



Left: Scott Falahee and Jeff Kotas at work. Photo by Mark Frever, CSFM, Director of Grounds, Albion College. **Right:** Steve DiNatale working on campus of University of Oregon. Photo courtesy of Eric Fasbender, CSFM.

Advice on reaching “the next level” in your turf career

Editor's note: We asked some prominent members of the sports turf community how turf managers can get to “the next level” professionally, whether that might be management or moving up the crew ladder:

Mike McDonald, CSFM, U of Minnesota turf manager

Sometimes when you're talking to or working alongside a turf manager or another crew member, you can tell if the person enjoys the profession or is just doing a job. Those that come up to you or a group of people and start asking questions, listening to what other people have done, are the ones you can tell are looking to improve themselves and their workplace.

They can't get enough information to put into practice and see what they can do better to improve their grounds. That is the way to get to the next level, networking with your peers and showing pride in your job and work. People take notice of that kind of commitment and desire to move forward.

Marcus Dean, CSFM, assistant sports turf manager, U of Kentucky

In order to “reach the next level,” I think people have to be driven to be the best at everything they do (some people might

think this is a bad trait!). The “dirt and grass” crew member cannot ever get complacent in what they are doing daily. I think as soon as you get completely satisfied with the job you are doing, you start to decline.

I am never completely satisfied with myself. I constantly look back and try to figure out how and if something can be done better. You know that you are going to make mistakes but you have to learn from those mistakes. To reach “the next level” I think a person has to stay up to date with the latest research and technology, and be able to network and not be afraid to ask questions.

I say all of this and yet I don't feel as if I have reached the next level. I have a great job, work with great people at a great university, but I still have some climbing to do on the professional ladder. But I am not job title hunting at all; I have interviewed and been offered “next level” jobs, but decided the overall situation was not better than my current job.

In January I passed the CSFM test and hope that it will lead to career advancement. There are a lot of reasons that I wanted to be certified; I think there will be jobs within the sports turf industry that require certification and I don't want to limit my possibilities. Being a CSFM shows the administration at UK that I

have added some credibility (by the way, they have never questioned our department's credibility!). It also allows UK to have a recruiting edge over other schools that don't have a CSFM employed. This is one way that I can help recruit world class athletes to UK and allow our athletic department to climb in the Athletic Directors Cup standings. Being a CSFM in Kentucky has inspired other sports turf managers to get interested in the CSFM program (Editor's note: Dean is president of the state's STMA chapter). I can help the entire state of Kentucky advance the quality of sports turf while carrying out my daily job. Isn't that what the STMA is all about?

Jody Gill, grounds coordinator, Blue Valley School District, KS

Achieve as much education and continuing education as possible. Also, consider achieving CSFM, CLT, CLIA or any other certifications that may be applicable to your career. Be willing to work extra hours when necessary especially when you have an opportunity to learn something new.

Volunteer for projects that may be out of your comfort zone or something in which you may need more experience. Be sure your supervisors know that you would like to move into a management position in the future. Most good managers enjoy and take pride in helping good employees move up and take on more responsibility. As with any endeavor, take pride in everything you do. Have a real passion for this industry and make sure it shows in your work. When you achieve your goal, be a positive role model and give back to the industry.

Kim Heck, CEO, Sports Turf Managers Association

Sports turf managers are responsible for so much more than maintaining athletic fields. They manage budgets, inventory, purchasing, capital equipment, recordkeeping, environmental programs, personnel....the list goes on and on. Many are definitely in a management role at their facilities.

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The real issue is how do sports turf managers proactively elevate their stature at their facilities to gain more recognition for their good work? It really starts with how you conduct yourself as a sports turf manager because how others perceive you is reality.

Here's a checklist for sports turf managers who want to be sure they are doing everything possible to be perceived as a professional at their facilities:

- Are you available and responsive to questions?
- Do you react calmly and positively, even when there is criticism?
- Do you embrace new technology, or are you thought of as being 'set in your ways'?
- Are you proactive when there are problems by communicating any potential issues to your boss, and then do you also bring solutions?
- How flexible are you when you have to make changes to your daily, weekly or monthly management programs?
- Are you on time and prepared for meetings?
- Dress appropriately for those meetings?
- Present accurate and unbiased information during those meetings?
- Do you "think big" and bring ideas that excite people?
- Are you considered a "team player"?
- Have a firm hand-shake?
- Look people in the eye with self-confidence?
- Do you have an "ethical" business reputation?
- Do you deliver on your promises?
- Are you committed to continuous learning and gaining skills beyond those needed for your job?
- Do you mentor your staff and position yourself as a role model for them?
- Do you champion the good work of your staff?
- Do you empower your staff to make their own decisions?
- Do you set and maintain high expectations for all who work with you?
- Do you take responsibility for your mistakes and those of your subordinates?
- Do you make a point of thanking employees and praising them when they do a good job?

It goes without saying that sports turf managers have to do an excellent job with the resources allocated to them for field prepa-

ration and presentation. It is the softer skills that will differentiate you.

Mike Andresen, CSFM, facilities & grounds manager, Iowa State

To me "the next level" means to be a better professional, a more respected professional and a more valuable employee. If we truly focus on the job we currently have and strive to grow in that job we most certainly become a better professional and more valuable employee. Certainly you'd be more marketable should you choose to entertain other opportunities in this profession.

We're fortunate to work in the competitive athletics arena and

I try to learn from the administrators, coaches and athletes that we work around. The number one difference between an average athlete and a star athlete is the ability to focus on the task; his/her own skills and their ability to help the team be better than its individual parts. Focus every day on really producing for your team (crew) and for the teams you work with. I don't necessarily mean produce volumes of work, I mean produce perfect work. We don't worry about other entities at our business. Simply, they don't know our jobs so what makes us think we know theirs? Focus.

Agronomically we are the expert for our employer so that end of our game has to be rock solid. We should focus effort on keeping those agromonic skills solid. Focusing on

soft skills such as becoming an exceptional listener, communicator, budget manager, crew manager and trusted co-worker are traits that will set you apart from average. I like the adage of "don't take yourself seriously but do take your profession seriously."

Achieving the designation of Certified Sports Field Manager quantifies your level of professional focus and willingness to work intently on hard and soft skills. No employer owes you or me anything except a paycheck for satisfactory work. Very basically, we are a commodity hired to do a job for our employer. From day one it's our job to earn respect and privilege and I believe we pretty much end up being given the level of respect we earn.

This profession can be pretty humbling and can beat us down at times. We're individually not as good as we sometimes lead ourselves to believe and we're certainly not as incompetent as we sometimes feel. Look around at the giants of STMA and what traits do



you see? I see humbleness and focus above all else. Do a self evaluation of your strengths and weaknesses. Ask people you trust to give you honest feedback.

Work hard on skills that are not strengths but don't beat yourself up and think you can change them overnight. Determine steps you'll take, such as reading and attending educational seminars and conferences to help you improve. My boss recognizes her number one resource isn't the mower we own, it's the person doing the mowing and she invests in nurturing that asset. A tip: kind and constructive words go further than any amount of money ever will. People depend on us and take cues from us. Supervisors are named by the boss but leaders are named by the crew. You have to earn the hat of "leader," it's not bestowed. Strive to be the leader!

It's critical that you know what makes those around you "tick," including coaches and administrators. You need to know their personalities and be able to meet their style. At times you'll need to motivate, discipline, teach, learn, negotiate with and so forth. Most of all keep your eyes open and maximize every opportunity you get to improve your "game." Those opportunities flash through our lives every day and only when you focus on that part of your life will you even see them.

Those giants I see in STMA and this profession are successful in my eyes because their focus is on maximizing everyday opportunities to make themselves and their teams better. It sounds goofy but

professionally I really do believe the "destination" (whatever your definition is) is not the fun part; the climb to get there is the real gratification and with proper focus you'll get to feel some of that gratification every day!

Troy Smith, CSFM turf manager, Denver Broncos

Moving to a management position requires a combination of experience and education. If you acquire a two or four year degree then you should have the "book smarts" for the job. Once you take an internship or job in the sports turf industry, you then learn how to do the daily, weekly and monthly jobs that the job requires.

As you gain "field smarts," you will learn that that is more than one way to do the job. All of this will build a foundation for you to draw from in the future. Your supervisors will then begin to ask you what is best for a situation and this is where you use your combination of education and experience. You will also begin to watch your managers and take a little bit of management style from all of them (either good or bad) to develop your own management style.

You should begin to gain the confidence of your employer with time and the transition from a crew member to a management position should be on its way. Continuing your education, continued employment and obtaining your certified sports field manager designation are all examples that will show your employer that you are serious about your earned management position. ■

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