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## LEARN SOMETHING NEW TODAY?

**M**y father's lifelong philosophy was to "go to bed each night smarter than you awoke."

This belief led him from salesman to president of his company. I've tried to live my life the same way, realizing that no matter how much I think I know about my chosen profession, there is always more to learn.

Here is the perfect case in point. Since forming Aspire Golf Consulting in 2007, I've been fortunate to work on dozens of projects. Most have been in my wheelhouse – interviewing and training superintendents, consulting with facilities thinking of undergoing agronomic and/or architectural renovations, or those upgrading to tournament conditions. Every now and then, though, I'm thrown a curveball.

Such was my involvement in the \$75 million exchange of The Desert Mountain Club property, in Scottsdale, Ariz., from the holding entity to the membership; a sale completed on Jan. 1, 2011. Among the many steps in this process was scrutiny of the six golf courses, their conditioning, operations and personnel.

For Aspire Golf, work started in January 2009, when the membership – which was thinking of buying the club from Desert Mountain Properties – called and requested the following:

- Perform due diligence on behalf of the membership, investigating the golf course properties to find out if members were getting value for what they were being asked to pay.
- Provide a detailed report of "visual and such subsurface testing and review to meet the scope of the engagement."
- Review the turf contained within tees, greens, fairways, rough areas and hazards and practice areas to see if standards and requirements of a properly functioning golf course were met and to see if their function was

impaired in any way. Included was irrigation, drainage and landscape features including the grass tennis surfaces.

- Review all agronomic practices currently in use.

After a week of walking, probing, poking and digging across 800 acres, Aspire reported to the membership that the golf course properties were in satisfactory condition after 20 years of operation. The members' potential investment was sound and well functioning from agronomic and daily maintenance perspectives. They were going to get what they were paying for. However, this was likely not what they wanted to hear...

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If you find yourself in a similar situation, you'll be well prepared if you consider the following factors:

- Read each and every line of your contract and completely understand the primary as well as the secondary meaning of each word and clause within the document, particularly as it relates to your specific assignment.
- Know your business and perform due diligence on each aspect of the contract. The more you are prepared, the better you can explain or defend your position as it's likely you are dealing with successful business people used to significant financial dealings.
- If you have been honest and forthright in your business dealings, expect that behavior to be known. Your books are going to be examined very carefully – so be prepared.
- State the facts accurately, be firm in your review and understand that the recipients of your analysis likely

have little turf or agronomic background, but they do have opinions and probing questions.

In the case of Desert Mountain, I was pleased with phase one; the membership wasn't. That difference of opinion could have led to some unpleasant meetings, but once I realized the members wanted a different report from me, I carefully defended my positions. Throughout this phase, I kept the following precepts in mind:

- Two people, at least three opinions. There will always be opposing viewpoints and others are bound to see things differently than you do, regardless of expertise.
- Accurate communications are es-

sential to fulfill client expectations.

- When explaining and defending your findings, do not lecture. Patiently explain without falling back on baffling scientific terminology and complicated agronomic practices.
- Listen to opposing points of view and put yourself in their shoes, especially about financial issues.
- Take nothing personally. State the facts without passion or prejudice.

A year later, Aspire Golf entered Phase Two of its work after being contacted by the seller, Desert Mountain Properties, to provide a straightforward and complete review of its holdings to insure a smooth sale.

This was a completely different task and this time I was working for the other side. **GCI**

Check out this issue's Online Extras for more about Tim Moraghan's involvement in the historic Desert Mountain Club sale.