

Today's leaders are innovators, so let's get busy

By A. THOMAS PERKINS

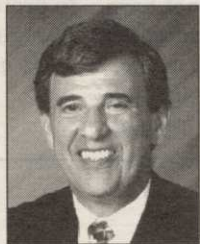
I've always been fascinated by the concept of leadership. What does it take for a company or institution to be a leader? What makes a company or institution a leader, while others are considered followers? What kind of equity is there in being perceived as a leader?

Although I haven't reviewed published research on the subject, I have observed the impact of effective leadership over 25-plus years in the golf turf business. My conclusion is that companies aren't perceived as being leaders because they are bigger, make more money or have a more popular or flamboyant CEO than their competitors.

Today's leaders are the innovators — companies that are forward-looking. Leaders are companies that are helpful and dependable — who make it easy for their customers and their public to work with them. Leaders are proactive, and they're excellent communicators, especially good at listening. Being perceived as a leader does carry tremendous potential for financial success.

The importance of effective leadership for the golf turf industry was never more evident than in 1995. This was highlighted in part by *Golf Course News'* first issue of the year, in which Hal Phillips reported on the 1994 Golf Summit held in Scottsdale, Ariz. Hal cited a "poor public image" and "the environment" as two of the biggest challenges facing the golf industry. Now, 12 months later and just two months into a

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new year, I'll bet most of us in the industry believe the challenges haven't changed.

Just as the challenges are the same, I believe the response required of us in the industry hasn't changed, either. We need to demonstrate greater leadership — on the job and in our communities — using the leadership traits I cited previously.

We need to help our communities recognize how golf — the game and its courses — contributes to each community's quality of life. We must promote the value of the recreational opportunity we help provide and the quality of our industry's people. We must highlight the aesthetics of our courses while improving and promoting the game's accessibility. In short, we must show our communities that we are good corporate citizens who provide a valuable resource for everyone.

Yes, we need to promote all these things. And we must be confident advocates of our own environmental stewardship. The facts are that the maintenance of today's golf courses and the accrued environmental benefits of our industry's efforts are "friendly." We must all be fully literate on these topics and provide the leadership necessary to keep our public informed.

We must listen, too. We must listen to and understand our communities — their questions, concerns and needs — and provide them honest, open answers. We must operate with the idea that our communities are our partners, and without them, we'd be out of business.

"Partnering" may be one of the most overused buzzwords of the '90s. But I believe that finding the right partners — whether it's in your communities or as vendors and suppliers — is

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A good walk missed...

By J. BARRY MOTHE

It was a sunny cloudless October morning on Hilton Head, a Sunday where my only two obligations were a round of golf at Harbour Town Golf Links and making an evening flight back to Maine, a Michelob kind of day.

My gracious hosts were longtime Hilton Head residents. I had driven a car down for them for the winter. They signed me up for an 8:42 a.m. tee time at a course regularly listed among the top 50 in the world. Harbour Town — home of the candy-striped lighthouse beyond the 18th green — hosts a major PGA Tour event each spring the week after the Masters. The clubhouse grill, furnished in leather and trimmed in dark wood, serves sandwiches and salad plates named after past winners like Greg Norman, Tom Kite and Nick Faldo. This was my first round at a world-ranked course. It turned into a world-class letdown before I could crank up my first lousy tee shot.

Harbour Town is one of the few PGA tour stops open to the public. It isn't cheap. The cost for trying to hit Pete Dye's 18 tricky, smallish greens is a robust \$154.88. I did not pay to play. I was a lucky guest. Now, for \$154.88, you'd think a golfer would be allowed to do something as mundane as carry his or her bag and walk the golf course any time of day. Especially at a place called a links. But not Harbour Town — or hundreds of other golf courses for that matter. If your tee time falls before 1 p.m., you must take a car and keep it on the white asphalt paths that wind down the sides of fairways, around the greens and tees. There are no caddies. Regardless of the depths of your bank account, you simply cannot walk.

How did we get to this? How can a golf course strip a golfer of the fundamental physical activity of the sport, even if he or she is willing to pay the rate of a car but pass on the riding?

National Golf Foundation (NGF) 1995 statistics paint a bleak picture for the walking golfer. In south Florida, 74 percent of daily-fee courses surveyed always required a golfer to take a car. Another 26 percent required them for part of each day. That means no daily-fee golf courses in south Florida surveyed by the NGF allow walking at all times.

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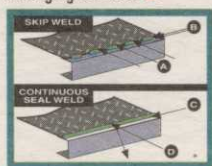


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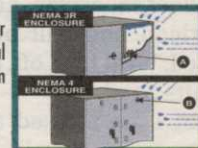
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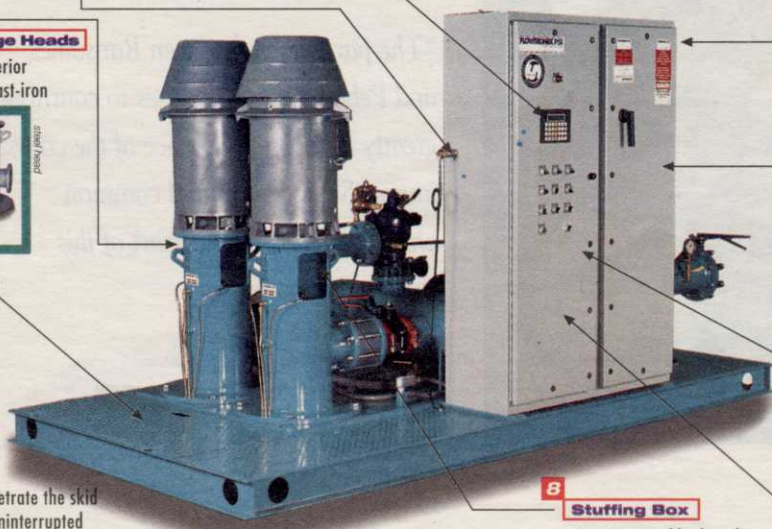


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Almost 50 percent of the courses surveyed in Arizona, southern Nevada and southern California required cars at all times. Nationally, 46 percent of the daily-fee courses either sometimes or always require golfers ride. With cars the second-leading revenue source for 95 percent of daily-fees (behind green fees), I don't expect those numbers will drop anytime soon.

No one will convince me golf cars speed up play on a golf course, which is the explanation offered at Harbour Town and elsewhere for totalitarian mandatory car policies. Any intermediate to advanced golfer can walk an 18-hole round faster and more efficiently than from a golf car,

especially when cars are restricted to car paths. Restricting golf cars is respectful of turfgrass, a plus. But it can also turn golf into a stop-and-go, club-juggling charade, one you should be able to avoid if you're willing to pay the price.

Being forced to ride around a top-ranked golf course like a 12-year-old at a strictly-run amusement park was frustrating enough. Then there was the reaction and comments from my two playing partners, strangers I met on the first tee.

Both seemed amused that I found it distracting to be forced to ride. One of them, a silver-haired Southern businessman in his early 40s with a chunky gold watch and rings to match, offered a fascinating tidbit during a post-round lunch overlooking the 9th green. He announced

that a round at St. Andrews in Scotland a year ago was the first time he had ever walked a round of golf. I almost choked on my Tom Kite (grilled cheese with bacon).

He admitted he sort of enjoyed it — roughing it out there on foot and all. But he quickly added there was no way he could carry his own bag, which, naturally, was big and expensive enough for a Tour pro, his caddie, and half a room of kitchen appliances.

I realize cars are necessary for some golfers and courses. I know many elderly and disabled golfers wouldn't be able to play without a car. That's not the problem.

What bothers me are the golf courses and managers that absolutely forbid people from walking, period. It's gotten so weird that several new golf courses —

mostly at ultra-expensive, limited-membership private clubs — offer walking as a luxury. They breathlessly promote these exclusive "walk-only" courses as heroic, courageous monuments to golf tradition. Imagine, walking as prestige.

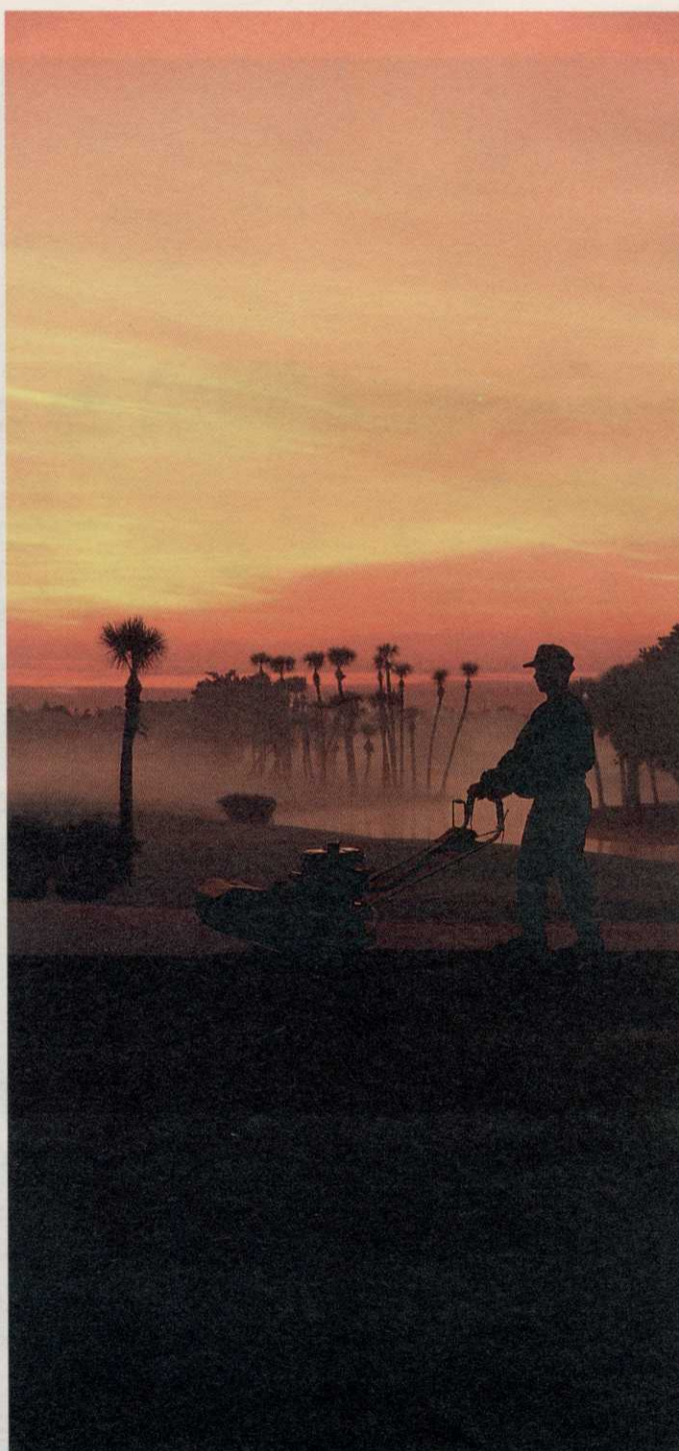
Walking a round of golf shouldn't be about prestige. Walking is the soul and spirit of golf and should be a fundamental right of a golfer on any golf course, even if you have to... pay for it.

Harbour Town seemed like a pretty place, visually seductive with a selection of consistently good and often great holes, some with gorgeous views. I just wish I got closer to the whole place in a way that only walking allows. It's not the same when all that famous scenery and essential atmosphere is flying by the golf car window.



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Perkins comment

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one of the most important keys to success today. You should look for partners who are committed to leadership and committed to your industry.

In our business, the specialty products industry, the leaders are keenly aware of the environmental concerns in your communities and are working diligently to provide products with no adverse environmental impact. We are developing products that are more convenient, more effective, less costly — and more sensitive to the environment. For our industry, this is a day-in, day-out responsibility we take very seriously.

We in the specialty industry must be forward-looking, too. Each year, we are providing exciting new "leadership" products to golf course superintendents that will enhance your courses, improve your business and respect the environment. Some of these leadership products aren't so new. For example, in 1985 the pre-emergent herbicide pendimethalin was introduced for the turfgrass market, featuring low application rates, outstanding performance and no leaching in soil. In 1995, pendimethalin again was the leading pre-emergent herbicide in the golf course market — attesting to its long-term cost effectiveness and low environmental impact.

Like the game of golf itself, some things don't get older — they just get better. And getting better is something we in the industry must do; constantly improving by innovating, by being helpful and dependable, by being proactive, by listening — and by finding partners who are willing to do the same.

Constant improvement is one sign of a leader. When our communities see us working hard to improve ourselves, our partnership with them can only become stronger. And that's the key to success in 1996 and beyond.

I wish you much success as you "lead" the way for the remainder of this decade — and into the 21st century.