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Morale and Leadership:

Buzzwords for the 21st Century

Webster defines morale as “moral or mental condition as regards courage, confidence, enthusiasm, etc.” Sun Tzu alluded to this well over 2,000 years ago in his military doctrine “The Art of War.” He said, “The advantages of the ground are not as important as harmonious human relations . . . he whose ranks are united in purpose will be victorious” and “If he cherishes his men in this way he will gain their utmost strength, if he treats them as his own beloved sons they will die with him.”



Caught in the act: this operator is mowing greens with the transport wheels on. This type of photo appears on a bulletin board in Winnetka G.C.'s maintenance building, injecting a little levity into the workplace and improving morale.

Fernando Fernandez, CGCS, gave one of my all-time favorite Midwest Turf Clinic presentations in 1993, titled “A Complete Renovation Project.” As he started his speech, I believe he said it best, “It’s time I give something back to the Association.” Personally, I have always wanted to write an article. Well, Fred, here it is, finally!

Like most, I read *On Course* cover to cover. I must confess (albeit reluctantly) to reading very few of the many fine articles in *Golf Course Management*. The Civil War, Vietnam War and military leaders are topics consuming the majority of my recreational reading at home. From my concentrated “study” of the above, it seems ironic to me how much military and civilian life parallel one another. How do you motivate someone to face imminent death/permanent injury? How do you motivate a laborer to hump a string-trimmer after just walking five miles mowing greens on a 92-degree day for \$8 an hour? The common ground is good morale and enlightened leadership.

Not professing or pretending to be an expert on this subject, I am merely a student. My only hope is to help someone, somewhere to improve his or her individual management style. Disappearing are the days of dictatorial management. Superintendents cannot possibly watch over their entire staff spread out over 100-plus acres throughout an eight-hour day. We provide the leadership to “get the job done.”

Motivation is a way of providing the incentive to do an assigned job well. We have all read articles on what motivates people at work—things such as pay, room for advancement, good benefits, job security, absence of double standards, etc. If people enjoy their work, have a

few daily laughs, care about their coworkers and are treated fairly, good morale will be contagious. Morale is the fiber that can make ordinary people do extraordinary things.

Following are some activities and practices we implemented at the course that foster morale:

- Instead of sending staff home, or “sweeping the barns” for that second consecutive rain day in April, we cook up a couple of boxes of popcorn and watch a movie. Between safety training tapes we annually watch *Happy Gilmore* (the crew rolls over with the Bob Barker fight scene), *Caddyshack* (they love the gopher and Baby Ruth scenes), and the Three Stooges classic *Three Little Beers* (golf-ball washers will never be viewed in the same light). Remember, your crew wants to and needs to work to put that bread on the table for their families.
- We encourage laughter and fun while stressing NO horseplay.
- We have a coveted “Wall of Shame” photo board in the lunchroom featuring numerous pieces of equipment stuck in our peat-muck soil or in a pond (protocol requires operator to pose in picture) and staff doing nutty things, for example, a new hire mowing half his green with the transport wheels on and wondering why he’s not filling the basket . . .
- We take annual group photos and post them around the shop and/or clubhouse.
- We encourage staff to play golf. Several play weekly and love their “membership” on the nine-hole par-3 golf course.
- This June will be our third year holding the AJGA Windy

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Another highlight of Henry Michna’s photographic Wall of Shame: overaggressive mowing of pond banks.

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City Classic. The top juniors in the country shoot par or better over a three-day tournament on a longer and more difficult course than the MAGCS played last June. For our last two hours of work on the day of the tourney's final round, we go over to the 407-yard no. 9's green complex and sit in the shade on the little berms and bridge and watch the leaders (future collegiates and potential pros) shoot darts at a green flanked on the left by 180 degrees of water. We always have a few kids look up at our imposing staff of 20 and say "nice job" or "thank you for the week." Boy, does that feel good.

- We enjoy the typical fine summer BBQ shop party.
- In December, Richard Blust, our superintendent of parks, takes both crews to a very, very nice Italian bistro. Cloth napkins are, of course, an oddity to most.
- "Putting For Dollars" is the best \$100 I spend in a year. On a hot day in summer, when staff seems a little more wound up than usual, we play "Putting For Dollars." We try for a Thursday or Friday when

our 25-stall practice range is two-deep and the clubhouse area is buzzing. At lunchtime we tell all staff to report back to the shop two hours before the end of the day. At that point, we tell them all to grab their putters, bring a cup-changer and drive **all** the utility carts up to the clubhouse. Cut a new cup on the spot and place a five- or ten-dollar bill in the cup for closest to the pin. I putt first to show the line and use a ballmark to mark the closest ball. If someone holes it, he/she automatically gets the same amount. Don't worry too much about going through the money too fast. Everyone turns into Tiger and surveys the situation before each shot. It takes a while for a staff of 20 to play out. One of the settings we use is a relatively easy 10' straight downhill with the placement on the slope to help teach the cup-changers why they have been trained not to have placements on slopes. Next thing you know, **EVERYBODY** on the practice range is watching your staff having fun and cheering for all those near misses. They almost never see your full staff assembled and realize that it does take a lot of dedicated people to provide the playing conditions and improvements your staff contributes.

- Although we must treat people individually, we avoid double standards.
- We keep an honest two-way street policy.
- We keep an open mind and solicit input on anything from all staff. Staff has provided the genesis of some of the best improvements to date.
- We try to pass on to them all those nice comments golfers give—they did the work!

- We tell the staff "nice job," "thank you" and that we are **PROUD** of their work!

Liberty is taken here to recommend my favorite book, *About Face*, by Colonel David H. Hackworth, U.S. Army, retired. His Web site is www.Hackworth.com. My assistant Mark Anderson, radio operator/forward observer, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, 1st Marine Division (Vietnam 8/67-9/68) turned me on to his book. Maybe he thought I could learn a thing or two. Mark, thank you.

Following are just a few of the essentials of good leadership "Hack" expounds on in the story of his military career. He learned soldiering the right way, from the hardened veterans immediately following WW II in post-war Italy. He served throughout Korea and three tours in Vietnam to become America's most decorated living soldier, with 110 medals including two Distinguished Service Crosses, nine Silver Stars, eight Bronze Stars for valor and eight Purple Hearts. He is an outspoken critic on military reform and is a contributing editor for defense at *Newsweek* and a syndicated columnist for King Features and a regular on the "Larry King Live" show. He is the man General Creighton Abrams called "the best battalion commander I ever saw in the United States Army."

Although essentially military, these leadership traits seem to carry over to everyday life. I frequently review them as a reminder on how to do things right:

- Lead by example.
- Care for your staff. Know your staff.
- Be a doer and self-starter. Aggressiveness and initiative are the two most admired qualities of a leader.

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Morale is a state of mind. It is steadfastness, courage, hope, confidence, zeal, determination and loyalty.

Over the Banks We Go

The author's little brother wonders, "Where's the ark?"

Flashback to late February. The rains have just stopped; all the snow is gone and things are looking pretty bleak. It's just not a pleasant sight. This has to be the worst time of the year for the course; everything looks dirty and old. So I daydream, looking out the window of my office. Lo and behold, there is my crew, trying to pick and cut through the ice on the course to install the pumps. Yes, the course is flooded once more.



Scott Speiden.

FLOODING! For better or worse, this is something I know about. I have worked for Itasca Country Club since the early '80s. Since that time, I have seen large and small flooding events. But all floods are not created equal. There are those floods that just raise and lower water heights, but leave no sediment. Those are considered the carry floods. Then there are those, like the '87 flood, that leave behind a sediment layer of over three inches. Once you pump the water, you had better have a game plan. The silt does not give you much time before it kills the turf. In the past, we have lost fairways, tees and greens due to floods. Having a good pumping system and equipment helps considerably. Itasca has two 12" Cristifulli PTO driven pumps that can pump 5,000 gallons/minute, one 16" Cristifulli pump that can pump 10,000 gallons/minute, more than six 3" pumps, and other assorted electric pumps on the course. I always figure I can pump over 23,000 gallons per minute. Even with that capacity, however, we can sometimes pump as long as 48 hours straight, with no downtime.

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Here, I'd like to give a little insight on floods and how they affect us and the courses we call home. To that end, I posed a list of questions to a group of superintendents who have a tremendous knowledge of flooding through real-life experiences: Sean Creed of Oak Brook Golf Course, Dave Braasch of Hughes Creek Golf Course, Oscar Miles of Merit Club, Joe Reents of Oak Meadows Golf Course and Jim Meyer, retired superintendent of Itasca Country Club. I chime in myself with a few comments.

In your opinion, what is the worst part of flooding?

"Seeing your previous work go down Salt Creek!" was Oscar Miles' comment. All joking aside, money is the real issue. We all seem to agree that the worst part of flooding is the loss of revenue. This is one of the biggest problems for any course, private or public. It is very difficult to analyze actual loss of revenue due to extreme variations among budget-

ing systems. A major factor is timing of the flood: summer, winter, during a tournament, an outing day, etc. Flooding puts a huge damper on the season for any golf course.

Other comments touch upon the clean-up after the waters have subsided. Clean-up is a huge headache. We have turf under water and turf that still has to be maintained. The hours you spend cleaning, for days on end after the flood, seem like a waste of time. We spend astronomical amounts of money on labor, pumping, fuel and hauling, to name but a few costs. Sometimes I think, is it really worth it? Rest assured, after you have been able to get the course cleaned, overseeded and back into play after an event like this, you do think differently about whether your efforts were worthwhile. Once the course is back in shape, you know that it was a learning experience and it was well worth it.

How many acres do you lose during a flood?

It seems commonplace for much land to be disabled due to floods. Sean Creed says that Oak Brook has lost in the neighborhood of 40 acres due to flooding. Joe Reents adds that his course has lost 40 to 50 acres to floods, but feels very fortunate in that the waters at Oak Meadows subside quickly. This limits the loss of turf at his course. Hughes Creek loses 20-plus acres, or 80% of the front nine, reports Dave Braasch. We at Itasca Country Club lose 40-plus acres due to reservoirs upstream of our location. These reservoirs create elevated flows in our creek for long periods of time. State and local agencies have control of retention basins upstream that can reduce downstream flooding. Working with these agencies may offer remedy to those who want to improve flow through and off the course.



A view of no. 15 during a flood event.

What kind of strain does flooding put on your budget?

Dave responds that flooding throws his overtime and fungicide expenditures over the projected amount. He adds that oddly enough, flooding always seems to come during the Pythium season. As the saying goes, when it rains, it pours!

In all seriousness, we are wholly aware that the bottom line is exactly that. Even if we come through the season in excellent shape, if the budget is out of whack we will hear about it. So this is a huge issue for those courses that flood. When a flood hits, it will crush your budget and there may seem to be no way of recovering that loss during the season. But options do exist for recovering money lost on the floods, as Sean explains. Floods do not affect his budget; he simply applies a surplus charge of \$1.50 per golfer, which is designated for a flood fund. Oscar adds that the flood of '87-'88, during his tenure at Butler National, caused a considerable loss of income. Accounting for loss of income to the club and the cost to repair the course, Butler's membership was assessed \$5,000 apiece to cover the strain. What great ideas! We at Itasca have always tried to forecast how many floods we will have during any given year. Whether big or small, flooding hurts the budget. These add-ons will allow us to stop forecasting and set a charge for flooding.

Do you remember the '87 flood and how did it affect you?

Joe is reminded of the '87 flood everyday. His barn has a permanent stain line on the wall 3-1/2-feet high, left from the floods of '87.

Dave was a crew member at Idlewild Country Club then and remembers this event vividly. He

spent days on end with a high-pressure hose in hand, washing off the greens in hopes of saving them. Jim Meyer, too, says he remembers the '87 flood very well and would rather forget it. He remarks that it was one of the worst experiences he had as a superintendent. The stress was almost unbearable and he hopes no one has to go through that.

As for me, I was an assistant at the time for Jim and I agree completely. What I saw Jim go through, no superintendent should ever have to go through. Thank God, a crisis like this hasn't happened since. Being an assistant in '87, I commend Jim and all superintendents for the way they dealt with that situation.

What is the one thing you will never forget about the '87 flood?

That smell!

I bet you are thinking, what smell? The smell of fish, silt and dead grass was something indescribable. Unless you have ever worked a flood, you will never completely understand it. I will never forget the aftermath of the flood of '87 here at Itasca. Our pro shop staff came out to *try* to help us in the clean-up. Needless to say, they did not last long. Two of our greens were completely surrounded by water, much like little islands on the course. It's not everyday that you have to float your cutting machines out on rafts to get to the green. Despite the fact that the course is flooded, though, it still needs to be maintained and sprayed for disease. Dave comments that the disease outbreak that followed the flood was a close second to the smell in terms of impact. After a flood, you can bet that disease will be knocking on your door next. As if dealing with the water weren't devastating enough, now you have to deal with the rest of

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This is no. 15 again. That's the author's brother dog-paddling up the fairway.

the course. It seems to be a never-ending struggle.

Flooding can torment a superintendent. The flood itself is easy to take, but it is the next couple of days, dealing with the golfers, higher management and golf pros, that will test you. I am a firm believer that with experience

comes knowledge. Oscar, a veteran in our industry, tells me that our profession learns and gains respect from challenges such as these. He adds that we can never handle situations like these alone; we would go nuts trying. The main thing to remember is to ask for help; extraordinary work **can** be accomplished under duress.

Yes, being a superintendent is a great job. Times exist, however, when a boulder is thrown onto the road. How we deal with it is what makes us good at what we do. Here's hoping we're having a great (flood-free) season—keep your feet dry! 



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Announcing the Inception of Environmental Leaders in Golf Awards

The GCSAA and *Golf Digest* are teaming up to form the Environmental Leaders in Golf Awards. Sponsored by Syngenta Professional Products, Rain Bird Corporation/Golf Division, Textron Golf, Turf & Specialty Products, and Pursell Technologies, Inc., the Environmental Leaders in Golf Awards recognize golf course superintendents and their facilities for their commitment to environmental stewardship on the golf course. These prestigious awards will result not only in recognition of environmental leaders, but also in contributions to the GCSAA Foundation.

An independent panel of judges representing major national environmental groups and the golf industry will conduct the award selection. Applications will be evaluated in five categories: Resource Conservation, Water Quality Management, Integrated Pest Management, Wildlife/Habitat Management and Education/Outreach. These categories will be reviewed based on four criteria: sustainability, criticality, originality and technology implementation/use.

GCSAA members may apply for the awards directly; members and nonmembers (including the general public) also may nominate GCSAA members for award consideration. Request your application from the GCSAA Service Center (800-472-7878), the GCSAA

Web site (www.gcsaa.org/envi ron/elga_form.html), the *Golf Digest* Web site (www.golf digest.com), chapter leadership or one of the participating sponsors. The deadline to apply is October 1, 2001.

Expanding Online Educational Offerings

GCSAA expands its online education programming with the debut of “The Art and Science of Maintaining a Functional Putting Green.” The new course features Milt Engelke, Ph.D., of Texas A&M and focuses on the components of a functional root zone and its importance in managing a top-quality putting surface. Dr. Engelke explores the physical, chemical and biological components of the root zone for both native soil and sand-based root zone greens. The class takes 3.5 hours and is broken into 20-minute segments to allow superintendents to complete it in multiple sittings. Successful completion means .35 CEUs. To register, go to www.gcsaa.org/learn/selfstudy/artand science.html.

Launching Internet Commerce Project


GCSAA Communications, Inc., a subsidiary of the GCSAA, will soon be enrolling members of the golf course management industry in an Internet commerce service that will bring e-commerce capabilities to golf course superintendents.

The project, entered into jointly with Raleigh, N.C.-based XS Inc., will begin with a “soft”

launch in a pilot mode so that GCSAA and XS Inc. can work with buyers and sellers to develop the best possible service prior to making a decision on a full-scale Internet commerce presence. The pilot program will involve a limited number of product categories and the use of focus groups to collect feedback on the initiative. GCSAA will undertake a “launch, learn and re-launch” approach, continually making improvements based on feedback from its members.

“This service is just a continuation of GCSAA’s philosophy that began in 1996 to employ the World Wide Web to become a more effective and efficient organization and offer the same for its members,” said GCSAA President Tommy Witt, CGCS.

XS Inc. brings a strong set of complementary and proven capabilities to GCSAA. It has operated commerce sites in the agricultural market since 1999. XS Inc. specializes in building neutral public exchanges, as well as custom-developed private exchanges that can support distribution needs and relationships.

“From the outset, our goal was to provide a 24/7 environment that enables superintendents to execute their jobs in a more efficient manner,” said GCSAA Immediate Past President R. Scott Woodhead, chairman of the GCSAA Internet Strategy Committee. “This project is the next step toward that end.” 

Ronald Fox



The Fox family: Ron, son Stephen, daughter Ashley, wife Chris, daughter Jessica and dog Abby.



POINT O' WOODS

Point O' Woods Golf and Country Club? I've never heard of this golf course. Where is this place?

If you, like me, had never heard of this fabulous Robert Trent Jones-designed golf course located in Benton Harbor, Michigan, consider yourself officially introduced. Point O' Woods was built in 1958. As rated by *Golfweek* magazine, it currently ranks #56 in the all-time ratings as one of America's best classical golf courses. Mr. Jones was known to have a very fond affection for this piece of land and the layout that he conceived. The name of the club comes from the topography of the original parcel of property. The surrounding land was and still is farmland, but a small point of undeveloped woods existed, untouched. Now this site features another Jones masterpiece.

The members of the club are mostly Illinois residents who own summer homes in the surrounding area. They were looking to build a club they could play while away from their "other country club"

back home in the Chicago area. The property was purchased, Mr. Jones was called in and the rest is history. The course itself sprawls over 200 acres of rolling forest land. Needless to say, hitting the ball straight here is a premium requirement for scoring. The design requires a player to work the ball both ways. Tremendous risk and reward opportunities are available to challenge players. The greens are large and receptive, but well-guarded by strategically placed bunkers. The par 3s play long. The course plays to 7,014 yards and is a par 72. There's nothing tricked up about this course—it's just straightforward, classic golf. The club has hosted the prestigious Western Amateur since 1963. Some of the previous winners include Curtis Strange, Scott Verplank, Justin Leonard and Tiger Woods.

Now you know a little about the golf course, but let me intro-

duce you to the man who makes the legend live. Ronald Fox was born to and raised by a Scottish greenkeeper in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Ron's father was from what you would call the "old school." A greenkeeper for 40 years, he put in a working day from dawn until dusk every day. Ron told me a story about one particular Christmas when his father went to work in the morning as usual to grind reels on Christmas morning. The family had to wait for father to come home at 11 o'clock before they could open the presents. That's "old school!"

As Ron was growing up in a club-provided residence off of the 13th hole, he and his brother roamed the golf course daily, playing in the woods and sneaking on to play a few holes at night to hone their own golfing skills. Ron remembers driving a tractor and mowing the rough when he was