



In Bounds: Finger Ride Inspections

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Twelve-by-twelve my office serves many purposes. The main entry into the shop, it gets and unfortunately stays as soiled as a cup cutter's hands most of the year. Dirty from the topdressing pile out front through the summer and wet from melting snow in the winter, the linoleum floor is home to my dogs and an electric heater which keeps us warm in the winter. Two windows grace the walls along with pictures of my family, the golf course and a frame supporting a couple of old golf clubs. Stapled adjacent to the door leading to the main shop area are a series of tattered and dusty pages, some yellow and some white, each titled "lessons learned this year".

The sheets of paper go back to the last time my office was painted and contain words of wisdom learned the hard way and snippets of plans to implement next year. Written more from frustration and to

make a point rather than agronomic insightfulness, catchy truisms such as, 'Poa dies if allowed to dry out' or, 'bent grass sod curls up and turns dead brown if it isn't watered' can be found on the wear worn early lists. New concepts such as 'to limit sand contamination, flush out spray tank fill line every time the sprayer hits the course' also make their way to the "lessons learned" sheet.

Underlining, writing in bold and sometimes even circling the idea really hits home. One would think I could remember everything, but as I age my ability to retain information is as reliable as the range boys picking up the balls from the driving range Sunday night so we can mow it on Monday morning. Quantity reminders are highlighted lest I forget it takes 45 yards of manure to cover our flower beds near the club house, 12 cases of cone cups (4r, of course) to make

it through the month of September and one dozen cartons of feminine products for the bathrooms on the course. Some of my historical favorite jottings are quotes.

Of course the line 'proper planning prevents poor performance' is self explanatory, but the quote, "It isn't what you expect, it is what you inspect" needs illumination throughout the year for me and my staff. So very often I direct my leadership team to do a project, complete a task or manage the managers with great anticipation that the jobs will be done according to my expectations. Relying on this will often create a sub-acceptable end

result as the implementation is lacking follow through by management. Something I am at times guilty of as well.

Without follow through there is no accountability. And without accountability those implementing your plan can do just about anything they want. Here enters what I refer to as the 'Finger Ride'.

Eighteen years ago I sailed a pretty good ship with few uncoiled ropes or wet spots on the deck. However, with the addition of a new General Manager I was exposed to the expect/inspect theory and the finger ride follow up.

Once adjusted to his new position he shared his management philosophy and I quote as I have already mentioned, "It isn't what you expect, it is what you inspect." After chewing on this tidbit of worldly knowledge for a day and reflecting that it had little bearing on me because I was doing everything I was expected to do, I placed it back in my mind under the "H" file for Hmmm. One week later my GM invited me for a ride on the course, my very first of many 'Finger Rides,' where I was introduced to the fine art of inspection.

With note pad in hand I toured my track and learned scrutiny first hand with every point of the finger at a blemish, paint chip, pile of clumped grass or angled hazard stake. And here I thought my course looked pretty good, but you know...it really only did look pretty good, not as fantastic as I had expected.

One week later after another, but not as painful 'finger ride,' the concept of inspection really sank in. My product had improved dramatically with polished ball washers, straight ropes and new shoe spike cleaners. The lesson had been well taken and I was on my way to better management. With this new knowledge my staff also appreciated that they too would be held more accountable because besides great expectations, their end results would have more inspections. They also soon grasped that a job done right the first time limits the often too personal and potentially unpleasant 'Finger Ride.'

Other quotes upon my lessons learned sheets include one that says, "Don't open the course on a Tuesday, and poll other courses in the area to learn when they are opening." I have NO idea what this is about or why I wrote it! We tend to open when the turf is ready for play. And another, "GROW POA!" This one I get, considering my fine turf areas are populated primarily of annual bluegrass, it only makes sense that I stop trying to grow bent and focus on Poa. Simply

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Finger Ride Inspections—

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stated, knock off the kinds of growth regulators and management practices that tend to cause my Poa to look unhappy.

Finally, my notes indicate that players like the course 'looking sexy, not sick.' This perception was caused last year by too much regulation during a stressful period of the summer. Even though the greens were fast as greased lightning, they looked unhappy, ill and in need of water. The membership was not thrilled. I learned the bulk of my players actually want green grass, sexy playing conditions. The snow won't melt fast enough as I wait to fulfill their desires.

Having just placed a new sheet of note paper upon my wall – blue this year – I look toward 2008 as potentially being the best year ever. Sure there will be new lessons to learn and old concepts to implement. And along the way I will endure a 'finger ride' or two and probably do some digit management myself! But right this moment I am going to meander over to my lessons pad and write, "Budget for a new shop or at least an improved office," because the strong breeze outside has pushed a bit of snow and the sub-zero temperatures under my entry door and I am getting cold. Maybe in a few years I will get a new building. *Right!*

2008 Minnesota Green Expo



The 2008 Minnesota Green Expo was again a huge success judging by preliminary attendance numbers and on-site feedback. A complete report will be provided in the March 2007 issue of Hole Notes. Preliminary reports indicate that over 7,700 people attended the Expo this year to view over 1,000 exhibit spaces on the Trade Show floor. Nearly 100 educational sessions were offered, many of which were very conveniently held in the auditorium spaces located within a few feet of the registration area. Approximately 1,800 attendees kicked off the Expo by attending the Keynote address given this year by David Horsager.

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