

THIS TOO SHALL PASS

"This too shall pass."

This phrase has guided me through some tough times. When the chips were down, when obstacles seemed insurmountable and when situations seemed at their most dire, I repeated these four words to myself and they would encourage me to hang in there a little longer. Things will get better.

And they did.

To be honest, I don't remember where I heard it first. In researching the phrase's origins, one of the stories I liked the most was that it was inscribed on King Solomon's ring to remind him that the present – whether positive or negative – was a fleeting thing. It's also one of the fundamental principles in a complex adaptive system, a theory often used to describe how ant colonies and the stock market work. The world is in a state of flux, always changing and constantly reacting to fit the environment around us.

This spring I talked with a number of golf course superintendents about how they were managing through the inevitable budget cuts at their courses.

To no surprise, most superintendents are dealing with the issue of doing more with less – substantially less in some cases. For some, it meant heading into the season with fewer people on staff, while others were forced to eliminate hours, even a day, out of their work week to meet their new budgets. Nearly all, though, were expected to manage through this financial hurdle and present a golf course Shangri-La to members.

I was curious to know how they were getting through this. Many superintendents told me they were managing the best they could, reinforcing to their staffs that, while their hours may be fewer this season, at least they still had hours to work.

I firmly believe superintendents who have the skills to adapt and the fortitude to persevere will make it through this economic downturn as better, stronger managers with more cohesive crews.

Take, for example, Scott Cybulski, CGCS, who is the superintendent at the private Falmouth Country Club in Falmouth, Maine. Cybulski, like many superintendents, told

me membership at his club was down and his budget went right along with it.

Cybulski's particular economic challenges have forced him to approach his job with a new mind-set, one that matches up the strengths of his existing staff to the jobs that need to get done. It also is requiring him to foster more of a team mentality with his crew.

"I'm going to need for them to work without any direct supervision because there's no way I'm going to have the time to watch over them," Cybulski says. "It'll be a good test to see how efficient I can be as a manager, and it's going to be a good test of how my people can work together."

Thomas Wright, superintendent of parks and grounds at Mohonk Mountain House in New Paltz, N.Y., says while budget cuts are

cumbersome, they're forcing managers to realize that they can no longer throw money and resources at problems. "In a crazy sort of way, I see this revitalizing us," he says. "If there's an issue, we must find a way to troubleshoot it with the skills, talents and resources we already have on hand and retask our people to do the work."

It strikes me, though, that while the economy will

rebound, it will take longer for superintendents to feel any financial relief.

Superintendents may become victims of their own success. They've proven to be highly capable managers who can do more with less and uphold the ideals members and players have come to expect at their respective courses.

It's a high compliment for anyone to survive a test of this magnitude without throwing in the towel or without compromising professional standards. It's also an unfortunate reality that green committees and corporate boards will hesitate to restore budgets and fail to reward these accomplishments with a return to normalcy. And who out there doesn't long for a return to how it once was?

Remember, for better or for worse, eventually this too shall pass. GCI



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