

The art of agronomy is fascinating, and the science of agronomy is remarkable. But it's the combination of art and science that illustrates what's best about growing grass.

Think about it — the agronomic decisions that superintendents make every day include tactile input from the course as well as knowledge of the discipline. But science has started to rule the day, and that scares me.

The growing notion that we must find scientific proof for everything we do is disturbing. Just as upsetting is the thinking that if we can't find published research on something, we shouldn't be doing it.

While today's turfgrass researchers have my utmost respect, superintendents shouldn't forget that their individual cases may vary from a university test plot. That certainly doesn't mean we should throw out all research just because it doesn't meet our specific needs, but it does mean we shouldn't be slaves to it.

There's a scene in *Dead Poet's Society* where a group of students read a poetry passage in a textbook that then asks them to graph the poem to determine its quality. The teacher, played by Robin Williams, instructs his students to tear out that section of their books. The point is clear: Poetry doesn't succumb to statistical analysis.

Neither does tending to a golf course. What is great about a course's condition to some often matters little to others. Moreover, members and golfers simply know they like or dislike something without knowing exactly why. If we ask them, we are likely to hear confusion rather than clarity as they try to articulate their answers.

Technical issues are now an integral piece of the superintendent's education. Technology has revolutionized the business, but it can't be to the detriment of tried-and-true methods that have benefited the game.

There are those who now say: "Where's the research to prove that? It doesn't matter if that method or technique has produced amazing results because we must be able to look up the research to prove validity." Dis-

Stay in Touch With Your Feelings

BY DAVE WILBER



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counting proven results turns the art of greenkeeping into nothing more than a science.

Our artistry is evident in the way we talk about the game. We evaluate golf courses based on subjective criteria such as looks and playability rather than yield, which is how other forms of agriculture are evaluated. But we're still tied to agriculture inextricably, so we run the risk of losing our instinct for the feel of a course because agricultural research doesn't support feelings.

That's not to say we should ignore science. The best superintendents I've seen are the ones who keep up with science and stay aware of modern development. But they also don't discount their own sense of what their courses need and what has worked for them.

In fact, what's common among top superintendent is the continuous — and sometimes informal — research they do on their own. Most have test plots for experiments and use personal indicators to identify what's happening. They may not be double-blind, replicated independent studies, but these kinds of on-site evaluations have limitless possibilities.

For nearly the entire history of greenkeeping, those responsible for preparation of the surface for golf have had their hands directly upon the canvas of the golf course — and that will never change.

Seeking solutions means embracing science, finding answers and having the wisdom to know that results do not always come with an explanation.

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