

The business of growing grass has always embraced my workaholic tendencies. That reminds me, I recently celebrated the 10th anniversary of setting out on my dream (geez, I sound like an old geezer.) In May of 1992, I decided to take my soil-oriented, eco-agricultural-spiced and sustainable turfgrass-management strategies out on the road to see if I could make a difference in growing grass and actually help superintendents and the game.

I didn't have much support from my peers. My entire superintendent buddy system told me I'd be back at the helm of a course when the first grand opportunity came along. All of my commercial "friends" had opinions, too, that weren't supportive. But I embraced the challenge that my dream presented. Proving people wrong was a great motivator.

I did prove them wrong, thanks to my solid work ethic and love for the industry. But I'm starting to wonder if my dedication to the industry is healthy.

People talk about "giving back to the business" as if that's taking the same noble paths as Mother Theresa and the Dali Lama in their quests to help the world. I'm guilty of a similar mantra and have been known to spew forth my version of "doing so much for the business that has done so much for me."

But times are changing. Jaded in my old age, I'm not. Realistic about what I see and hear, I certainly am. I'm in love with our crazy business, but it isn't obliged to love me back — and it certainly isn't giving more than I put into it.

Looking back, not much else mattered when I was growing grass as a superintendent. Well, beer did, but that was something to drink with other turfheads when you needed to *talk* about growing grass.

Then, marriage No. 1 came and went in a flash of nights spent at the pump station and mornings out of the house at 4 a.m. after going to bed at 9 p.m. The weekends spent working didn't help sustain that marriage. Neither did two job changes.

A few weeks ago, after yet another plane trip where I was stuffed into a seat too small

I Give and Give and All I Got Was . . .

BY DAVE WILBER



I THOUGHT I WAS
GOING TO DIE.
WHAT DID I SEE AS
MY LIFE PASSED
BEFORE MY EYES?

for my ever-expanding and road-food nourished ass, I collapsed into a heap after not remembering how I got home. I'd experienced a hypertension attack along with angina. The doctor said it was a near heart attack. I thought I was going to die as I stupidly drove myself to the hospital.

What did I see as my life passed before my eyes? A person who has given his life, his love, his health, his money and his never-ending determination to The Business.

I think to myself that I've given a lot to the greater good of turfgrass — maybe too much. After all, isn't giving your livelihood the ultimate sacrifice?

Ten years of consulting has yielded me a bit of credibility, yet I'm apt to measure myself by the failures I've had and to some degree by what others are saying about me from their safe, salaried, protected, non-grass growing positions. I've been an independent solo act and have not worked with a net. (Actually, that's not entirely true. I have true friends in this business who are indeed my net as they understand the plight of the workaholic.)

But is my life worth giving to the business that has given me so much? Or is it really true that the business has taken and taken and taken at considerable expense? Maybe when I'm carrying the bag for the Dali Lama at Nirvana Golf and Zen Bunker Raking Club, I'll get that answer and achieve my Total Consciousness.

For now, the wisdom I'm learning that I can share with you is that balance is a thing turfheads like me don't do well and must learn to do better. That includes being real about what we can and should be giving and to whom we should be sacrificing for.

Dave Wilber, a Sacramento, Calif.-based independent agronomist, can be reached at dave@soil.com