

Stress? Who Me?

by Kathy Antaya, Northern Michigan Turf Managers Association

After reading a brief article on job stress, I have no trouble believing that the stress level for a golf course superintendent ranks among the top six professions. These include police officers, fire fighters, emergency room personnel, prison guards and air traffic controllers. While our jobs don't normally involve life-and-death situations, superintendents are constantly bombarded with numerous problems that require our attention. These small (and not so small) problems add up over time and can create the Atlas Syndrome—a feeling of carrying the world on one's shoulders.

Stress build-up starts first thing in the morning when a staff member calls in sick, equipment won't run properly and you spill coffee on yourself. It continues during the day with equipment breakdowns, jobs taking longer than expected and unpleasant meetings with greens committees, general managers, golf pros or the DNR! Later in the day you

find disease outbreaks, wilted turf, cart damage from careless golfers and hand tools forgotten at job sites. Arriving home after work you find the cat barfed on your carpet, the newspaper landed in a puddle, your lawn is infested with weeds and bills need to be paid. What a day. In actuality, this would be a low-stress day for me.

So what can one do to eliminate these situations? We can't get rid of all the problems, but we can change our reactions and do things that we enjoy to eliminate the stressed-out feelings.

Begin your stress reduction plan by removing obstacles.

Personnel problems? Gather your staff together for a meeting and let 'em have it. Clarify your policies, give real examples of problem behaviors/attitudes. Set your standards and expectations and define the consequences (i.e. work or get fired) Be certain to end the meeting praising them for the good work they have done.

Step two of your plan involves reducing the problems that reach you.

Delegate responsibility wherever possible. For example, when installing drain tile, I delegate a "chief" to lead the crew. The crew chief organizes equipment and supplies needed, assigns tasks and approves each step of the project. He/she also gives you feedback concerning reasonable completion deadlines and unexpected problems. There are three very important aspects to delegation of specific tasks: 1) thorough definition of the job, including why they were chosen as chief, what you are trying to accomplish, and how to know when it's done; 2) give the crew chief authority to make field changes and to run the crew; and 3) allow the crew chief to make mistakes (but then fix them). Delegating authority takes some practice before it significantly reduces your stress. With the possible exception of your assistant, no staff member is as educated, experienced, or dedicated as you. Allowances must be made for these factors. I am a perfectionist, but if I were to hold my staff to this goal, they would be miserable from continuous criticism and unable to complete any task in a timely manner.

Your third step is mental adjustment. Don't expect everything to be done perfectly every time. Setting high standards is good, but life gives you imperfect conditions, people, equipment, and/or supplies. You must be realistic. Don't let the small problems build up. Say something before you

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explode.

Another mental adjustment involves your to-do list. Don't expect to finish every item every day. Remember, the world keeps turning even when you don't place that order or make that phone call. One of my favorite mental adjustments involves our internal tape recorder. Every day we repeat to ourselves certain messages. We've done it for so long we no longer consciously hear it. Usually these messages are negative: "I have too much work and not enough time;" "the golf course looks terrible," "I'll probably hit this ball into the water."

We need to replace the negative with positive and do it regularly and consciously: "One person can do only so much, "I know that if I relax and swing easy I can reach the green." In other words, pat yourself on the back, you are a valuable and worthwhile human being.

My final suggestion for

mental adjustment is laughter. Research has determined that laughter can reduce blood pressure, heart rate and stress levels. I listen to my staff at break times...their conversations never fail to crack me up. Laugh at the

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funny stories about your own mistakes—the crew appreciates hearing about your errors and you will learn to forgive yourself for not being perfect. Don't take yourself or your job too seriously and you'll find plenty of opportunities to laugh.

My final stress reduction suggestion is to do more of what you like. Frustrated with the paperwork that university employment requires, I'll grab a shovel and dig trenches or spread

sand with my staff. I enjoy physical labor and sometimes wish I was still on the crew. (Wouldn't that be great? No responsibilities, just do what you are told.)

Schedule time off for yourself during the summer. I've found it useless to try to leave early unless I've put it on my calendar. Take a long lunch and visit another course. Golf or just ride around with the superintendent. Of course you must make some time for non-work-related activities. Schedule more time for family and friends. Play your favorite sports. go boating or fishing. The list is as diverse as we are. What you do doesn't matter; what's important is that you enjoy it.

Our lives are filled with stressful situations. Reduce the problems that reach you. Change your reactions and attitudes and make time for enjoyable activities. These things worked for me. I feel more enthusiastic and have more

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Our Watered-Down Game

by Brad Faxon, PGA Professional

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Golf in America is too green.

I'm serious. What America needs is a good old-fashioned water shortage. Green is pretty. It's beautiful. It's pleasing to look at. I like green. But it doesn't make golf courses play the way they should, the way they were meant to play.

Green means lush. Green equals soft. And soft isn't good. Over-watered golf courses have become the standard in America. The word "roll" isn't even in an American player's vocabulary anymore. I think that's unfortunate. The scope of the problem,

however, goes way beyond the setup of the PGA Tour courses.

America's obsession with green has changed golf. The way American courses are maintained has changed the way equipment is made, the way courses are designed and the way people swing.

Look at the courses. All of a sudden, we're playing courses where you've got to hit the ball up in the air and stop it. Architecture went from Tillinghast, Mackenzie and Ross to Nicklaus and Dye. The game went from horizontal to vertical.

Look in your bag. Perimeter

weighted clubs make the ball to higher. (The better to play those new courses.) Square grooves make the ball spin and stop quicker out of the rough. And then there's the lob wedge. (The better to escape Pete Dye death bunkers.) The old Brits never had an L-wedge. They never needed one off those tight lies.

Look at the swings. We went from swings like Ben Hogan and Byron Nelson to more upright swings like Tom Watson and Jack Nicklaus, guys who hit the ball real high. The current popular swing has become more upright.

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Go back to the history of golf in Scotland. Courses were just laid out on the ground somewhere near the coast. They had no irrigation. They relied totally on the weather. Golf was played along the ground. The elements made the conditions tough. And you had a sand-based soil that was easy to keep firm. There were a lot of tight, hard fairways and you had to bump the ball along the ground and allow for roll.

I'm not blaming American superintendents. If there's a brown spot on a country club these days, the greens committee calls an emergency meeting. I think the club members see the Bob Hope Classic or the Masters on television and say, "That's what we ought to have."

So these courses look great but they don't play the way they should. I grew up on a classic old Donald Ross course, Rhode Island CC. The first hole is a short par four, open in front of the green. When I started out as a caddie, the members would hit a 5- or 6-iron, land it 10 or 15 yards short of the green and let it bounce onto the putting surface. That's how you played. You used the contours and allowed

for them.

When I went back to play there during college, maintenance had changed the course. I hit 5-irons out of the rough that backed up. Balls stuck on the greens. The course was so much softer and easier. People at the club said, "Brad, this is the best this course has ever been" I said, "No, this is the *greenest* it's ever been." and they didn't even know what I was talking about.

Green is O.K. if it's firm. That isn't the case in the U.S. where over-water reigns. Warwick Hills, home

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of the Buick Open, is one of the longest courses we play and always gives up some of the lowest scores. I played there Monday after the tournament and talked to the head pro. He told me the superintendent is scared to death that the tour will starve the course and he won't be able to keep it green after the tournament. So he drenches it for two weeks before, but we had rain this year, our drives plugged and we played preferred lies the first few rounds.

You want to know why foreign players are dominating professional golf? Because they play firm courses in the wind and still play bump-and-run shots and have a lot of imagination. American players have had those shots taken from them. The courses are too lush.

Remember what Jose Maria Olazabal did at the final hole of the Masters? He pulled his iron shot and ran it down the slope. He was past the hump in the middle of the green. He played what I think was the shot of the tournament, a bump-and-run down the hill and saved par. It was an incredible shot. If that had been the Buick Open, say, he have just pulled out a sand wedge, flipped it up and stuck it right next to the flagstick. Where's the challenge in that?

The USGA has the right idea. When it was deciding whether to go back to Newport CC, a true links, for the 100th anniversary of the U.S. Amateur, the club's membership was in favor of the idea and said, "Don't worry, we'll make sure we get a sprinkler system in by 1995." The USGA told them, "If you put in a sprinkler system, we're not going to hold the event there."

That's the way golf was meant to be. Now, what do you say we turn off the sprinklers and play some *real* golf?



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