

And just what is it you do for a living, anyway?



What do you do for a living?

How about the people who work for you?

When your new employee is asked about his job by Aunt Minerva, will she get a meaningful response? Or will she have to ask, “And what is that?”

As I was scanning the obituary pages this morning — too many of my acquaintances and contemporaries have taken up the nasty habit of appearing in them — I ran across the notice for a 71-year-old man who was described as “a golf course maintenance person.”

How sad, I thought, that this human being had devoted perhaps half a century to maintaining a facility which, during his working lifetime, brought enjoyment and innumerable lessons in humility literally to millions of people... and his legacy is the sterile designation, “maintenance person.”

What did he do?

Was he a mechanic? Irrigation technician? Spray technician? Equipment operator? Turf groomer? Tree trimmer? Ditch digger? Cup cutter?

Or was he a member of a crew that did all of those things? If that’s the case, he worked very hard. The least they could have done is call him a “maintenance worker.” There’s some honor in that.

But it still doesn’t answer Aunt Minerva’s

question, “What do you do?”

I don’t have the answer, but I suggest it’s an important question for at least two reasons:

The first, obviously, is motivation.

When greenkeepers began seeing themselves more as managers than as grass farmers, they changed their job title to superintendent. Their employers went along with the change because they got better golf courses out of the deal.

The same lesson could be applied to your “maintenance persons.”

The second has to do with survival of the industry.

A golf course “maintenance person” helps nurture a complicated ecosystem that returns fresh water to our aquifers and oxygen to our atmosphere. He protects more wildlife than any zookeeper and he preserves parklands that are not just pretty to look at, but actually serve a useful, healthful purpose for more than 20 million Americans.

Give a “maintenance person” a job title that reflects those contributions and maybe the toxo-terrorists, as Tim Hiers has dubbed them, will go pick on the real enemies of the environment.

What do you think?