

*Transition in
the tropical
region*

I remember one winter as an assistant superintendent in South Florida taking messages for my boss from other superintendents in our area who were having problems with their greens.

I told them that I would be happy to have my superintendent call them back but he has told everyone else the same thing so far — let your overseeding go and grow bermudagrass.

It seems to me that overseeding in a tropical region is more of an insurance policy than anything else. If we do get the cold weather that seems to visit us about once every 20 years, you'll be in good shape. If it turns out to be a warm winter, grow the bermudagrass.

Other reasons that come to mind for overseeding this far south include masking contaminated putting surfaces, maintaining a very green color and having the status associated with bentgrass overseeding.

I do not like the whole idea of cultivating the current bentgrasses anytime anywhere in Florida, but the last time I wrote about this, it seemed rather controversial so I will avoid further discussion of the matter here and get to the point of this article.

When it was announced at our last chapter meeting that the topic of this issue of *The Florida Green* was transition, another form of transition came to mind.

Transition by definition is change and if any profession has been through

transition in recent years, it is ours.

The president of our chapter asked the floor for suggestions as to how we could get more superintendent involvement at our meetings.

“Figure out a way to do this job in less than 60 hours per week,” I thought.

“At the same time, figure out how we can sleep at night facing the alphabet soup of regulatory agencies with many regulators who seem to take pleasure in disrupting our day, and still find the time and achieve a state of mind conducive to the proper development of our families.

“If you can show superintendents how to do this they will come with bells on.”

I personally have attended our chapter meetings religiously and sought to be involved and active in our chapter only because I perceived this use of my time as a valuable investment.

There is no doubt in my mind that I was able to negotiate better deals with suppliers and obtain the help and counsel of my peers at a higher level than my counterparts who chose not to attend meetings or get involved.

But I must admit, it was very difficult at times to get the SFGCSA to the top of my priority list while facing a mountain of minutia.

There is no doubt in my mind that all of our superintendent members who chose not to attend the meeting were busily addressing concerns that seemed major. There is also no doubt in my mind that most of them will forget, in time, how they used their time that day.

On the other hand, I feel sure that as long as I am breathing I will not forget Tom Mascaro's talk, the interaction I had with people in my field whom I admire and respect and I know my club and



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profession will benefit as a result of this meeting. Our profession and the demands placed upon us are changing daily and involvement in our associations is as critical now as it ever was.

I would like to give one example of how quickly change has been occurring in the environmental compliance arena over previous years.

When I started applying pesticides to golf courses 19 years ago there was little concern for environmental safety.

Even though I considered myself to be conscientious, I know now that I was ignorant of many areas that needed consideration. Most of the chemicals I remember using have been removed from the market and replaced with better ones with less potential for negative environmental impact.

There is no doubt that these developments are very positive for everyone. But I sense that the pendulum has passed the bottom of its axis and is again moving away from a balanced state.

I have worked diligently to assure that my operation meets or exceeds the expectations and requirements of the various regulators who come to call. But the time required and the worries associated with compliance are all in addition to what was considered the scope of a superintendent's responsibilities 10 years ago.

For example, when I started as a superintendent, I had a notebook to document chemical applications and maintain inventory lists, and a label book that I kept up to date using the labels off the containers I used each day.

I now have a two-drawer filing cabinet filled to the gills with permit applications, correspondence and all the other necessary information to help assure compliance.

I was visited by a regulator the other

day who told me that I had to get another permit from his agency because I had obtained more than one permit from them in the past year!

I have one file that contains all the environmental compliance information I had compiled from 1987 to 1991. I have a file of equal size in April 1992! What was I doing with my time from '87-'91?!

Many people who view our profession from the outside have extremely romantic visions of what it is to be a superintendent. I have heard people say that being responsible for a golf course must be like having a jealous mate.

If I were going to personify a golf course, I would choose to visualize an intensive-care unit filled with 18 individuals who would not have the luxury or inclination to be concerned with jealousy. The rising expectations of the people who pay the bills is adding to the critical status of these 18 individuals, bringing additional stresses to the superintendent.

It seems to me that expectations continued to increase every year. There is no doubt that we have accepted and, for the most part, met these expectations. But ladies and gentlemen, we are dealing with a hybrid of greens grass that was released in 1965!

When you hit the wall of limitation on this grass, there is nothing on the other side but dirt, embarrassment, hard feelings and very little golf.

To give a non-superintendent some idea of how close greens can come to becoming bare overnight, I have found I can grow very acceptable greens at my club at a height only $2/100$ s of an inch over a height where they decline and die rapidly. To most people, $2/100$ s of an inch is not much, but to a superintendent, this can make the difference between sleep and restlessness.

It should be noted that when Tifdwarf was released in 1965 we used a ruler to measure mowing heights. Now we use a micrometer.


So is the transition being experienced by the golf course manager/superintendent all bad?

I don't think so.

Certainly I know and have known many top professionals in our industry who have been fired unfairly and I feel bad for them... but adversity brings opportunity.

As Tom Mascaro pointed out in our meeting the other day, the best way to increase your compensation and security is to assume more responsibility.

I believe the profession of golf course management will take major strides in terms of stature in the next five to seven years, and it will become a much more lucrative and secure profession.

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