

Why Your Club Should Conduct a Professional Superintendent Search!!!



ARMEN SUNY
KOPPLIN KUEBLER &
WALLACE

The selection of your golf course superintendent may possibly be the most important decision that a club can make.

Is there another position in the club that, through poor performance, can cause the club to shut down for an entire year?

If you lose your greens, your course will close down, revenues will die just as surely as the grass has died. While this may be an extreme example, consider the negative effects that several years of suspect maintenance practices may have on your course for years to come.

Recently, I had a conversation with a gentleman who had been on the selection committee of a club on the East Coast where I had completed a superintendent search two decades ago. His thoughts about golf course maintenance were an interesting example of why professional search services are needed for clubs.

He explained, that in his business, a Wall Street firm, you can blame bad performance on your predecessor for only one year, after that you owned the problems. On your golf course, the problems that can be left underground and unseen, may, and often do take more than one year to fix.

Recruiting a great superintendent for your golf course is a challenge. For the last 25 years, KOPPLIN KUEBLER & WALLACE has been up to that challenge, successfully recruiting superintendents for the finest clubs in the country.

The key attributes for the superintendent are a bit different from other club positions, in that the **technical skills required are climate specific** as opposed to the other key club positions that use the same skills in any region.

Your club's superintendent candidate profile is the foundation to our search. Through meeting with the selection committee, key staff members, reviewing course conditions, club expectations, agronomics, future plans, and budgets, we develop the profile that will identify the "ideal" Candidate. Through this process you will begin to understand what makes a candidate a finalist – a finalist your new Superintendent and ultimately your club's new superintendent – a success.

Our ability to identify immensely qualified candidates is, to put it very simply, unmatched. Our pool of candidates is not limited to only those individuals actively seeking a new position. This is an important distinction to make. With our industry outreach, we recruit successful candidates who may not be looking for new opportunities. It is typical for our finalists to come equally from our advertisements and our industry outreach.

We have the wherewithal to evaluate the technical ability of a candidate to be successful in another climatic region. This has allowed us to greatly increase the pool of talented candidates for many positions.

Superintendent success traits include:

- Honesty
- Integrity
- Work ethic
- Intelligence
- Business sense
- Common sense
- Organizational ability
- Leadership
- Experience
- Formal education
- Agronomics
- Golf IQ
- Pragmatic perfectionism
- Observational skills
- Communication skills
- Green thumb

All of these traits are important in our decision-making process but these two traits – **green thumb and agronomics** – are key to determining the successful candidates to interview.

If being a superintendent was just science, then any reasonably intelligent person could "learn" how to grow grass and condition a golf course to its highest level. As you well know, that isn't always the case.

Having a candidate who has worked at great clubs, attended a great turf school or has tournament experience, is all very beneficial, but even with all of that they still need to have a

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“green thumb.” A superintendent with a green thumb will be instinctive and intuitive about grass and see more on one trip around the golf course than a less gifted superintendent ever sees. Our experience allows us to ‘dig down into the dirt’ and discover which candidates have the proverbial “green thumb” and which don’t.

GOLF IQ

A superintendent must understand golf and golfers and have a love of the game and golf courses. That doesn’t mean that the superintendent has to be a low handicap golfer. However, they need to understand the integration of maintenance with the game of golf.

Additionally they should have the intellectual and agronomic flexibility to craft maintenance regimes that achieve playability goals while providing sustainable, aesthetically pleasing turf, bunker, and landscape conditions.

A high golf IQ will lead to great golf experiences for golfers on a daily basis through well-conceived planning, the proper staff coaching and training and the constant and vigilant inspections of the course to insure that playability goals are met.

ACHIEVING SUCCESS

Our goal is to identify five immensely qualified candidates for the final interview process and assist the committee and club in determining which candidate has the best set of technical skills for their club and the personality that will fit in seamlessly with the club’s culture. **BR**

Armen Suny is a search executive with Kopplin Kuebler & Wallace. He was the superintendent at Cherry Hills Country Club for the “1985 PGA Championship” and went on to host six PGA Tour events at Castle Pines. He was the general manager at Shadow Creek for Steve Wynn. Suny was the assistant superintendent at Merion Golf Club for the 1981 US Open and an intern at Aronimink Golf Club for the 1977 US Amateur. Armen can be reached at (303) 570-2741 or via email at armen@kkandw.com.

Suny’s education is in turfgrass management from Penn State. His experiences include: Golf course design (Sagebrush Golf and Sporting Club, No. 1 new golf course in Canada, 2009 with Rod Whitman and Richard Zokol,) PGA Tour tournament director, and golf course residential project workouts.