

STANDING STILL IS FALLING BEHIND

Johnny Miller, sometimes called the pro tour's thinking golfer, commented recently that many golfers reach a certain level of perfection and then can't seem to progress any further. That's because they don't keep learning constantly, in spite of how much they already know.

The good golf course superintendent is much like those golfers. He often has reached an admirable level of perfection — his course is in great shape, he knows what to watch out for and how to treat problems, and things generally are going along quite well.

But then something happens. Maybe it isn't noticeable for a while, but slowly, almost imperceptibly, things begin to go downhill compared to other courses. That isn't because the once-expert superintendent has lost what he already knew. It's often because he has failed to keep up with new ideas, products and methods in golf course management.

Those superintendents have become confident and satisfied, and with good reason. But in today's world where things move rapidly, standing still is really the same as falling behind.

How can the superintendent keep up and progress? First he can consciously think about and work at learning new things. It's easy to get caught up in the day-to-day operational decisions and problems and not find the time or the motivation to look into new developments, including some that might not directly apply to him and his course.

Where can a person look for new ideas? There are the obvious answers — books, papers, magazines, literature about new equipment and products, GCSAA Conference and Show, seminars, and chapter meetings.

Volunteering to teach someone else is a way for some superintendents to progress professionally. The students' questions and the superintendent's preparations to teach open up areas the superintendent might not have thought about for a long time. Everyone who teaches also learns.

Some superintendents continue to grow by speaking at meetings, offering to teach their specialties to younger superintendents and working more closely with their crews. Some take on handicapped workers and teach them useful skills. At the same time, the superintendents learn more about their own courses, themselves and turf management procedures.

Taking extension courses through a university is another way to increase knowledge, and so is delving deeply into a subject that has been interesting for years but that there has never been time to really study. To understand turfgrass physiology, for instance, a superintendent could take advantage of the many excellent books on the subject and he could also talk with university, extension and industry experts who are nearby or accessible.

Sharing knowledge enriches the sharer doubly, and writing an article for a magazine is one way to share. How about THE GOLF SUPERINTENDENT?

Challenging yourself and your knowledge through testing is another way many people have chosen to improve themselves. While it soon will be a requirement in all states for superintendents to be tested if they use restricted chemicals on their courses, the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America has offered superintendents the professionalism yardstick of a certification program since 1971.

Preparing for any test will require you to at least refresh your knowledge if you want to perform

acceptably on the test, and it usually will reveal new areas of knowledge you may have overlooked. Similar to most professional association certification programs, and like the licensing requirements of other professionals (teachers and pilots, e.g.), the GCSAA certification calls for continued demonstration of improvement at least every five years in order to renew certification. Certified Golf Course Superintendents demonstrate their abilities and knowledge and they thereby challenge themselves, for their personal betterment and that of the profession.

Most of all, growth can come from listening to what others have to say. Johnny Miller put it this way: "I'm not afraid to listen to anybody ... because I feel that if you're smart and know what you're doing, then another guy might say something that's not even right but it will spur you to think about something that is right. Or he may trigger some thought. You might be able to take a primary level thought and go ahead and put it up at the ... level in your own mind. If it's not a good thought you can just say it doesn't work for you. So I don't mind listening to anybody. I love to talk to people."

Cultivating the skill of listening makes it possible for even experts to learn from other experts and from amateurs. Being an expert in one's field today doesn't necessarily mean that a person will be an expert in that field tomorrow. Stagnation is negative, no matter at which level it sets in, and it can be avoided by concentrating and making continued efforts to grow and progress. Remember, no one really stands still, because those who stand still are quickly passed by others.

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When the weather department announces that an inch of rain fell during the last shower, do you know just how much rain fell? An acre of ground covers 43,560 square feet or 6,272,640 square inches. An inch of water is therefore 6,272,640 cubic inches. That amount at 231 cubic inches per gallon equals 27,154.285 gallons or 226,466.73 pounds per acre. Say your club covers 168 acres. Therefore an inch of rain falling on the property weighs 38,046,410 pounds or more than 19,023 tons.