

No credit or blame for a blade of grass, alive or dead. No sunrise or sunset over the links as the first and usually the last person to be on the course. Never a sleepless night babysitting a pump station. No opportunity to take part in the preparation of a city championship, open championship or couple's club outing.

No possibility that the good, bad and absolutely fabulous business of growing grass would exist for me had it not been for a few mentors. If you haven't got one, find one — fast. Let me say that again. If you don't have a turfgrass guru, you need one.

Like many in our business, opportunity came to me early. Actually, the opportunity came the first day I met Mike Kosak, who was superintendent at Pole Creek GC in Winter Park, Colo. But I had no idea what "superintendent" meant.

Mike hired me to work on his summer crew during a golf course grow-in. It was my dream come true. I fell in love with what we were doing. That was 17 years ago, and Mike is still a superintendent at Lahontan GC in Truckee, Calif., and also the financial partner in the company he works for. He's too humble to list his successful projects, but they are world-class. He remains today a friend and someone I continue to admire. I've often said thanks, but I've never figured out a way to really express my gratitude for his impact on my life.

There have been other mentors. As I look back, I see that I allowed myself the opportunity to be influenced by people I respected for their abilities. I'll bet dollars to doughnuts to mud-thick coffee that I always will.

Which leads me to my humble advice for today's young superintendents and the graduating classes of 2000 and beyond. Find someone to look up to and learn all they will teach you. Rinse and repeat.

Seek out the amazing talent that can be found in so many places and dedicate yourself to serious apprenticeship. Open your mind and let the knowledge flow in. Arguably, there is no better way to learn.

I'm not talking about the all-too-favorite sport of ticket punching, where simply gaining

Advice to the Young: Get a Guru

BY DAVE WILBER



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the name of a prominent course or famous superintendent on a resume is the means to the end. The ticket puncher is easy to spot in a lineup. If such a person should succeed in fooling anyone for a while, that person will eventually show his or her true colors. That person's method lacks the passion it takes to submit to learning and gaining a true understanding.

On the other hand, the studied apprentice makes a distinguished mark. This person is grateful for each opportunity. Most noticeably, the person continues to seek and find the confidence of an adviser.

I've read a few of today's pop-psychology books on mentoring. I'll save you the time of reading them by paraphrasing their themes in eight points to remember:

- Find a mentor you can look up to.
- Learn all you can from this person.
- Be grateful for the opportunity.
- Remember that frustration is usually part of a true challenge.
- Question, but don't second-guess.
- Say thanks.
- Keep in touch.
- Pass the knowledge along when you feel it's your turn.

Perhaps Jerry Coldiron, CGCS of Boone Links/Lassing Pointe in Florence, Ky., offers the best advice. "The best way to give something back is right in front of us," he says. "We have to take the time and be leaders by mentoring our people."

Spoken like a true turfgrass guru.

Our business is one of continued applied science with a huge heap of real-world knowledge needed to be successful. Seeking a mentor shouldn't be viewed as an option for young superintendents — but regarded as a necessity.

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