

# *An Adventure in Life* **A Sense of Achievement**

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As people progress through the challenges and experiences that life itself provides, I believe an individual has a list of achievements or experiences they want to participate in or accomplish. In a way, I believe a person derives a sense of achievement and an increase in an inner self-esteem that creates a sense and feeling of satisfaction with whom they truly are. Just as the professional athlete no doubt feels a tremendous feeling of satisfaction and accomplishment with achievements in a particular sport, the everyday person should and hopefully attain this same type of feeling and inner self-esteem with their own personal victories and accomplishments, no matter what they are and on what scale. To this end, as I reflect back over the years of managing golf courses, some of the most pleasant and interesting staff members I have had the pleasure to

work with have been the older, semi-retired staff members that I always tried to incorporate as an important part of my maintenance staffs. These individuals seemed to have an aura of confidence, calmness, wisdom and peacefulness that I always had and have found refreshing and impressive. To a person, all seemed to have lived their lives with a purpose and had accomplishments and experiences that they had probably dreamed about and planned throughout their long lives. They more or less had a checklist of life, and for the most part had pretty well completed the checklist. It never mattered the scope of the list or accomplishment, it was what they wanted to accomplish and provided that contentment and inner peace. That inner peace seemed to ooze out of their bodies and being to others around them. This peace and wisdom

seemed to create an attraction to other people, as if drawn by a magnet. I'm sure that all of us who have or had these people on their staffs understand and have experienced this. The individual who had owned his own business, traveled the world, was secure financially, but wanted to enjoy and relax in the outdoors; willing to work for no pay just to be able to experience the early morning on the golf course. The retired truck driver who wanted to share daily experiences, a joke, a story, with his fellow employees at 5 a.m. over a cup of coffee and a cigarette before heading out to mow fairways. The retired accountant, who tired of numbers and computers, stuck indoor everyday, appreciat-

ing the peacefulness and beauty of day-break on the golf course.

In sharp contrast to this were the high school and college students who were really just entering into the adventures and experiences that life holds for people. These young people exhibited restlessness and in many cases a real uncertainty of what they may have wanted in life and, more importantly, how to get there if they had any idea of what their goals and aspirations were. For many, just getting to work on time and on the correct day was a major accomplishment. In many cases, one could observe the younger people quietly observing the older staff member and what the person could offer not just about the job, but more importantly, about life itself. I'm sure we can all think back to our younger days and recall the older people we worked for and with who influenced us in our lives. They may have provided us with the view and example of what we may have been looking for in and from life as we moved forward. In most cases, our lives were richer for these experiences.

These distinctive and contrasting types of employees and people is not evident in the golf course industry or within the culture in Hong Kong and China. Through observation and talking to people, I believe the rigid, structured culture is at the root of the tremendous difference in this mentoring regard. To begin with, the Chinese really seldom seem to have thought about goals and what they want out of life. They have been taught and conditioned from birth that the government makes the decisions that directly affect their lives. The people's main goal in life is to live, be obedient, survive and to provide for their families. People really have no time to think about goals and desires and experiencing all that life has to offer. People really have no idea or concept of what all life has to offer. People's lot in life since birth is to know their place, be obedient, and exist. I have never observed the contentment factor that I wrote of earlier about the retired or semi-retired staff members that many American golf courses have. Very little mentoring by the older people to the younger people is

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## Sense of Achievement-

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evident in the Asian world. The single most important idea and aspiration in the mind of the Chinese is to get by and live. There is never a sense of contentment or inner peace -- just an anxiety to work and live day to day. In most cases, this attitude is seen by the youth as the way life is meant to be lived and tolerated. The desire to really get ahead in life or have a better life than your parents is basically not a part of a young person's mindset. The young people who do have goals and aspirations in life do very well in school and in many cases go to another foreign country such as the United States for an education. These individuals are in a very small minority. The majority of the youth appear to just continue on in the footsteps of the older population. High school and college students are not a part of my maintenance staff. Part-time work or seasonal work is not part of the Chinese culture. People who need a full-time job and income to live on fill the jobs. The school-age children spend their time studying, a full time job in itself. This lack of mentoring from old to young really has created a culture, which is really not moving forward for a majority of the population. The forward moving, thinking young people are a small minority. It is amazing to see a society and culture that is and has been so controlled by the government and rulers throughout their history. People's lives are directed and basically ruled by the government. The overall result of this practice is that the power and will to think has been taken away from the population throughout history. Newspapers, maga-

zine publications, news reports, etc. are seldom viewed or thought about by the people. In conversations with some of my staff, they don't even realize or know that the United States has troops in Iraq, and they don't care. In essence, this somewhat explains the Chinese peoples' lack of common sense and the ability to think and solve a problem. The governing establishment or particular government has always controlled the people's lives. My young, college-educated assistants have few thoughts or could care less about the events going on in the world. This culture is strictly based on the concept of living and getting by day to day. When I speak of the freedoms and the way of live in the United States, the people are astounded and in many cases do not understand or have a concept of how Americans really live. The United States and the American people and way of life are very mysterious to the Chinese people. I have spent many hours talking to many of my employees about America and Americans way of life and living. Owning one or more motor vehicles, driving to all destinations, big homes with a yard, going to a neighborhood establishment for an alcoholic beverage and dinner, attending sporting events, a 40-hour work week, free speech -- these are all concepts they have no understanding of. A live Christmas tree -- especially a tree taller than four feet is amazing to the people. The Chinese people that do have Christmas trees have artificial trees -- very ugly artificial -- that usually are no taller than four feet. The reason: homes and flats are so small that there is no room for a very large tree if at all. Compactness and making use of every square meter is a real Chinese art. It is truly amazing how the Chinese can cre-



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ate a well-appointed kitchen out of an area the size of a small closet.

**After being out of America** for a period of time, I have come to realize and appreciate the tremendous country and life style that we Americans have and do enjoy on a daily basis. It was truly a unique experience to return to Wisconsin in October for a vacation and compare my American life with the Chinese culture I had left. I found myself examining the two very different cultures and ways of life looking at the strengths and weaknesses of both. The tremendously different ways of life of both worlds would have never been imaginable without experiencing both. As I wrote in my first column from Hong Kong, a life goal was to manage a golf course in a foreign country. My ongoing experience has allowed me to find and feel that sense of satisfaction that I wrote of earlier.



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