



**Tim Moraghan**, Principal, ASPIRE Golf [tmoraghan@aspire-golf.com]. Follow Tim's blog, Golf Course Confidential at <http://www.aspire-golf.com/buzz.html> or on Twitter @TimMoraghan

## FALL: THE FICKLE SEASON

**F**all has arrived. The weather is cooling, the leaves are falling and the days are shorter... still a great time for golf and golf courses. It's also the first opportunity many superintendents have had to reflect on the season's efforts and what could have been done differently or better during the season.

Chances are you're not the only one reflecting. With the club calendar opening up, this is likely when your board, membership, ownership, or whoever is responsible for your employment is also reviewing your efforts. This is when disgruntled golfers sit in the grill room and chirp about how the course "really sucked this year" or "our superintendent just doesn't get it" or "I don't understand his/her problem." With a single malt in one hand and a deck of cards in the other, they scheme how to find a better, younger or cheaper (or all three) groundskeeper. Meanwhile, you innocently press on.

It used to be that the "Three Ps" of the golf industry were to protect, promote and preserve the game. Today, a tough economy combined with the unrealistic demands of uneducated golfers have created three new "Ps" – pre-ordained, pre-planned and pre-destined – that can result in your unemployment. Often, you unknowingly aid in your own demise.

So consider the following factors. And if this is the first time you've thought about these things in the past 12 months, then it's possible they'll soon be using another "P" to describe you – past tense.

**POLITICS.** The secret to surviving club politics is knowing what's going on without being involved. Hard as it is, you must remain neutral, remembering that it's not your club, it's theirs. Don't get sucked in to their griping and machinations. Don't do anything other than be completely truthful about the course, and do the best job you can do while keeping your head down and mouth shut. Be friends with everyone but no more. Learn who the key players are, and keep listening and watching for signs that the tide may be shifting against you. An old sage once told me: Politics is best defined as "poli meaning many and tick being a blood-sucking insect."

**YOUR AGE/LENGTH OF EMPLOYMENT.** Long-time readers may want to search GCI's archives and

re-read my column on the "20/50 problem." What I said then continues to be true: those of us over 50 with 20 or more years in the same job at the same club are automatically equated with declining efforts, complacency, lack of communication and old-fashioned methods. While doing all you can to fight those negative assessments, be sure to avoid saying things like, "I'm getting too old for this s#&!." Trust me, someone will agree.

**US VS. THEM.** Being a superintendent is a wonderful way to earn a living: The course is our office, we're outdoors, working with and battling Mother Nature, motivating staff and creating spectacular conditions that bring pleasure to others. However, all too often I hear supers refer to "my course." Sorry, but unless you own it or have a piece of the

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action, it isn't yours, and thinking it is will only lead to problems. As a member of a top private club once told me in no uncertain terms, "If you don't pay dues, you don't have an opinion."

**MANAGEMENT COMPANIES.** Love 'em or hate 'em, management companies are part of the operational equation. With the game and the economy in decline, these organizations have become viable options for clubs in financial trouble. But they often save money by cutting staff and salaries, bringing in whoever can promise to do the job faster and cheaper. Which is why you should be on the lookout for unannounced visits by management company representatives or unidentified guests. Keep your ears and eyes open for member gossip about money issues (e.g., potential leasing, sell-offs), and be leery of innocent-sounding questions about your budget, staffing, equipment needs and the qualifications of your assistant. Go beyond your department's finances and budgets and if possible, become acquainted with the club's overall operating budget. Learn how the club operates. Don't be sneaky, just be aware.

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COMPANY	WEBSITE	PAGE
Aqua-Aid	www.aquaaid.com	8-9*
Champion Turf	www.championturffarms.com	8-9*
Clivus Multrum	www.clivusmultrum.com	26
Cushman	www.cushman.com	2
DuPont Professional Products	www.proproducts.dupont.com	5
Executive Golf Search	www.egsinc.com	32
Irrigation Consulting	www.irrigationconsulting.com	54
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John Deere Golf	www.deere.com	60
JRM	www.jrmonline.com	55
Knox Fertilizer	www.knoxfert.com	43
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COMPANY	WEBSITE	PAGE
PBI/Gordon	www.pbigordon.com	21, 45*, 54
Rain Bird	www.rainbird.com	15
Redexim	www.redexim.com	45*
Sipcam/Advan	www.sipcamadvan.com	59
STEC	www.stecequipment.com	29
Syngenta Professional Products	www.syngentaprofessionalproducts.com	24-25
Toro	www.toro.com	39
Turf Diagnostics & Design	www.turfdiag.com	32
Weeks Farm Machinery Auction	www.weeksfarmmachinery.com	49

\*Denotes regional advertising.

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**LOVE THY MEMBERS.** Treat every member the same. It's probably okay to become friendly with your employers, even have off-course relationships with people you've worked for over many years.

However, always keep your eyes and ears open for signs that the end is near:

- An eerie silence befalls the golf course and the friendly associations stop.
- You're no longer asked to attend board meetings, or your assistant is asked to join you.
- You sit alone in the grill-room.
- You begin hearing about minor issues regarding the course even from your most ardent supporters.
- Even your "friends" begin looking for second opinions.

**SPECIAL PROJECTS.** Arguably the greatest attribute of a superintendent is a never-say-die attitude. You should be trying to accom-

plish as much as possible with unrelenting enthusiasm.

However, be wary when the club, owner, or management group begins asking you to take on projects that don't fall within your area of expertise, jobs like resurfacing the parking lot, re-decking the patio around the pool, re-fencing around the tennis courts, repairing the clubhouse roof, even undertaking significant tree removal. These tasks will take you away from the golf course, and if course conditions decline, so will your job security.

Tom Landry, the legendary former Dallas Cowboys coach, said to me that being a successful football coach is just like being a successful golf course superintendent. In both cases, "you are only as good as your last day."

Want to get fired? Ignore what your membership is thinking about you. Instead, be smart and you'll be the one deciding when that last day comes. **GCI**

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