

Did I Learn Anything New Today?

Editor's Note: This column originally appeared in the December 2000 issue of The Green Breeze, the publication of the Greater Cincinnati Golf Course Superintendents Association.

I can remember coming home from school as a child and my mom always asking two questions: "How was school today?" and "Did you learn anything new today?" My reply to the first question, which to my mom's dismay was always "good," revealed a lot about my developing personality—I wasn't going to reveal my feelings unnecessarily. Over the years, my reply never changed. The answer to the second question, "Did you learn anything new today?" has stayed with me, and to this day I wonder at the end of the day if indeed I have learned anything new. If I can answer yes, I consider the day at least a partial success.

While involved in a conversation about the few superintendents who remain as active superintendents after age 50, the question "Did I learn anything new today?" began to roll around in my head. Sure, there are the issues of club politics, bad weather and numerous other reasons why superintendents leave by the age of 50; but maybe an additional factor is that after a certain age, we may no longer feel that it is important to answer the question "Did I learn anything new today?" in the affirmative.

Learning is what we do so well when we are young. Experts tell us if you want to learn a second language, you had better start by age 12; and if you have ever tried to learn a new skill, like golf or playing a musical instrument, you know only too well that younger people learn much more quickly. Something happens to our ability to learn as we acquire experience.

Frequently, when the discussion turns to superintendents leaving the profession, the parties involved bemoan the experience

that our profession is losing. This is a valid observation. Experience is what stops us from making the same mistakes over and over again, mistakes that can result in lost turf and repeated expenditures of large sums of money. Experience results in consistent playability and quality turf. Experience is the result of learning from our mistakes.

Experience and the ability to learn are frequently characterized as being at odds. The older superintendents see the younger ones as not having "common sense," the knowledge that everybody knows. Younger superintendents see older ones as being unwilling to try new things, to take risks. There is a truth in what each side states, but the fact of the matter is that the truth lies somewhere in between.

Common sense tells us those things that work and those that don't. Years of experience teach those willing to learn what is common sense. We acquire experience by learning, and by learning, we acquire experience. The two go hand in hand.

The conversation I was involved in was quite abstract; no one's job in particular was being discussed, rather trends from the GCSAA's latest survey of superintendents' compensation. Nevertheless, if one looks around our area, one does see many new faces that have come with all the new courses being built in the area. You can also see many older, familiar faces, faces that buck the national trend. Those are the faces of those still learning, still searching for the better way, still unwilling to accept what everyone assumes is "common sense." We can, I believe, be proud of our local superintendents that go against the trend.

When I finish my day, I ask my children, "How was school today?" My oldest responds, "Good." My youngest responds with an outpouring of everything that is on his mind. We're all different. When I ask, "Did you learn anything new today?" I hear my mom asking me again, and I wait for their answers. As youngsters, they are only too eager to learn, but I also ask myself, "Did I learn anything new today?" 