

“Weeping May Endure For A Night”

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The rest of the quote for the title of this article is “but joy cometh in the morning.” As many of you know, this is a direct quote from Psalms 30:5. I would like to apply this quotation to a subject that is close to my heart and very common to our profession, a subject that most superintendents never broach, that causes many sleepless nights and many bleeding ulcers. That subject: personal trials or afflictions or failures.

As bona fide members of the human race, as golf course superintendents, we are quite willing to talk about our personal triumphs, our accomplishments, our successes. But, what about the real building blocks (a seemingly paradoxical statement) of our character, of our personhood—our failures.

Because of an experience in 1977, a “failure” if you will, and to other personal trials that are even now upon me, I believe I qualify as a specialist, an authority on the subject of failure. I make that statement out of thankfulness and humility, not regret or boastfulness. By relating that experience and what I obliquely learned, I hope to show that probably more is gained through our failures than our successes. In looking back eight years removed from that “failure” I consider it one of the most valuable experiences of my life; at the time, I was asking, not demanding, why me, Lord?

1977, of course, was my first year at Burning Tree; I had reached a personal goal of mine, a tournament course or very fine private club, fully seven years before I could even dream of such a possibility. At a beautiful club, steeped in tradition, I was going to provide the first conditioned golf course on the East coast. After three successful years at Andrews AFB that seemed to be a reasonable goal at the time.

By August of that year the golf course—tee, greens and fairways—looked as if someone had done a poor job of spraying Round-up herbicide; the only thing consistently green were the leaves on the trees and they turned brown early that year. What happened? I still do not know. When things started going down in May or June, I certainly overreacted with certain management practices but not to the extent that the course was suffering.

If the turf was suffering, I was more so. My personal pride was being ripped out by the roots. For the first time in my life I realized I did not have control over my job situation or my personal destiny. That realization is both sobering and humbling. At the time and during those four months, I slept a maximum of two hours per night—the other 4-6 hours were spent endlessly tossing and turning and worrying; I did not share any of what I was going through with anyone, not even Karen. By the end of the season I was a basket case, even though I managed to put on a good front. Within myself, I got consolation from the fact that I probably would never take my own life since I hadn’t already.

For those of you who may go through a similar experience, for those of you who may be having problems, trials or afflictions not necessarily of your own making with green chairmen, committee chairmen, or members in general, for those of you who may be having personal problems, what did I learn from ’77 that might possibly encourage you?

First of all, make certain your priorities are in line. What is most important to you? If you do not know what is most important, look to see where your time is spent; that is a pretty good barometer of your priorities. Do you pass up vacations with the family because the course would founder without you? Do you work seven days a week even though your wife would like you to visit relatives or go to church with her? Do you not participate in your children’s activities because you have to work till 6 in the evening or on Saturday morning?

For me, I learned my priorities were totally out of kilter. Because of my total personhood, who I was as an individual was tied up in my job at that time. Because my course was going under, I was going under also, as an individual. Out of 1977 came a realignment of my priorities. For me, faith in my Creator and trusting in him became number one, my family second, and job, third; everything else fell below each of these. This does not mean that my job is unimportant to me, that I do not give 100% that I do not care; it does mean that it is in perspective to other areas of my life that I consider important. I believe that because of this I am even more valuable to my employer now.

Secondly, if you are having difficulties, open up to others and share your problems with them. As you do, it is amazing, absolutely amazing, how many other people have had or are having similar problems. The more you open up and expose your inner being, your thoughts, your feelings, your hopes, your dreams, your prayers to others, they in turn feel the freedom to open up to you. That ten ton weight of “bricks” or “baggage” suddenly becomes five tons when shared with another. That problem does not necessarily go away but it does become manageable; it is brought into perspective.

In the “summer of ’77” I did not do this. I kept everything within. My pride would not allow me to share my problems; I was internally exploding. Death, truly, would have been a welcome relief.

Third and lastly, I feel that the “failure” eight years ago started me on the way to becoming a “people person”. Not that I have arrived in this area of my life, far from it, but I’m on the road. It behooves each of us to take the time to listen, truly listen, to what another is saying. He may be asking or crying out for our help and yet we are not really hearing his need; he may need a kind word of encouragement, a helping hand, a thank you or a please. Are we really listening?

In summing up, I would say that personal trials, afflictions and failures throughout life are going to come our way. How we choose to handle them, what we learn from them goes a long way toward our own personal happiness, contentment, and well-being. “Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning”. ■