

My old friend Oscar Miles sent me an e-mail a few weeks ago looking for some help with a speech he was preparing for a group of young turf students. Oscar, the legendary superintendent at The Merit Club in Chicago, asked how I would define the meaning of “professionalism” in our business.

My first thought was to reply back: “Hell, Oscar, *you are* the definition of professionalism is this business.” Instead, I sent a bullet-pointed list that used a lot of highfalutin words like “stewardship” and “ecosystem.” I thought it sounded pretty good, but it turns out that I left out the one simple but critical word that really sums it up.

I figured it out a few days later thanks to the online forum, *TurfNet*. Oscar had also posted a request for help with his speech on the site and a lively discussion ensued.

As I read the posts, which included the opinions of some of the best-respected folks in the business, a consensus about what connotes professionalism eventually formed around one word: Integrity.

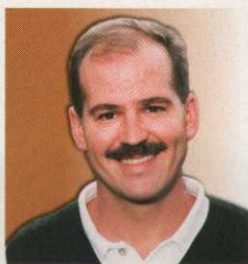
It struck me as I read those posts that this notion — that honesty and trustworthiness are inherent to success — is something that sets us apart from so many other professions.

Maybe it springs from being a part of a game where integrity requires players to call penalties upon themselves. Maybe it's the fact that the work is about quality rather than sales or profit. Or maybe it stems from our great fortune that the early pioneers of greenkeeping were themselves men of great honor.

But if I had to pick one reason why integrity is such a hallmark of professionalism in this business, it would be that the work done by superintendents is usually only truly understood by other superintendents. Everyone understands and appreciates what doctors, lawyers and even editors do. Even most avid golfers have no clue

Integrity Defines Professionalism

BY PAT JONES



THE EARLY
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how you spend your day or what qualifies as success for you. The general public? Not a chance.

So even though you kill yourself to have better conditions than the guy or gal up the street, you still respect and trust that person because he or she is in the same boat as you. If two superintendents can't trust each other, who can they trust?

Increasingly, what seems to threaten this wonderful aspect of the profession is competition for good jobs and employees. Stories about “poaching” assistants or technicians are popping up too frequently. Competition for vacant — or even currently filled — positions has led to an erosion of ethics. And I don't mean piddly violations of any written code of ethics. I mean the wholesale trampling of the spirit of integrity that sets us apart from the dog-eat-dog world of business.

It's a frustrating trend, but I have a solution. I say we all pitch in to set up an endowment that will fund a new position — Traveling Professor of Integrity Studies. The professor will criss-cross the nation, lecturing turf students on the value of integrity in our business.

Within a few short years, the enlightened commitment of those well-taught young people will stem the tide of ethical erosion and return us fully to our glory days. The only question is who should be appointed to the professorship and become the Johnny Appleseed of integrity?

Hmmm . . . Professor Oscar Miles. It kind of has a nice ring to it, don't you think?

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