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Kirk Richmond at Crooked Stick Golf Club in Carmel, Indiana visited with superintendent Russ Apple during his grow-in at The Pete Dye Course at French Lick to share management ideas. And while there is strength in numbers, it's more important to know that a familiar face just up the road uses the Penn bentgrasses too.

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NEVER SAY NEVER AGAIN...

There aren't many sure things in life. Some would cite the old "death and taxes" maxim. Others would remind us that, "The sun will rise tomorrow." Superintendents would, of course, moan: "Golfers will bitch no matter how perfect the course is." Everybody has their own take on it.

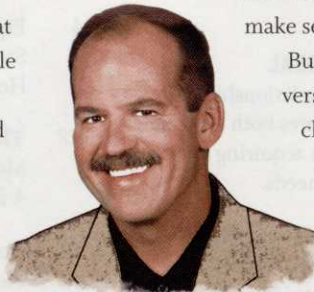
For me, the only absolutely sure, indisputable, unarguable fact in the world is that Sean Connery was the best James Bond ever. If you attempt to tell me differently, you will likely get a poke in the nose. Pierce Brosnan, my ass.

As Bond, Connery was, quite simply, the coolest guy ever. He drove amazing cars, frolicked with fabulous women and killed bad guys in a myriad of creative ways. Hell, he even still managed to beat Goldfinger at golf after the fat little jerk cheated.

Connery retired from the Bond role in 1971 after "Diamonds Are Forever" and did some crappy movies before unretiring in 1983 to make "Never Say Never Again." The film's title comes from those who reminded him that he had repeatedly and loudly vowed to *never* make another Bond flick.

Well, I was thinking about Sean Connery's change of heart just a few hectic weeks ago when I found myself enthusiastically agreeing to become GCI's publisher and editorial director. For five years, I had also repeatedly and loudly vowed to anyone who would listen that I would *never* return to the corporate rat race. I would *never* go back to all the hassles of running a magazine. I would *never* give up being my own boss. And I would positively *never* give up the cushy consulting lifestyle that allowed me to lounge around all day in my flannel pajama pants and well-worn fuzzy slippers.

But I figured if Sean Connery – the coolest man on the planet – could eat his words then a bonehead like me certainly could, too.



Pat Jones
Editorial director and publisher

That said, I do think hypocrisy of this magnitude begs a little explanation, so here goes:

GCI has grown and blossomed beautifully in a relatively short time. I'm jumping on the bandwagon just as the magazine is on the verge of greatness. Thus, I can take all the credit without having done any of the actual work.

Being your own boss sucks. There's no one to blame when the copy machine jams and this guy who claims to be my "Uncle Sam" calls constantly looking for money.

As much as I loved working solo at home, I began to realize that showering and shaving occasionally had benefits. Plus, all of the voices in my head were starting to make sense.

But seriously folks... The short version is that I've had a lot of changes in my life – I'll be writing about those in my "Parting Shots" back page column in coming months – and I've made a commitment to reinventing myself. Lord knows I needed to. And, over the years, the owners of

GCI have treated me like family. When they offered me a larger role with the magazine, it just felt right.

The other thing that felt right was the opportunity to help make GCI a publication that truly leads our industry. We're lucky enough to be able to send this magazine to 30,000 of our friends every month. We damned sure have an obligation to inform, stimulate, educate and even provoke you on every page of every issue. I promise you here and now we'll fulfill that obligation. And this time, that's a vow you can be sure I will never break. **GCI**

Pat Jones

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Serving the Business of Golf Course Management

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We'd like to hear from you.

E-mail us at gci@gie.net with your thoughts and opinions.

FEEDBACK

Reality check

Thanks to Pat Jones for the call to action to everyone in the industry (February, "The Cold Hard Reality of Spring," page 66). Often I get to tell the story of playing golf in South Carolina at a course with a couple members from that course. I dipped my towel in a creek and they screamed at me, "Don't do that; the water is full of chemicals!" Of course this is where the rubber meets the road for us all. Can we stand up and tell the right story – right then?

Keep up the good work.

P.S.: The end of the story is those guys got an earful after they tried to save my life!

Mark Esoda, CGCS
Atlanta Country Club
Marietta, Ga.

"The Cold Hard Reality of Spring" is perfect and excellent timing. I just published an article in our newsletter asking Iowa superintendents to get involved at the grassroots level with their local and state 'politicians.' Nobody wants to do that, but we know it is critically important. I love your 'five relatively painless little ways' angle and think we could make huge progress if even 25 percent of our people would do that. Thanks, as always.

Jeff R. Wendel, CGCS
Executive director
Iowa Turfgrass Institute
Ames, Iowa

In response to Pat Jones' Feb. column, I'll give a shout for Mike Crawford, TPC Sugarloaf, Duluth, Ga. Yes, he is one of my peers in the TPC Network, but he is a 2010 EGR recipient for his tremendous work in Georgia with water issues. His work was extremely beneficial for superintendents in Georgia during the recent drought in that state.

Roger A. Stewart Jr. CGCS
Director of golf course
maintenance
TPC Twin Cities
Blaine, Minn.

Irrigation system questions

I feel Erik Christiansen's column ("Satellites, Decoders and Disaster," January, page 23) is grossly inaccurate. A new 1,400-head, FD 101 decoder irrigation system was installed five years ago here at Aurora Hills Golf Course near Denver, Colo. The system was installed according to all manufacturer specifications including lightning. The Denver area is a very arid climate with average rainfall of less than 15 inches a year. Denver also receives a high amount of lightning strikes each year. In a five-year period less than 10 FD101 decoders have had to be replaced because of lightning. Christiansen's comments about decoder systems falling short in lightning protection and survivability are just not the case. The performance of our decoder irrigation system is second to none. I am a little confused by Christiansen's statements about decoders, as well. In Jeffrey Brauer's column in the same issue (page 18), he mentions Mr. Christiansen designed a decoder system that was installed at Firekeeper to reduce wire, labor costs, field controllers and should reduce potential for lightning strikes. What gives?

Michael P. Osley, CGCS
Aurora Hills Golf Course
Aurora, Colo.

Erik Christiansen responds

System users, irrigation designers and industry friends responded to my January column with an interesting mix of agreement, disagreement and personal experiences. As with many issues superintendents face daily, no one answer fits; nor does one professional's experience translate to all others. Both system types are proven successful, and both have been around for at least 50 years sporting a variety of brands, versions and applications. Users of each type have had good and bad experiences. Based on my experiences as a professional irrigation consultant, both satellite and decoder systems have very loyal followings. Irrigation designers, superintendents and sometimes even contractors tend to polarize toward one or the other.

Over the years, I've designed both types of systems and have seen both succeed. I openly discuss with clients the pros and cons of both system types and how they apply to their specific projects, site conditions, budgets, crews and other factors. My goal is to use all of the facts, experience and data to provide the absolute best advice to my clients, according to their needs and resources.

I stand by my recommendation under the scenario presented: For a large system in a hot, arid, lightning-prone area, where a lack of irrigation can damage turf within 24 to 48 hours, I would recommend a system that had the greatest back-up watering capability – a satellite system.

I enjoyed the feedback and appreciate everyone who took the time to write in or contact me. To me, this is what makes a great column topic – people openly sharing their depth of knowledge and experiences that offer practical benefits to current and future decision makers.

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6 REMODELING BLUNDERS TO AVOID

I recently saw a newspaper article titled, “The Top Home Repair Blunders.” After a quick read, I realized that with minor tweaks, they are the same six blunders to avoid in golf course renovations. So, here we go.....

ACCEPTING THE LOWEST BID

I had a neighbor who continually used roving undocumented workers for home repair because they were cheap, and continually had to re-do work when they failed to show up after a few days on the job. He never learned.

In golf construction, low bids are great, and some great deals are out there right now, provided you prequalify the contractor. You can use references and research and/or limit bidders to members of the Golf Course Builders Association of America. If only qualified contractors who understand the work are bidding, then you should be happy with the low bid.

THE FRIENDS AND FAMILY PLAN

This may work for cell phones, but many reputable architects and contractors politely decline projects at their home clubs. The potential for hurt feelings is just too great. Many members will have some – but not all – of the expertise to be successful, raising chances of problems. And, while there have been some great deals from club members, there are enough bad ones to spawn jokes about the “brother-in-law” discount actually being 110 percent of the market price, too.

DIY SYNDROME

Some clubs work under operative phrases like “What could possibly go wrong?” and “How hard can it be?” to justify design or construction by themselves without outside help. But, they don’t know what they don’t know – until it’s too late. Club members who are engineers feel they can design greens or irrigation, and contractors who “have put all kinds of pipe in the ground” except for the specialized golf course drainage and irrigation kinds feel they can build it, but there are little twists to everything.

Even when using your maintenance crews, which are qualified for some construction, a typical problem

is that they aren’t really equipped in machinery to handle bigger construction projects.

LETTING MAINTENANCE SLIDE

Adding to the problems of an underequipped maintenance staff is that you often expect them to be in two places at one time, which isn’t possible.

Another aspect of this is thinking that the golf course is fixed forever after a renovation. In fact, it starts wearing out from the day it opens, and the best time to start saving for the next rebuild 15 to 20 years down the line is right now!

FOLLOWING EVERY TREND

If you have a harvest gold or avocado green appliance, you know how silly trendy things can look later. Some great courses have been disfigured with trendy design styles or features like waterfalls. Our currently trendy hairy fringed bunkers may end up as the beehive hairdos of the 2020s, when our retro-vision should be perfect, right? Past trend initiators had to be pretty sure their style was “last thing” in good taste, too, right?

Although there are exceptions, even if your course is a somewhat bland design, you are usually better off following its styling cues than reinventing it completely. Fix what you must, but be sympathetic to what is there for the best results.

ASKING QUESTIONS LATER

Renovations aren’t “shoot first, ask questions later” situations. Determining style, budgets, construction techniques, etc., and picking golf course architects and contractors are best planned in advance, but a surprising number of projects rush to start (perhaps afraid members will change their minds) and leave key questions unasked and unanswered until after construction starts and changes get far more expensive.

I have seen projects spend twice what a contractor would have bid, all in misguided efforts to “save money by not using a contractor and golf course architect.” Not realizing that golf courses require just as much expertise in maintaining, planning and building is perhaps the biggest blunder of all. **GCI**



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Tavis Horton has served for 10 years as assistant superintendent at Birmingham Country Club in Michigan. He can be reached at horton31@aol.com.

ASSISTANTS AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Today's career environment has evolved. What's different is that there are more ways to influence getting a job than in the past. We already know the saying is true, "It's not what you know; it's who you know." Well, the number of people you know has now expanded thanks to social networks. People are now able to learn more about you when you utilize and participate in the various social media tools.

LinkedIn has been around for a while as a professional online social network. It isn't an exciting network when you compare it with Facebook; however, it's useful to know that the LinkedIn profile pages are indexed in Google, allowing future employers to find your profile when they "Google" you.

LinkedIn can provide assistants with a new way to network with superintendents, fellow assistants and vendors in the industry and to find peers who share common interests. I have found many superintendents in my area who are on LinkedIn.

I have also found that another interesting aspect of networking exists with the members of golf courses who use LinkedIn. You just never know when your professional interaction with a member on LinkedIn might lead to an invitation for a job interview.

Blogging and sites such as Facebook can lead to hundreds of inquiries on who you are. Your blog is like a resume. The story of our work lives or the story of what we do after work expresses our passion and is now captured in ways we didn't have available before.

With free tools you can share your accomplishments with the world, and with Google's help your prospective employers can determine your Web presence and learn a lot about you before even meeting you.

Online social networks provide the opportunity to learn more about someone through repeated interactions. If you and I are friends on Twitter, I get to see what you consider

interesting enough to post into a box. If we're friends on Facebook, I might learn a lot about your interests and the like from what you put on your profile or some of the other groups you belong to.

However, social networking tools such as Facebook and Twitter have the potential to be both a help and a hindrance. They are networking tools that allow you to get the word out to your network that you are looking for work, but they also allow companies to search social media sites and gather data that will help them make decisions about you with or without allowing you to present yourself formally.

Results will vary, but overall, an assistant is just as capable of finding and building networks as anyone else through various social media tools.

The use of provocative or inappropriate photos and poor communication skills will become a basis for judgment above all else.

With any new invention, nothing is guaranteed. What works for one assistant may not work for another, depending on the level of acceptance of social media today vs. the future.

Results will vary, but overall, an assistant is just as capable of finding and building networks as anyone else through various social media tools.

The point is you need to network to grow your career opportunities. Build and nurture your own network in a way that works for you. **GCI**