



ON COURSE WITH THE PRESIDENT

Fred Behnke, CGCS Mount Prospect Golf Club

Do You See The Elephant?

I was a recent participant in a focus group. You know, the kind where you sit around a table with other supers and have a conversation guided by a facilitator about insecticide, or equipment, or whatever. I do this every once in a while for a little pocket money and the experience of looking at that big bank of one-way glass on the wall and wondering who “big brother” is. There’s a kind of mysterious and creepy aspect to the experience that appeals to my inner child. I know—I have to get a life.

Competition drives us to excel like no other motivator, be it the drive to lead the way, or the fear of being left behind . . . competition is the elephant in the room nobody is talking about.

Anyway, at this gathering there was the typical “getting to know you” time of introductions and opening comments during which several of the supers in attendance allowed that our business is unique in that, even though we may work for competing golf courses, we are not in competition. Superintendents, as a group, are more than willing to lend a helping hand or a piece of equipment to a fellow super in a time of need. There is a sense of “we’re in this together” that sets us apart from the typical “dog eat dog” way of doing business.

As this symbiotic relationship was put forth, a chorus of agreement ensued from the assembled participants until one individual chimed in with the comment, “Well, that’s not entirely true.”

Every head turned to the new speaker, and the facilitator asked him to elaborate on his comment.

Now, I know this super; he runs a top-notch private course in the western suburbs, and though I have never had the pleasure of joining him, I know he has been known to hoist a few, so let’s call him Killian’s Red.

Back to the story. Killian’s Red goes on to say, sure it’s true that supers aid and abet each other in the course of their duties, but to say there isn’t competition among us is just plain fantasy.

Truer words were never spoken.

The plain truth of the matter is that successful superintendents are on the constant lookout for a leg up. While none of us would wish ill on our peers, we sure do measure ourselves against them.

- Private versus private
- Public upscale versus private
- Municipal versus public
- Public versus resort

Mix them and match them as you will, but it’s there. When was the last time you played golf somewhere and didn’t notice something that . . .

- A) You would do differently.
- B) You wouldn’t do at all.
- C) You wished you’d thought of, and couldn’t wait to get home to try.

This business has ruined the way we enjoy the game. Playing golf has become work, not because of the toil associated with swinging the club so many times to get around a course, but because we, maybe subconsciously, are constantly evaluating, measuring and critiquing our operation against “others.”

Is this a bad thing?

It doesn’t matter, because good or bad it’s out there whether we like it or not.

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Americans love a winner. From day one we are taught to compete. How soon was the baby toilet-trained? Who got the better grade on the final exam? Who got the lead role in the school play? Not to mention t-ball, soccer and other athletic pursuits. Complacency breeds stagnation. Competition drives us to excel like no other motivator, be it the drive to lead the way, or the fear of being left behind; it's really what makes us go above and beyond the call of duty.

Enter the Midwest Association of Golf Course Superintendents. One thing I have observed in lo the many years I have been a member of this Association is that the best supers, the ones that run the prestigious clubs, the profitable public tracks and the finest-conditioned municipal courses really use the Association. They may say it's because of the magazine, or the education, or the networking options, but competition is the elephant in the room nobody is talking about.

Chicagoland has a plethora of outstanding golf venues from which the discerning golfer can choose. What is acceptable in another part of the country is simply not an option here. You need to measure up or you're gone, simple as that. It may be harsh to say, but as an Association we really don't care who gets what job. The plums will go to the person that seizes the opportunity. We want the best and the brightest in our area. Their presence will push the rest of us to match or exceed their performance. This is the big time.

Our job, as an Association, is to provide our members with certain tools to help themselves excel. It's up to you to pick them up and put them to work. If you think something is good enough because you've always done it that way, watch your back because somebody's gaining on you.



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