THE STATE OF SUSTAINABILITY AND GOLF

First things first: If you are reading this, the Mayans were wrong. Whew...we made it to the beginning of yet another year. Now that we know that we have survived to face the upcoming months and years ahead, this is a great time to stop and look at how the world around us is really doing. And while we’re at it, let’s review what we personally and professionally have contributed.

So as not to totally come across in a negative way, let say there are individuals in the golf industry who have taken to heart their responsibilities to become better stewards of the environment. Their actions have changed the faces of many golf courses, as well as the way golf course maintenance facilities are being designed and managed. Those facilities serve as catalysts for improved water quality and increased wildlife habitat.

During the last few decades, golf organizations such as the USGA have invested millions of dollars toward research efforts, aimed not only at uncovering the facts connected with what golf may or may not be doing to or for the environment, but suggesting management changes, as well. These efforts serve as the foundation for the development of new products that deliver increased environmental and economic efficiency. To all of that I give a hardy “Bravo!”

Now here comes the other shoe. Sustainability is not a destination, a sign, an award, or, for that matter, environmental management by another name. Sustainability is an attitude and a combination of methods collectively aimed at fostering economic viability, environmental health and improved social wellbeing. To put it bluntly, from nearly every aspect, the economy is down and the social wellbeing of a growing number of human’s on Earth is down and continuing in a downward trend.

Think about the fact that every ecosystem on Earth is in decline. Nearly all of the major fish stocks in the world’s oceans are over fished and in decline and the oceans’ dead zones are growing, not shrinking.

I have been trying to capture the attention of the golf industry concerning these and other topics for more than 25 years. My hope is that in the next few years the industry wakes up and makes the decision to truly become engaged in sustainability.

There seems to be a growing effort to use the terms “sustainability” and “sustainable golf.” However, many of these efforts are, in my opinion, a mile wide and an inch deep.

They are simply the same-old-same-old... but with a new name. That simply will not get the job done. And further more, it will lull most people into a false sense of security that will not only be dangerous for the future of the golf industry, but it will add nothing to the efforts needed to help move society toward a more sustainable future.

It’s sort of like rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic and making certain the ship is at least heading in the right direction as it slowly slips beneath the icy waves.

To put it bluntly, from nearly every aspect, the economy is down, the health of the environment is down and the social wellbeing of a growing number of humans on Earth is down and continuing in a downward trend.

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