

The Icelandic term for computer is Tölva, which is a fusion of number (tala) and prophet (volva). Cool, you say, but what's the point? Well, Iceland currently ranks No. 1 in Internet connections per capita in the world simply because there's an Internet and a World Wide Web to connect to — and Icelanders love the innovation.

The Icelanders turned toward their number prophets and dialed up the world because a few interesting and forward-thinking Americans thought there should be a new way to communicate and share research documents. I guarantee no thoughts were on those programmers' minds about changing the world when they created those first Web pages. Now it's dot-com history, and Iceland is better for it.

It's not as crazy in our beloved agronomic world as it is in the silicon zone, but we have seen tremendous change in the last few years. I'm constantly being told that most superintendents have never before been asked to condition their facilities to such high levels. The pressure to keep up with the guy down the street and to conform with standards is overwhelming.

Yet, every local area has at least one superintendent who marches to his or her own drum while doing unbelievable things to the golf course and creating excellent playing conditions. You know this person. He or she is the one who always has a different twist, is working with something new or is reputed to be reinventing the wheel — again. Inside your secret office with your private thoughts, this person may even be you.

The people I'm talking about may not always show up at local meetings — but to be sure, when they make an appearance, they're usually willing to talk about the latest out-of-the-ordinary things they're working on. You may not understand the conversation, but you do know you've never quite heard it like that before.

Being different like this is a sport for some in a Jerry Springer shock-value kind of way. For others, however, it's a way to greatness.

But so many times turfgrass professionals are afraid to stray from the norm. It may be

Here's to Daring to Be Different

BY DAVE WILBER



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that they feel more comfort in the status-quo crowd. It may be that they feel safety lies in going with the tried and true. But I have unfortunate news: Greatness and failure are closer together than you may think. To seek one, you have to dance with the other.

Innovation challenges us to be different and to seek the fine line between distinction and catastrophe. The innovators are poles apart, diverse and seeking answers to the specific problems they face.

A superintendent may share a crisis or a concern with me. The conversation usually leads down a road of trying all the usual and normal stuff. However, if we turn on to the more experimental road or discuss thinking outside the box, this becomes uncomfortable ground, untested by others.

But when that great personal Number Prophet on your shoulders gets put to good use, there's usually a valuable and different solution at hand that no one else may have ever dreamed. That's prominence. That's when the startling, outstanding discoveries are made.

In this time of high expectations, where we're asking the most of turfgrass professionals, the real challenge is in daring to be different — not trying to cut a new shadow in the same mold. The next time you have the possibility to go out of the usual and try something new, think of the Icelanders being changed by the Internet. Imagine that your bold, new idea evolves into something that can change an entire business. Believe it because it can happen.

So here's to weirdness, forward thinking and the daring to be different. A little Tölva can go a long way.

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