

"Did you ever see an unhappy horse? Did you ever see a bird that has the blues? One reason why birds and horses are not unhappy is because they are not trying to impress other birds and horses." — Dale Carnegie

A golf course owner with a degree of reputation took me on a line of questioning a short time ago. The essence of his question list had to do with his wonder about why his professional grass growers, more than any other subset of his organization, are by far the most worried about reputation.

This came on the heels of a meeting where the grass guys had all the info about who was doing what and where they were doing it. And the turfheads were madly trying to figure out where they fit in the big game of who would say what.

The easy explanation for this is that the work of keeping the green is often compared from place to place, which is nothing new.

Looking deeper at the attitude of repute can tell so much. Some suggest that the best time to assess a reputation is during times of difficulty — nothing brings out the true persona like the response to a crisis.

The daily job of preparing a golf surface can definitely provide calamity. Think about it: How often do we hear stories of dead grass or bad greens vs. great conditions? Superintendents worry about that match up and the impact it will have on their reputations.

Then there is the issue of response and how it leads to building or destroying a reputation when you're "on the record" — be it with media, the members or just a casual conversation.

Conventional wisdom dictates avoiding "no comment" responses and discourages someone from taking a defensive position at all costs.

In fact, public apology in response to the accusation of misconduct is often touted as one of the most important ways to protect a reputation, but it's seldom used.

Regarding Your Reputation . . .

BY DAVE WILBER



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Why does the phenomenon of stonewalling persist in response to negative information? Why do people continue to use this approach, when public relations gurus discourage this response?

Some say a person will go as far to invent a response to protect his or her reputation. An example is the invented "employee mistake" when something goes wrong with a piece of equipment. Reputation is placed above the truth — and many times without much pause in doing it.

Am I suggesting that reputation is a character issue? Yes, especially when the chips are down. When a superintendent gets fired for doing something really stupid, how often do we hear comments like, "Well, we really don't know the whole story," or "Actually, he quit." Often what isn't said contains the worst damage.

In the end, many times it comes to a simple decision of fessing up or stonewalling. Our owner, who didn't understand the turfgrass-flavored issues of reputation, certainly understood that concept. He also understood that the superintendent's reputation comes almost entirely at the hands of others and, worse yet, golfers.

At first glance, it might seem like we birds and horses are trying to impress the other birds and horses — and no one is happy. Looking deeper, the successful superintendent knows that people on the inside of the business of growing grass are talking, but it's really the clients and customers who hold the important court.

Developing a solid character with them helps as they seek the truth. That way the right people are impressed.

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