As It Lies
Who is Number One?

By Jim Walker

Being number one in a lot of things in this world is very important: Number-one-ranked player in the world, World Series champs, Super Bowl champs, NBA champs, NCAA champs in football and basketball — all can have life-changing ramifications. The list goes on and on.

There are exceptions, however, to being number one. It is not cool to be the first one to arrive at a party, or the first one to leave. It is not polite to be the first one finished eating at the dinner table, an act that may be more delicate situations in which a man might not want to finish first, but I digress.

All of this leads me to a discussion of being the number-one person to tee off each morning at my golf course. I know many people like early tee times so they can finish and get home early on a golf course. I know many people like Rule 36 — immovable hazards.

I'm not talking about knowing the USGA Rules of Golf verbatim, like Rule 36 — immovable hazards. Although knowing that rule did allow Tiger Woods to have the gallery move a boulder for him in the Phoenix Open a few years ago. I'm talking about some common-sense rules to avoid obstacles in our career path.

The Human Condition

Tirades, tantrums and termi-
making a special delivery, volunteers for helping with ACSP projects. You will be seen as unselfish and a true manager and facilitator.

Dress for Success

Working superintendents don’t have to wear blue jeans and a Copenhagen cap to a local chapter meeting. A polo shirt, sport coat and Dockers from Sears are perfectly fine attire when visiting another course’s clubhouse as a guest.

The curse of Casual Friday is that it is now Casual Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, etc. Wearing shorts and boat shoes at work doesn’t mean you can’t grow healthy turfgrass, provide excellent playing conditions or manage a multi-million dollar asset. After all, a fishing guide is trained professional too. It’s OK to jump in the hole and fix the leak if you have to. Just don’t go to the clubhouse looking like a ditch digger or a fishing guide — you are the superintendent.

Communicate or Abdicate

Don’t let the rumor mill do your talking. Tell the truth and tell it often to everyone on the staff from the pro shop, valet parker and waitress in the restaurant. Then tell your boss, committee chairman, the influential golfers and even the “squeaky wheels.” If you don’t spread the facts, someone will offer to fill the void with their opinions.

Example: “With the cloudy, rainy weather the greens are a little thin right now. I’ve raised the height of cut, which is recommended by the USGA Green Section as a first response to thinning. I’ve sent out soil samples to check for nematode levels and soil pathogens. I’m going to solid-tine aerify and lightly topdress and fertilize them also. If they don’t perk up, I’d like to have Bill Smith and Tom Jones, the superintendents at Posh Hills CC and the Platinum Club, come over and take a look and see if I’ve missed something. It would really help if the sun would come out.”

Don’t miss the chance to post announcements in the clubhouse or write an article for the club newsletter. You don’t have to be a novelist. There are boiler plate articles you can copy from GCSAA and others to spread the word about what’s going on in your department and on the course. Just remember to tell who, what, why, when and how and you’ll be fine.

Business Savvy

Run your operation like a business, not a bottomless money pit. Don’t covet the newest bells and whistles without showing the cost and benefit of everything… from purchasing new equipment to using new products. Have a plan in hand, not your hand out every year for more dollars. The devil is in the details. If you were the owner, wouldn’t you want to know where every dime was going? Be creative in finding ways to lower costs, like reducing out-of-play turf areas and multi-tasking employees.

Continuing education

If you aren’t learning something new, you are falling behind. The best scenario is being able to go to conferences, seminars and chapter meetings. Regardless of the formal education, the networking is worth the effort. Being around other superintendents always raised my spirits and my intelligence on growing good turf. After you go to a conference or even a local meeting, write a short report or note to your boss and tell him something you learned that will help you do your job. They might get the idea that it’s good for you to go to these things.

Public Relations

It’s harder for a club to fire a nice, friendly and positive person who is seen often and participates in club functions or at least shows his or her face around the course.

“Good morning Mr. Smith. How are you hitting them? I know you often bring guests out to the course. I just wanted to let you know we will be doing our spring aerification next week.

“Hello Ms. Jones. Did you see the new butterfly garden on No. 6? We just joined the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary System and we are working on becoming certified. Would you like to serve on our Resource Committee?”

Health and Fitness - You Are What You Eat

Coffee, donuts, soda, burgers and fries or cereal, fruit, juice and salad?

You don’t have to deny yourself treats. Just consider variety and moderation in all things, especially alcohol at your club and local chapter functions. Find a way to exercise. It relieves stress and keeps you around for your family.

Perceptions

It may look like a barn. It may smell like a barn. But in reality, it is the turf management operations center. A broom, a blower and a couple of gallons of paint may be all the tools you need to make your shop look organized and efficient. Sloppy is as sloppy does from clutter to record-keeping.

Mix/load and/or equipment-wash areas that drain directly into ditch-es, creeks and wetlands look exactly like what they are, pollution generators. Pour some concrete. Recycle the rinsate. It isn’t rocket science. It’s called stewardship and gives the perception that you and your club care about the environment.

Ethics

Resist the temptation to respond to comments or questions about another superintendent’s golf course condition, practices or even problems when asked. You may or may not know all the facts. Usually you don’t and their comments are often uneducated hearsay. Don’t agree to make a visit to that course if they invite you without calling that superintendent first. It looks real bad if the other superintendent gets fired, and you end up somehow involved in that operation.

Don’t get caught in clandestine poaching of your neighbor’s employees. Good equipment managers and technicians are in demand. It’s a free country and everyone has a right to seek the best deal they can get. However, the industry is too small and your reputation is at stake if you don’t give your professional peers at least a heads-up on pending negotiations. He may not like it but at least it wasn’t done on the sly.

Follow these rules and stay in the game. The score you earn here is more than just a number.

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