

Evolving into Successful PGA General Manager

By Jim West, PGA

Nearly twenty-five hundred PGA Professionals in the country currently serve as successful facility general managers. Additionally, an increasing number of PGM students are expressing interest in this career path. Why are PGA Professionals great candidates to be successful in this space, and what can aspiring associates do to prepare themselves to become successful general managers?

PGA Professionals are problem solvers. Whether it's shifting last-minute tournament pairings due to a cancellation or resolving a difficult conflict about a ruling on the golf course - PGA Professionals have the breadth of knowledge and the diplomacy skills to calmly and confidently resolve issues. PGA Professionals are also empathetic leaders and mentors who are committed to continuous improvement and genuinely care about the careers of those under their direction. This is a great base skill set for a general manager!

Leadership, learning, continuous improvement, and mentorship are foundational qualities for successful general managers.

General managers oversee and lead multiple departments at a facility, including millions of dollars of revenue, expenses, capital purchases, long-range strategic plans, and much more. Each department has an important and specific function and purpose that contributes to the success of the facility. A successful general manager understands the basic inner workings and is attuned to the keys to the success of every department. How do general managers gain this knowledge and understanding?

Most PGA General Managers began their career as inquisitive assistant golf professionals. While learning the skills necessary to succeed as head professionals or golf directors, they also took the initiative to learn about other departments at the club. Similar to learning golf professional skills, it all started by asking questions. For example, they spent time with the golf course superintendent during greens aeration to understand the science behind this important process. They spent time with the food and beverage manager and the chef when they introduced a new menu to understand how and why they selected items, including pricing strategies and cost of sales. They spent time with the head professional, director of golf, general manager, or controller to review financials at the end of the month and at budget time to understand variances and key operating indicators. They spent time with the membership director to understand member recruitment and retention. The key is they are committed to continuing learning!

Empathetic leadership skills are critical to the success of general managers. One of the most essential qualities of an effective general manager is coaching and providing resources to bring out the best in their team. In virtually every workplace, especially in the hospitality industry, it is easy for valued team members to become discouraged and sometimes short-sighted. Great general managers are close with their department heads, are attuned to the culture of their

team, and know when to step up and provide positive, affirming perspectives and direction. Most great leaders learned this skill set by working for and being mentored by great leaders.

A continuous improvement mindset and culture are also vital to the success of a general manager. A continuous improvement mindset should begin at the earliest stage of a career, where assistant professionals consistently evaluate everything that they do and find ways to learn and improve. As professionals grow in their careers, they instill this mindset in their team and, as a result, develop a culture of continuous improvement where everyone on their team not only feels free to bring ideas for improvement to leadership but they feel encouraged to do so.

Mentorship is also a vital part of general manager career development. Aspiring general managers should seek out successful general managers for guidance, mentorship, and support. PGA Professionals are passionate about helping others, and PGA General Managers can be outstanding mentors providing direction, honest feedback, and career guidance.

Finally, the new PGA of America Learning Strategy offers members a truly outstanding opportunity to elevate their knowledge in three career paths: Teaching/Coaching, Golf Operations, and Executive Management. For general managers and aspiring general managers, the Executive Management Specialized, Certified, and Master Professional Programs are exceptional and provide a very in-depth, relevant curriculum.

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