

Take Your Fate

By Henry Bechelet



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"If you think you can, you can. And if you think you can't, you're right."- Henry Ford

KILLING TIME?

I hate articles that start with quotes. This article is about attitude and doing what it takes.

The kind of greenkeeper you are will depend upon your attitude towards things. It will depend on what you care about. Your knowledge, skill and standards will all impact on the condition of the course. Ultimately, the condition of the turf is a reflection of you.

Attitude is what we think and feel about things. It stems from our values and beliefs and it guides the way we behave. Our attitudes help us form internal goals and they power our drive to achieve them.

OPEN UP

Attitudes can be held about anything. The strength of feeling will depend on the subject. Our attitudes are unique but they can also borrow from those we admire. They can be positive and negative in their outlook and impact. They are formed as we go through life and they can change over time or depending on mood. We can master our own attitudes if we need to, primarily by learning.

Attitudes stem from what we believe and what we value. Our beliefs are what we perceive to be true and they come largely from experience but they are also formed through education. Our values are what we view as being good or right. These are our principles and they help determine our

goals in life. For example, I value the qualities of the finer grasses and believe that it is possible to establish their dominance in golf greens. I am driven to write articles to try to encourage the same attitude in you. While you are still reading I have a chance. I need to tell you that success is not just about technical knowledge it's also about having the right attitude when implementing it.

The relationship between attitude and behaviour is not straightforward. External "intervening factors" can have an impact on our response to feelings. We don't live in isolation. For instance, the situation may preclude the desired course of action (through lack of resources), unforeseen events may have a negative impact (bad weather) and other people may be influencing the situation (golfers!). People also commonly have conflicting attitudes about things that might hamper proceedings. Valuing the finer grasses as well as a verdant green colour won't get you very far with the finer grasses.

Some theories about attitude take into account strength of feeling. Sometimes people judge different aspects of things separately and then average an overall impression. How much we like someone might compensate for deficiencies in results. Be careful if you make important decisions in this way, it may muddle things up.

We need a clear consistency of attitude for action to be properly focused on goal achievement. The greenkeeper needs to be clear in his

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values and beliefs to have a chance of producing the desired results. This works in all areas; course presentation, construction work, surface playing quality, staff motivation etc.

INSPIRATION

Attitude has its biggest impact on motivation. Our internal drive to achieve. Strength of conviction coupled with an objective focus will achieve your goals. Encouraging the finer grasses needs a plan based on sound principles, coupled with a strong will to succeed. A positive attitude achieves ambition then moves you on to bigger and better things. A positive attitude can be inspired from your peers, consultants, articles, books, your successes and even failures, it just depends on your attitude.

ASPIRATION

For UK greenkeeping, the "bigger and better thing" is more sustainable putting surfaces. Progressive thinkers demand the establishment of quality surfaces with the finer grasses. We are talking about putting surfaces comprising an even blend of bents and/or fescues with minimal annual meadow-grass. Establishing this kind of equilibrium gives high quality surfaces with reduced vulnerabilities. They are easier to look after and cost less to maintain. You know the arguments.

To achieve this goal you may have to alter your attitude about turf management. The technique is simple but slightly different than the common belief, so to pull it off you might need to change your ways. Essentially, all you have to do is move the environment away from constant aggressive surface preparations, to one more settled with occasional controlled beneficial stress. These concepts are discussed in more detail in the article "Changing the Nature of your Greens" which is freely available at: www.stri.co.uk. To succeed you will have to stick to your newfound principles for an uncomfortable while, in the face of imperceptible changes. Be clear on this, we are not talking about stressing-out your greens, that theory is now redundant, we are talking about gradual change without deterioration. The transition to the finer grasses can be slow and it can test your resolve. You will need to stay positive and fully focused at all times.

COPPING OUT?

I know 90% of UK greenkeepers already value the finer grasses. Everyone would take a bent/fescue sward tomorrow and be proud to show it off. So why aren't they more commonplace? Where are we failing? This is already a goal for a lot of us and it has been for years.

I don't believe that our past failures are due to a lack of greenkeeper knowledge. All the greenkeepers I work with are very knowledgeable and highly skilled. Maybe it's the way the knowledge is being applied. You might be taking the easy way out. We should not discount the impact of

possible "intervening factors" throwing us off. Golfers who value colour, fertiliser salesmen who value their bonus or advisors who value the easy option may be to blame. Just because we like someone doesn't mean that they are the best person to ask about good greenkeeping. I don't know the answer but there are probably a lot of things at play. I do think that lack of greenkeeper belief is a big factor in our failure to properly establish the finer grasses. A lack of supportive evidence may be a reason for this.

WHO DO YOU TRUST?

If you want to favour the finer grasses you have to believe that it's possible. If you want to know how to go about it there are a number of sources available. There are true believers out there who are willing to help. It might be time to learn from people who know what they are talking about. You will easily sniff-out the charlatans.

WE WERE ALL YOUNG ONCE

A lot of this is about advocating traditional greenkeeping values. Traditional minded greenkeepers who already value and strive for the finer grasses tend to have a no-nonsense, down-to-earth attitude. The intervening factors don't get a look-in. Some greenkeepers in this highly technical age might have the attitude that traditional greenkeeping method is out-of-date and opt for more gratifying methods. Judicious fertilising and irrigating is just not as attractive as the higher input, more aggressive approach. What the new clothes generation might not appreciate is that the traditional greenkeeping values have been hard earned. There is no point getting older if you don't get wiser. At some point we all realise that no matter how good a greenkeeper you are Poa annua will keep on punishing you. It is not a good friend.

HELP!

The two developments in recent times have been; the Danish model of encouraging the fescues; and the move by The R&A to champion a wider adoption of their techniques to promote better and more sustainable surfaces. The Danes are already walking the walk and I'm sure that they'd be delighted to talk to you. The R&A are putting their money where their mouth is and funding research into this area to come up with the proof. Their website (www.bestcourseforgolf.org) is also very informative. If you need convincing, help is at hand. The STRI are at the forefront of all these developments. To do what it takes, start by opening your mind to the possibility of the finer grasses. Now is the time to take your fate for a ride.

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