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## PRO-ENVIRONMENT?

**A**s always, the latest issue of PGA Magazine landed in my old-fashioned, wooden inbox with a resounding “whump!” Despite the ups and downs of the golf business, PGA Magazine has never lacked thickness. Its staff sells ad pages to every stinkin’ company in the galaxy that wants to make a buck off of boneheads like me who walk into a golf shop desperately looking for some magic product that will fix their slice and/or hook and/or distance problem and/or Charles Barkleyesque golf swing. Good for them.

The bottom line is that it’s a fine publication that does an admirable job of helping the PGA of America members do their jobs more effectively. But the cover of the typically fat September issue grabbed my attention with this headline: Golf and the Environment – How PGA Golf Professionals Are Working To Make Golf ‘Greener’. My keen, journalistically trained mind instantly processed the headline and generated this brilliantly stunning question: Huh? I was intrigued but a little befuddled by the idea of golf professionals being actively involved with environmental issues. At first blush, it seemed comparable to one of the turf magazines running a cover story about how superintendents are helping low-handicappers cure the yips.

So I enthusiastically dove into my copy of the magazine. In addition to the cover story – which is a lengthy, well-written and pretty straightforward account of the issues and what a few ecofriendly facilities are doing to address them – the magazine includes a president’s message column from the PGA’s Brian Whitcomb. It contained the following interesting statements:

“Many PGA members have already become involved in touting the positive environmental programs their facilities have in place. To these forward-thinking members, thanks for setting the example by taking on leadership roles in an area where we may have taken a back seat in the past.

“With the environment more and more

becoming a front-burner issue worldwide in the 21st century, we can no longer afford to leave the driving to someone else when it comes to golf.”

Hmmm. Nice turn of phrase. Carefully chosen words. Excellent automotive imagery. But vague enough to compel me to ask: What the hell does it actually mean? Let’s consider two possibilities.

First, one could read this quote (which is, admittedly, chopped from a larger column, so find a copy and read the entire thing for context) and conclude the PGA of America is completely supportive of superintendents taking the lead role on environmental issues but doesn’t want outsiders and activists to dictate what happens to our business.

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Alternatively, one could read this quote and conclude the PGA of America has decided, politically, they shouldn’t cede authority for a real issue facing the golf industry to a bunch of grass monkeys.

Obviously, those are my words, chosen specifically for shock value. Neither Whitcomb, PGA head honcho Joe Steranka nor anyone else with the association would ever use such a demeaning term for their superintendent colleagues – they’re good, well-intentioned people. That said, you have to wonder about the meaning of “back seat” versus “driving” in an official message delivered to more than 28,000 professionals, assistants and others.

(An aside: Think this might be some unintended accident of the writing or editing

process? Trust me, the president’s message in an official association publication isn’t written carelessly. Big associations put a lot of thought (and 86 approval stages) into what gets printed in these seemingly innocuous bits of copy. I worked with a bunch of GCSAA presidents on their monthly messages for many years and it was an often delicate and sometimes painful experience to try to align the president’s personal views with the official objectives of the organization. Some GCSAA presidents labored over every word, and some didn’t give a crap. I liked the latter better. But I digress ...)

I don’t think there’s anything accidental about Whitcomb’s statements. Based on history, as well as what was implied in the article, it’s clear to me the leadership of the PGA of America believes that urging members to be the environmental spokespeople for their facilities is another step in the process of establishing the golf professional as the lead dog in the facility management structure.

And you know what? If that’s true, I don’t blame them a bit because that’s their job down in Palm Beach Gardens. They’re supposed to represent and advance the interests of their members. If there’s an opportunity to position the PGA Professional as an environmental expert – or anything else that helps golf pros for that matter – they have an obligation to do it. If the GCSAA isn’t aggressively claiming ownership of the issue, why shouldn’t PGA at least take a shot at it?

There’s an old metaphor for situations like this: It’s called “the camel’s nose under the tent.” Camels are curious, hungry creatures that will poke their snouts beneath the edge of a tent to sniff around and find out if there’s something good to eat in there. Unless the camel is shooed away once it first appears, the rest of the camel will soon be inside and eating everything in sight. Thus, let’s hope the GCSAA’s leadership will quietly smack the camel – er, I mean the PGA – on the nose for this one. Otherwise, superintendents – the rightful owners of golf’s environmental success story – might soon find themselves being shoved out of their own tent by a large, hungry beast. **GCI**