



The Savvy Superintendent's Guide to Survival Marketing

One of the weirdest things about writing these messages is dealing with deadlines. You are reading these words just after returning from the GCSAA Conference and Trade Show or just before embarking for sunny southern California, but they are being written between the Christmas and New Year's holidays. A lot can happen in a month, even in the winter, so bear with me as I attempt my best Karnack the Magnificent imitation.

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Several manufacturers announced (or will announce) mergers at the convention. This year we will be buying our plant protectants from "Aven-Syn-Bay-Clea" Inc. and everything will be agency-priced for our "convenience." Our new equipment will be painted with attractive red, green and orange stripes and replacement parts will arrive at our doorstep the day before the original part fails.

A new bio-product will be introduced that rakes bunkers, repairs ball marks and replaces divots.

Water woes will be a thing of the past as a hybrid buffalograss/seashore paspalum will be available, genetically enhanced to convert salt into a goose deterrent.

Golf carts will feature artificial intelligence, enabling them to refuse to cross ropes, natural areas and water hazards.

Lastly, our own *On Course* magazine will finally be recognized by the GCSAA for what it is, simply the best chapter publication in its (or any) class.

All right, enough fantasy, let's move on.

There will be two issues that I truly expect to take on added importance this year, and they are:

- 1) Survival Marketing
- 2) Labor Costs

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The issue is value and selection. We can be thankful you can't play golf over the Internet – yet.

How does this affect the way we do business?

Unless you are fortunate enough to work for a club where price is no object, you have been asked to look for ways to cut costs—if not, you will be. Like it or not, we are management (yikes), and a golf course is a business (double yikes); there are times I dread good weather and abundant rainfall because memories are short (remember 1995—sort of) and it doesn't take a lot of creativity to keep the mowers sharp and the staff sober. There are times I wish for a "hard" year just to remind everyone how difficult it is to play a bad hand (usually that yearning goes away quickly).

We stand on the shoulders of the people who make it happen—our crews. I have been blessed to work with a fine staff that are reliable, conscientious and hard-working. I merely hint at the need to stay late or come in early and it happens. Yes, I know I'm lucky, but it doesn't change the fact that not making income projections for the past several years has brought uncomfortable scrutiny to the way we maintain the golf course. We are in the service business and labor is the largest expense. Nobody I know has guys hanging on hooks waiting for something to do. So when the hard assignment of cutting costs without reducing services is sent down the pipeline, go ahead and scream and shout, stamp your feet and bemoan your fate, but do so in private. Be ready to point out the consequences that certain actions would precipitate, and be thankful that you have the opportunity to make your case.

Most golfers (and even some of our bosses) have little idea of what it takes to prepare the golf course for a day of play. Like making sausage, they don't want to see it happen; they just want the finished product. Even more, a good maintenance staff does their work unobtrusively. We have been trained to flit around the golf course like ghosts, desperately avoiding


human contact because players don't like to see or hear the sausage getting made. We need to change that. I'm not saying we need to jump out of the bushes and shout "Look at me working hard for you!" But it's easier to look at numbers on a spreadsheet with a red pencil when they don't have faces (and families) attached to them. We need to aggressively market our operations. It's no longer enough to let our work speak for itself. If you believe that, you are being naïve. Don't forget that the graveyard is filled with indispensable people.

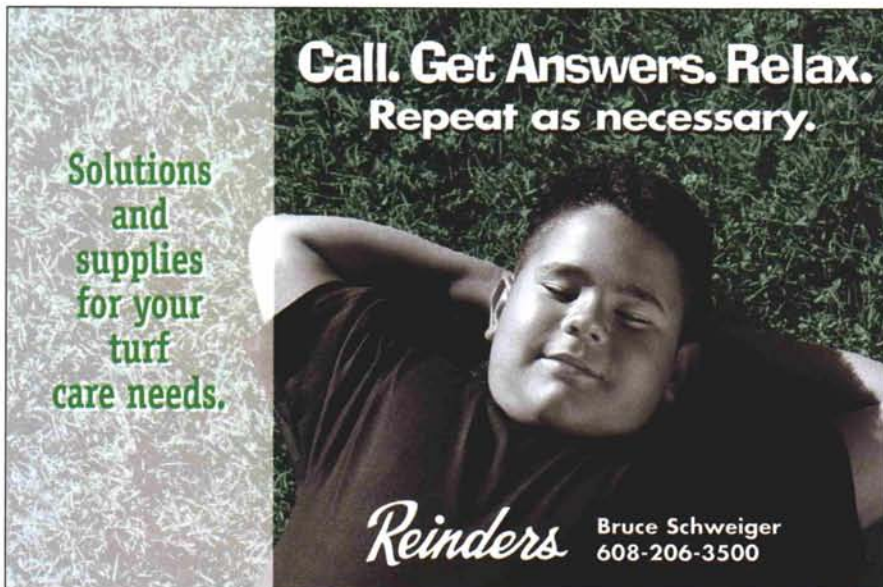
I would strongly suggest that one of the first things you do next season is have a greens committee meeting (or your equivalent) at your maintenance facility, invite your staff (all of them preferably), show off some equipment old and new, and trot out whatever new wrinkle you're going to add (or delete) from your routine. In other words—step up! Decision-makers rely on managers for inputs that drive "business decisions." Don't let the hammer hit because you were "on the course" when it came down.

One other thing, I want to offer my sincerest congratulations to Danny Quast for receiving the GCSAA Distinguished Service Award. In his time with us at Medinah, Danny was a mentor to many of our best and brightest. Who could ever forget the consummate professionalism he embodied when he faced

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the harsh and glaring spotlight of the media and several prima donna touring pros when Tiger Woods won the PGA Championship in 1999. Danny could have made excuses about some of the worst July and August weather you can imagine, or blamed the fact that critical turf management decisions were made by people who had no business intruding, but he chose the high road.

Mr. Quast, you are a stand-up guy—congratulations. 



Solutions and supplies for your turf care needs.

Call. Get Answers. Relax. Repeat as necessary.

Reinders Bruce Schweiger
608-206-3500