



10

THINGS I LEARNED

With more than three decades of experience, Tom Werner has a wealth of life lessons to offer.

by Tom Werner, CGCS

Choosing the right career is daunting to say the least. Try doing this in an era when technology as we know it today was pure fantasy. Some of us were fortunate to get an opportunity to do what they enjoyed at an early age. For others, it may have taken them somewhere else at first until it became clear. My opportunity came at a time of somewhat innocence, the 70s. Disco music, crazy clothes, post-Vietnam and Nixon. High gas prices, high interest rates, and lots of growth in the game of golf: a game my family enjoyed and still does. My brothers and I worked at the country club we came to know as home in Houston. The place was known as El Dorado Golf Club back then and the super was Gary Luscombe, a K-State grad. The property still exists and is now the Redstone member's course. Lots of houses nowadays, but back then it was woods so thick you couldn't see your way through if you happened to stray from the fairway, which happened to me often.

Gary was great to work for and taught us a lot, especially if you worked hard. One day I asked him about career opportunities, and he suggested a few places and Texas A&M was my next stop. I never had any trouble finding a job when I came back home for the summer and even worked a little bit while a student at the research plots under Dr. James Beard, our turfgrass professor.

College was great, but the real world beckoned in 1980 when I graduated and got married. I began to realize I did not know much of anything, but was willing to learn. That is why I came up with the top 10 things they do not teach you in college or out in the field, because quite frankly, everyone's situation is different and the circumstances change over time. The person who writes this 100 years from now may use some of the same anecdotes, but I hope they learned it better than I.



Tom Werner

1 Your first job is the most important

This applied when I was an assistant. Work hard, listen, and learn. Don't second guess the boss and don't go over his head, no matter what the circumstances may be. Save the questions for the right time. Learn from the other employees and be willing to do anything they do. You will be leading them someday.

2 Your last job is the most important

By this time, your employer knows you can grow grass. They are just looking for the right fit. Embrace the politics and culture of the club or facility, but don't become engrossed in it. Be visible and not invisible. Embrace the members and their guests and get to know them. Lead by example and take care of yourself and your employees.

3 Don't be afraid to admit you were wrong

When something does not work out, don't blame others or technology. Things happen and don't experiment at the risk of losing your job. Give praise to your subordinates and accept blame with humility and do it quick!

4 Surround yourself with good people

Sure, there will be some bad apples, but cull the herd and weed out the undesirables. You are only doing yourself and them a favor. You cannot make everyone happy. Train your replacement and cross train others. No one enjoys doing the same thing over and over.

5 Get involved

Whether it is with your local chapter, your community, your church, or your children's activities. Have a life outside of work and make friends outside the industry. Take time to make time! Network with your old classmates, fellow professionals and friends.



D AS A SUPERINTENDENT



6 Don't think you have all of the answers

You don't know it all. Be humble and kind, but not passive and weak. Be firm, but fair. Be friendly, but not friends (especially with fellow employees). Continue your learning by being involved and search for the answers. Try new methods and technology when the old fails. Don't be afraid and at the same time be cautious. Do your homework!



7 Embrace technology; use it to your advantage

There are a lot of gadgets, gizmos, and snake oils out there, so don't be taken in by the glitzy sales pitch or suspect testimonials. Just because the other person claims (or the sales rep claims) they have been successful does not mean you will be successful. University research is still the best. Apply it to your application.

8 Play golf and enjoy the game

Respects the rules and history of the game. You don't have to be good and others will perceive you are trying, especially the members and golfers at your facility. Play golf with the members and management team. Keep it fun and if you are competitive, be careful.

9 Learn how to deal with Mother Nature and human nature

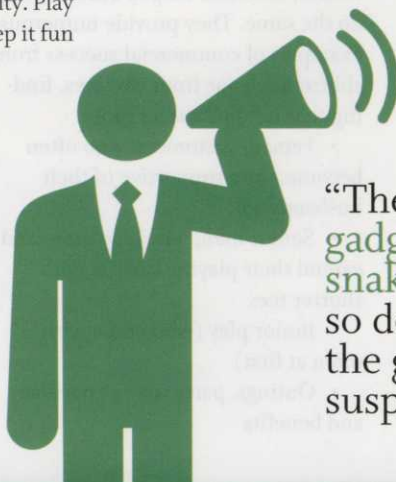
Remember, they don't always get along and there is nothing you can do about the former. The latter is hard to master, but try to understand others whether it is the members or fellow employees. Imagine yourself in their situation and don't overdo it. Keep it simple and sensible when it comes to your speech. Don't bake the cake, just serve it!

10 Know when to hold 'em, know when to fold 'em

If you aren't part of the solution, maybe you are part of the problem. If the situation is bad, get out. If the situation is good, stay. The grass is not always as green on the other side of the fence as it may appear. Don't give up and show that you don't care. Don't complain and voice your opinion to others. Agree to disagree, but never argue or get mad. It only shows you are weak and lack self-control. Carry yourself about professional and look and act the part. When you do part company, make sure you thank your employer for the opportunity no matter what the circumstances. Look at change positively and keep in mind that it is better to build a bridge than to burn it. There are good jobs out there and sometimes it may require a lateral move or career change. Good luck and enjoy the ride! **GC**



Tom Werner, CGCS, has spent 33 years in turf, 30 of them as a superintendent in Texas and Florida. He works in turf equipment sales and resides in Katy, Texas.



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