First things first

I'm not a big fan of those cliché-ridden management books written by superwealthy executive types. It seems me to drop $28 at Barnes & Noble for 300 pages of chest-thumping egotism punctuated by the occasional business success "secret" (e.g., "Hire good people and let them do their jobs" or "Make sure your parents are millionaires before you're born").

But, there is the occasional useful tidbit among all the buzzwords and other leadership tripe. One that stuck with me and has been on top of my mind lately as I'm building a new business, is Stephen Covey's maxim: "First things first."

Covey, the author of "The Seven Habits of Highly Successful People" and a zillion other self-help and time-management tomes, makes the deceptively simple point that you should always put the toughest, most important things on the top of your to-do list every day.

In my previous careers, that usually meant personnel issues were first and foremost. Addressing the needs and problems of employees immediately is critical. I've managed staffs as big as 20 people, so I know what it's like for superintendents who seemingly spend the majority of their day dealing with people issues. In short, it stinks.

In my new life, working from a home office as an independent business consultant, my staff issues are much different. As president of Flagstick LLC, I have only four direct reports:

- Executive vice president of finance and chief soccer mom (Mrs. Jones);
- Vice president of fetching daddy a cold one (Michael, age 12);
- Vice president of beating the snot out of daddy at Nintendo (Ryan, age 9); and
- Director of canine affairs (a not-so-bright Airedale terrier called Indy).

As a result of assembling this lean and highly qualified team, I'm able to focus my attention outward, on my clients and customers. Balancing their satisfaction with my financial and operational goals now is first on my list. (That and going fishing a lot more.)

My question to you is: What's first on your list? If you're like me, monstered with a millionaires before you're born").

I've seen come to perceived value for the dollar. Sure, it all starts with the quality of your putting surfaces, but little things can matter. So, contrary to the old saying, sweat the small stuff. Better yet, assign an assistant to sweat it for you. It's an excellent exercise in reality for a young person who wants to be the head guy some day.

So, I return to your original question: What's first on your list? Given the economy, overbuilding and extreme competition, isn't it time that we make golfer satisfaction our "first thing"?

Pat Jones is president of Flagstick LLC, a consulting firm that provides sales and marketing intelligence to green-industry businesses. He can be reached at pj@hawk@cox.net or 440-478-4763.