is a recipe for success as well as a great relationship.

Reliability. How many times do you make that phone call to one of your SCs and say that you needed something yesterday,

such as equipment, sand, fertilizer, irrigation parts, etc. You can't put a price on this. Response time is everything. Your emergency becomes his or her emergency. Both of you have the same vested interest to do whatever it takes to resolve a problem or react to it. I know SCs that would drop what they are doing and drive overnight to help the team as a 12th Man. Therefore, surrounding yourself with reliable SCs can help overcome unexpected problems. Remember, if you are loyal to them, they will most likely be as loyal to you. It is not all about making money when they are doing their very best to make your team look good or help you get out of a pinch. At that point, they are working hard for you as a 12th Man to make you a winner. Loyalty and reliability are everything!!!

Trust. It begins and ends with trust. There can be no 12th Man relationship without trust. You need to be able to confide in your SCs with confidential matters. You can't have an SC that leaves your team and goes to the next team he supports and shares confidential information (gossip!) about your team. This is an absolute no! The business you discuss must stay remain confidential between the two of you. It should not become public knowledge for other teams. This is probably the hardest thing to do as an SC. It is easy for a conversation to start up

about another golf course, but sharing confidential information is very unprofessional. So be careful!!! Choose a 12th Man that is trustworthy and can keep things close to the vest. No superintendent needs unnecessary “Drama” outside of their operation.

Lastly, don't look at the SCs as vacuum cleaner salespersons just out to make a buck. If you do this, you are doing yourself and your operation a great injustice. If you view the SC as just someone to quote you a price, then that person will never become your 12th Man – just another golf course salesperson with one thing in mind. Sell something!!! Don't bring this person into your operation because he is the cheapest person on the block with his products and services. Bring this person in as a 12th Man because of his or her talents and what they can offer to the team. This will lead to a great relationship personally, financially, and professionally.

Once you have surrounded yourself with SCs that are worthy of 12th Man status, it is important to treat them with respect. While they are not employees, they are soldiers of support! When they schedule a time to meet with you, you need to be

on time. Don't be late or not show up. This demonstrates a total lack of respect. Their time is as valuable as your time. When they call you, you need to return their call and vice versa. Treat them as you would want to be treated. Don't just ignore them. Show common courtesy and professionalism. Remember, they are trying to make a living being your 12th Man, just like you are trying to make a living as a superintendent. The goal is for both of you to be successful. If you decide you don't want certain SCs as a 12th Man, just say so, and they will respect the candor. They will just concentrate on being a 12th Man for another team. The worst thing you can do is drag one of your 12th Men along and make them believe they are a 12th Man when they really are not. This is unfair to you and them.

I hope some of these thoughts provide insight into how the Superintendent and the 12th Man relationship with SCs are important in the world of golf course maintenance.