

**M**y father was a good cook who trained in France, worked in the high levels of culinary art and owned a mom-and-pop restaurant. He would have said he was a good cook, but he would never have told anyone he was a world-class chef — even though he was.

When I was a kid following my dad around in the family restaurant, I remember him telling his staff repeatedly, “We’re only as good as the last dish we just served.” It was wisdom lost on my young ears at the time.

Someone asked me not long ago, “Who’s looking out for the superintendents?” My response, learned from my dad, came quickly. “Superintendents had better look out for themselves, and they should remember they are only as good as yesterday’s greens,” I said.

The issue is focus. As some superintendents are pulled in so many directions, they often lose sight of the main reason they draw paychecks. They may also underestimate the thing they are most likely to be judged: the condition of the course.

Superintendents have hoped that golfers would learn more about what they do and the challenges they face. They want them to do the simple and obvious things, like fixing ball marks and raking bunkers. They have also asked golfers to embrace the art and science of greenkeeping and see it as a profession. But with that longing for respect comes responsibility.

Superintendents need to embrace the value of being candid. A lengthy technical excuse to explain why something has gone wrong is likely to cause listeners to roll their eyes. When that excuse is laced with weird science, the human lie detectors begin to register.

Selling the latest new technology as the end of all problems makes people wonder when the same problems they see every day will go away. The invasion of the killer disease sounds good until the golfers start to wonder why the invasion didn’t occur down the road. Worse yet, when the superintendent down the road has an entirely different story, people begin to wonder if anyone has any clue at all.

## Only as Good as Yesterday’s Greens

BY DAVE WILBER



YOU WANT TO MOVE  
UP IN YOUR CAREER,  
WHO DOESN’T? BUT  
DON’T FORGET WHAT  
YOUR JOB IS  
REALLY ABOUT

I asked a superintendent who had been at a prestigious and demanding club for a long time to tell me how he made it for more than 30 years in the snake pit. He told me three simple things: He never lies; he inspects his course constantly; and he’s never afraid to say three important words — “I don’t know.” (Of course, he does know how to find the answer.)

The superintendent is also keeper of the bottom line and has been for hundreds of years. The golf, the match, the outing and the 10-footer for birdie occur on a surface prepared by a greenkeeper. Some situations demand exacting standards of perfection, and others require only a slight adjustment from what is natural. But each situation requires the effort of dedication, focus and professional application of knowledge and experience.

The hard truth, however, is that growing grass is the main part of the job. I wonder about superintendents who seem to want to do everything except consider themselves responsible for greenkeeping. Professional development in the turfgrass profession is fine, as long as superintendents don’t forget what their jobs are really about.

Superintendents know the incredible sense of a job well done. Sharing that with every divot-making duffer that comes to the course is a wonderful gift. But the experience of telling everyone how good one is will always pale in comparison to showing it.

My dad knew he had to watch out for himself and make sure great food was always coming out of his kitchen door. The same goes for the superintendent and growing grass. No one is going to watch out for that basic role, except for the superintendent.

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