

# Ethics and The Golf Course Superintendent

by SCOTT WAHLIN



*Superintendents are not protected from being "stabbed in the back" by our code of ethics.*

**T**HE purpose of this article is to explore our industry's Code of Ethics and examine where we stand in this area.

All superintendents are aware that there are codes of ethics associated with the professional associations they join, but I have found there are varying opinions as to what is ethical and what is not. I suppose this conclusion is obvious when it is taken into consideration that ethics by definition deals with an individual's morals and decisions based on those morals in his/her relationships with others. Our code of ethics specifically

spells out several infractions which are expressly forbidden, but there are also many actions which are commonly held to be unethical that are not specifically stated. These actions are not eligible for association enforcement. In a litigious society vague statements regarding moral standards are unenforceable without an inclusive and legally worded list of specific examples of infractions.

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I have recently been discussing ethics with associates to get an idea of what the general feeling is in this area. I spoke with one person who is an officer in an unrelated professional organization who told me that, in his opinion, if we are going to consider ourselves to be a professional association we must strictly enforce our Code of Ethics. This opinion is echoed in the introductions to both the SFGCSA and the GCSAA Codes of Ethics. We have all been aware of questionable behavior, yet enforcement on the chapter level is rare and, as far as I know, the national association has not pursued an ethics case to the point of punitive action.



One comment that was made to me by a highly respected superintendent and agreed to by several others, was that even though we have come a long way, we are still a very young organization.

I believe we have achieved the professional level we enjoy today because of the cool headed actions of intelligent people, but enforcement and punitive action must be made to be a viable alternative when more tasteful measures are unsuccessful.

Another comment I received involved a troublesome scenario. This man said he knew of an individual who had been out of work for three months and was contacted by a greens committee chairman interested in an interview. The committee chairman was asked if the present superintendent was aware of the intention to make a change. The committee chairman instructed this individual that they were going to make a change, the present superintendent was not aware of this situation and if he told him he would no longer be a candidate for the position. This does not sound like the optimal employment situation, but the decision to turn your back on this would be made difficult for someone who

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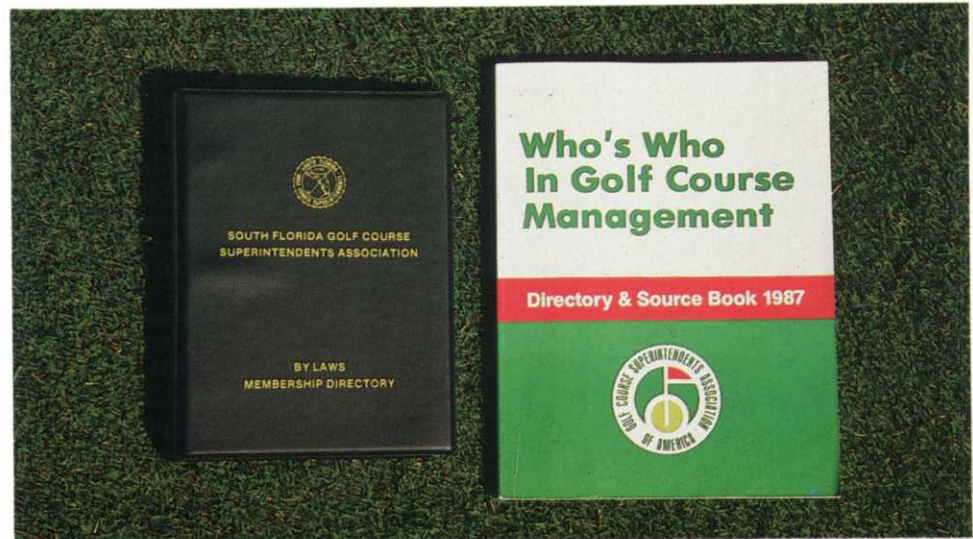
is unemployed. It would be my interpretation that a decision to pursue this position would be in direct conflict with the SFGCSA Code of Ethics although I am not sure that declining the interview would be the best choice. How can you tell if a decision is ethical? There is a statement in *The IBM Way* by Buck Rodgers I think is good here.

“You are responsible for your actions, and this responsibility will not always be an easy one. The next time you have an ethical dilemma, you might try this test. Ask yourself: if the full glare of examination by associates, friends, even family, were to focus on your decision, would you still be comfortable with it? If you think you would, it probably is the right decision.”

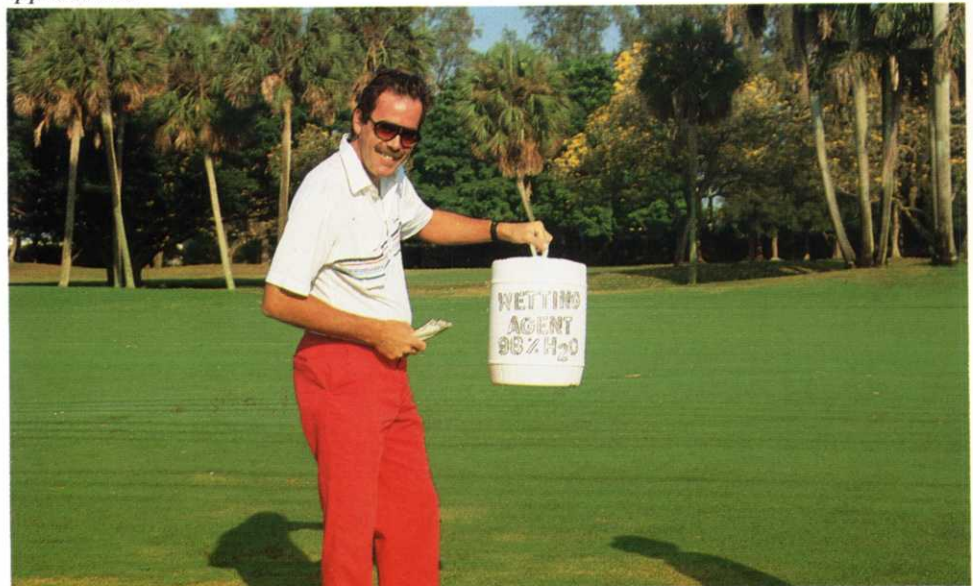
After looking into our codes of ethics I came to several conclusions; ethical behavior is largely a matter of opinion, many statements in our codes of ethics are too vague to facilitate enforcement and should be changed, ethics violations must be reported by all members and the possibility of enforcement must be a reality, and ethical behavior is a matter of personal morals and choice. ■



*Unsafe pesticide use is unethical but this is not specifically stated in our Code of Ethics.*



*Printed copies of codes of ethics are available in directories and on membership applications.*



*Professional behavior includes reporting members who have behaved unethically.*