

Zen and the Art of Equipment Maintenance

Didn't get to see the course today. Came damn close, but the dreaded call came in before my cart had cleared the maintenance yard. Ring goes the cell phone. Caller ID says it's Fran-



cisco calling from his mobile phone. Francisco works for me. He carries a cell phone. That's a whole 'nuther issue, though. "Crap!" I think. "This is gonna be bad." Usually when "Francisco Mobile" appears on my caller ID, it IS something bad. I already am prepared for the worst. I know I'll hear words like "maquina" and "tirando aceite" and "no corta" and, God forbid, "sangre." For those of you who've not grasped the basics of the Spanish language, these words mean machine, throwing oil, no cut and blood, respectively. To most, they mean radio the technician and get him to fix whatever is ailing whichever machine Francisco would be calling about, or call the ambulance if the latter word was used. To me, these words mean it's back to the shop for another unpredictable adventure into . . . the Twilight Zone (i.e., the garage, the equipment repair bay, the "mechanic's place").

You see, for reasons I won't endeavor to explain in detail here, I have no technician. Haven't had one since December. Back injury. Fickle doctors, ambiguous lawyers and other outer-worldly variables have conspired against me, causing the hiring of a technician to be nearly impossible. Thus, I have—along with my godsend of an assistant—become the end of the line for equipment repair and maintenance at my club. This is not good from any angle you look at it—not good for the equipment, not good for the crew that has to operate it, not good for my assistant, not good for my intern and definitely not good for my own mental health. Projects started must be left until later. Normal, everyday maintenance practices getting properly done must be assumed. Boneyard equipment must be revived (if for nothing else, to make room in the boneyard for

the NEW dead machine). Plans get tabled, or even scrapped. No, this is definitely NOT good.

I have managed to look at this experience from as positive a standpoint as I can, though. I truly am learning on the fly—adding another feather to my cap, so to speak. The elation that comes to me when I turn that key and hear the engine roar to life, regardless of how many little pieces and parts are left over after the fix is completed, is almost orgasmic. I have new talents! I can drive to the hardware store, the bearing store and the auto parts store blindfolded. I know every equipment distributor's number by heart. I know every service and parts department manager by first name. Hell, I know

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their kids' names. I can find the tow valve on every piece of equipment in our shop (or out, as the case usually will be). I can fix a flat tire with the best of them. I've learned that that metal plate on the floor actually goes up and down—turns out it's a hoist. I find myself just watching it and being, for some unknown reason, amused: Hoist goes up, hoist goes down. Hoist goes up, hoist goes down. Hee hee hee. I am now a savvy member of the "in crowd" that knows there's no such thing as a kanootin valve or a muffler bearing. Ask me where the around-the-corner Phillips head screwdriver is, I'll point you right to it. I've discovered ingenious products I never knew existed, such as "Nu Dough" (basically a stick of Play-Doh that turns into metal when it sets); as well as new, inventive uses for everyday products like duct tape and baling wire. I can fix anything with this stuff! This isn't so bad after all . . .

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Yes it is. The downside far outweighs any positives I can come up with. When I drive blindfolded to the hardware store, it is to buy jumper cables and tow straps and push mowers. When I go to the bearing store, it is to buy exotic puller-thingies and hydraulic hoses (and fluid to replace that which striped my seventh fairway all to hell). When I go to the auto parts store, well, that's a world all its own—a different need each trip, save for the two bags of Oil-Dri required daily. If I take off the blindfold while on my way, and spot a dead lawn mower out on the curb with someone's trash, I become a vulture on carrion, pouncing upon it and picking at its entrails until I've had my fill, or find fresher roadkill down the street. When I call on a service person to "walk me through" a problem, by his second sentence—the one that goes like, "Take your whatchmacallit meter and clip on to the positive thingamajig and you should have twelve hooferdinguses"—I hear Arabic (which I don't speak). Oh, sure, I pretend to understand, I tell him I'll try that right now, I thank him for his help, I hang up, and I go to the tool box for a hammer. I have permanent grease under the few fingernails I have remaining. My golf/work clothes are trash. My repair budget is shot on batteries and starters alone (this a result of my own unique philosophy: if it doesn't start, buy a new battery first, and ask questions later). If the battery isn't the answer, buy a starter. After that, we're talking solenoids (which I previously thought were those things up one's nose that get taken out by a surgeon when one is young), coils (the things that keep one's bed firm), voltage regulators and those god-forsaken safety switches that require death-defying acts of bravery and self-contortionism to locate (and bypass). My mowers spark, click,

sputter and drip. My Cushmans have one gear—you push for the other direction. I'm considering cutting the floors out of them and going "Fred Flintstone." Dangerous and frightening new parameters have been set—how many drips per 10 linear feet are acceptable, how many strips of paper should be used to determine that a reel "cuts paper," and so on. I can't even bring myself to sit back and read all the trade magazines from which I typically find relaxation because they are grim reminders of my plight. "Turf Twisters" brings to mind how my rough mowers are operating. "Top Ten Turf Tips" just makes me long for the fingertips I used to have before my many unfortunate forays into reel adjusting. Even this very magazine—*On Course*—makes me yearn to be just that. *Bull Sheet?* Figure that one out for yourselves.

The light at the end of the tunnel is getting bigger, though. I soon will have my technician back, and my assistant and I will once again be able to tour the course, to manage the staff, to tackle the projects—maybe even get in a round of golf on OUR course! My intern will once again be able to learn the finer points of GOLF COURSE MANAGEMENT. And my crew will once again be able to operate equipment that runs from starting time to quitting time without needing its very own jumper cables and oil-drip bucket on board. My life is finally turning around and the clouds that have covered my sunny outlook have disapp...

Ring.

Francisco Mobile.

Crap. 