



From Greens to Screens

VIRTUAL HIRING IN THE TURF INDUSTRY

By Marco China, Superintendent, Director of Turfgrass Operations, Deer Ridge Golf Club.

The turf industry has traditionally been known for its hands-on approach and reliance on physical presence on the golf course, as well as during the interview process for potential new jobs. While the adoption of virtual hiring and interview processes has been common in other industries and sectors, it has been slower in the turf industry. However, as technology continues to permeate every sector, the turf industry and its affiliated golf clubs are embracing these digital innovations to streamline recruitment, improve efficiency, and attract a broader talent pool.

THE SHIFT TO VIRTUAL HIRING

Historically, the turf industry has relied heavily on face-to-face interactions. From greenskeepers to turf managers, the hiring process typically involved in-person interviews. However, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of virtual technologies across industries, including turf management. With travel restrictions and social distancing measures in place, employers had to adapt quickly to continue their operations. This necessity led to the widespread acceptance of virtual hiring platforms, which had been around prior to the pandemic but saw rapid adoption out of necessity.

Today, many golf clubs and organizations in the turf industry are leveraging virtual tools like Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and specialized recruitment platforms. Hiring agencies and talent recruiters have also adopted these techniques, making them commonplace in formal interview processes. These tools allow employers to conduct interviews, assess candidates, and even onboard new hires without requiring physical presence.

BENEFITS OF VIRTUAL HIRING IN THE TURF INDUSTRY

Wider Talent Pool: Virtual hiring eliminates geographical barriers, enabling turf industry employers to reach a larger group of industry professionals.

Time Savings: Scheduling and conducting virtual interviews can be more efficient than coordinating in-person meetings. This efficiency can speed up the hiring process, allowing organizations to fill positions more quickly.

Flexibility: Virtual interviews offer greater flexibility for both employers and candidates. They can be scheduled at convenient times, reducing the need for candidates to take time off work or travel long distances.

Enhanced Assessment Tools: Modern virtual hiring platforms come equipped with various assessment tools that can help evaluate candidates more effectively. For example, video interviews can be recorded and reviewed multiple times, ensuring a thorough assessment. One such assessment tool is a one-way interview, where prearranged questions are answered by prospective candidates virtually while recording themselves. These answers are recorded in an allotted amount of time and submitted for review.

Michael Gregory, Managing Director and Partner with GGA Partners says, “The one-way interview is just another tool for us to use in the hiring process; it adds something new to the traditional hiring process.” Michael explained that the one-way interview is a great way to see how someone thinks on their feet and gives candidates an opportunity to do research ahead of time. “It shows who has done their homework and who can draw on past experiences related to what the prospective clubs may be looking for. Knowledge on the property ahead of time is an asset because you can speak to what the club may be looking for.”

CHALLENGES OF VIRTUAL HIRING

While the benefits are significant, virtual hiring in the turf industry also presents a couple of challenges:

Technical Issues: Connectivity problems, software glitches, and hardware malfunctions can disrupt virtual interviews. These technical issues can be frustrating for both interviewers and candidates and may affect the interview's outcome. Practice runs ahead of time will help immensely with making a virtual interview go smoothly. Prepping your space will help make you more comfortable in the setting, easing any nerves created from a more foreign interview approach.

Lack of Personal Interaction: Virtual interviews can lack the personal touch of face-to-face interactions. Non-verbal cues, body language, and the general feel of the interaction can be harder to gauge through a screen. Practice runs and preparation ahead of time will help make the interview more comfortable. Prepare for a virtual interview by using virtual platforms like Zoom; this preparation will make you feel more comfortable and will highlight any glitches or connection problems you may face so you can remedy those before the interview.

OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGES

To address these challenges, the turf industry can adopt several strategies:

Technical Support: Providing candidates and interviewers with technical support can help mitigate connectivity and software issues. Pre-interview checks and training sessions can ensure everyone is comfortable with the technology. There are many resources available online to help familiarize yourself with this newer format of the interview process.

Hybrid Approaches: Combining virtual interviews with in-person assessments can offer a balanced approach. Initial interviews can be conducted virtually, followed by in-person interviews for shortlisted candidates. The virtual platform allows for a shorter timeline when sifting through applicants to create a shortlist. This allows more time to be spent with in-person candidates since the list has already been shortened before any in-person interviews are conducted.

FUTURE PROSPECTS

The trend towards virtual hiring in the turf industry is likely to continue growing. As technology advances, virtual hiring tools will become more sophisticated, offering even better features for assessing candidates. There is no question that virtual hiring platforms can be uncomfortable, especially with our industry being new to these forms of interviews and thus slower to adopt this change. It takes practice to overcome that uncomfortable feeling. Hiring firms see this as a great tool because of that uncomfortable feeling. It puts you out of your element and gives you the ability to showcase how you can adapt and overcome the pressure.

While challenges exist, many clubs see the benefits of reaching a wider talent pool, time savings, and enhanced assessment tools, making virtual hiring an attractive option. By addressing technical issues and becoming more comfortable with the various software used, the turf industry can successfully navigate this digital transition. As technology continues to evolve, virtual hiring is set to become an integral part of the turf industry's future, paving the way for a more efficient, inclusive, and sustainable approach to recruitment. ■

Cordova Bay Golf Course,
Cordova Bay, BC



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