

BY RON FURLONG

Budget Busters

Superintendent offers "Top 10 Opportunities You Can Create For Yourself While Working Within a Tighter Budget"



As the money and resources available to superintendents continue to decrease, there are, I believe, two different mindsets to choose between when sitting down to attack your budget for the upcoming year. The first mindset is with dread; the second is seeing it as a great opportunity. Albert Einstein, who has been quoted a time or two, once said, "In the middle of every difficulty lies opportunity."

An opportunity for what, exactly, I can hear you asking? Well, let's see. How about for change? For challenge? For making your golf course even better within an even tighter restraint? Is that not an opportunity to prove your worth? Is that not an admirable challenge? "Too many people," the late U.S. politician and author James F. Byrnes wrote, "are thinking of security instead of opportunity."

It will come as no great shock to anyone reading this that many golf courses are currently operating under a budget very similar (even, in some instances, lower) to the previous year. This is the case even though the prices we pay for supplies are, of course, going up. My budget, for example, has basically remained status quo for three years. So how do we do it? How do we provide the same (or an even better) product with, essentially, fewer resources? That is the great question.

How, you may ask yourself, can I keep my

fuel budget the same even though gas prices have gone through the roof? Well, you can't, of course, but maybe you can lower your travel and expense line item to offset it; or lower your lease of equipment line item. Maybe you can get really creative and establish more "No Mow" zones in the deep rough, saving on fuel, equipment use and man-hours.

A tighter restraint could lead to, if you choose to look at it positively, opportunity. Opportunity could lead to creativity. Creativity, if utilized, could lead to a great level of satisfaction — the satisfaction of using someone else's money to its greatest possible effectiveness.

I've come up with a Top 10 list for your consideration. Let's call it the "Top 10 Opportunities You Can Create For Yourself While Working Within a Tighter Budget." Agghh, that's a mouthful. I need a swig of water after uttering that one. OK, let's get started:

Opportunity

#10

To become a better manager of people

A tighter budget means a smaller crew. It's hard to get around this one. It means hiring and keeping a crew you can trust and that can do the job — perhaps more of a job than you've asked from them in the past. You will have to hire the right people. You will have to motivate them. You will have to get the most out of them. The result, no doubt, will be that you will become a better manager. Or you won't succeed. It's as simple as that.

Opportunity

#9

To become a more thorough shopper

With limited funds you will no doubt become a more meticulous and a better shopper ultimately. You'll start to consider generic fungicides and maybe even off-brand mowers. Instead of two

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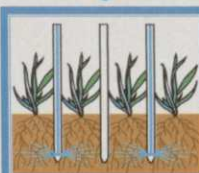
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Salesmen will suddenly seem more important to you for their prices than their companionship on the golf course.

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or three quotes for your new tractor purchase or drainage project, you'll get five or six quotes.

Also, it will suddenly seem like salesmen are more important to you for the prices they offer than they are for their possible companionship on the golf course. You will question your equipment technician's purchases closer. Does he really need to change his latex gloves seven times a day?

A tighter, stricter budget can only make you more of a micro-manager when it comes to spending. We won't go as far as to call you a penny pincher, but something in the same ballpark.

Opportunity #8 To get yourself in shape

Here's the facts: A tighter budget equals fewer people you can staff, which results in more work for everyone, including yourself. Undoubtedly, you'll find yourself behind a walk mower at some point or on the silly end of the shovel. This can only lead to shaving a few unwanted pounds.

Opportunity #7 To use a higher percentage of your brain

Let's face it, evidence shows we use only up to 10 percent of our brains. Anything that might stimulate the old noggin a bit more and maybe push us upward toward 10 percent or maybe even 11 percent has to be considered welcome.

Opportunity #6 To return golf to its roots (or to embrace the browns)

As I write this I'm also sitting here with an eye on the TV watching the British Open at St. Andrews, and I can't help but marvel at the beautiful yellowness and brownness of the golf course. You can't really deny that this golf course, with its illustrious history, is the true home of golf. This is how golf was first played and how golf was meant to be played.

I'm not saying we should exactly return to the times of goats trimming the fairways, but can't we embrace some of the traditional aspects? Can't we let go of a little bit of the green? Can't we welcome back some of the

browns and yellows of years past?

Ultimately, in time, we may have no choice.

Opportunity #5 To become more environmentally sensitive (in a sort of backdoorish way)

If you don't have as much money for chemicals, chances are maybe you're not apt to buy as many chemicals. Is this really such a bad thing?

I know, we're all absolutely perfect when it comes to the environment and protecting it. We've never overlapped or sprayed in any wind above 3 mph. Despite all of the warm and fuzzy environmental stewardship going on out there, it still might not be such a horrible thing if we had to learn to grow grass and manage some of those pesky diseases and weeds without quite as many applications. Just maybe?

Opportunity #4 To stimulate your creative juices

Consider this: If your budget has been frozen or even cut, would that not force you to become a more creative superintendent? Assuming, that is, you wish the product to remain as good as it was last year or even better.

Wouldn't you have to come up with new and innovative ways to do things — things that in the past didn't require a second thought? Consider no-mow zones, plant growth regulators and cultural removal of weeds. The list is endless. As the quote on my bookmark says, "The world of imagination is boundless."

Opportunity #3 To promote yourself and the job you do

This entails not only promoting within the local community or even within the golf management community but also promoting yourself and the job you do at your own golf course. If someone (owner, general manager, green committee chairman) puts a limit on your budget, and you come in at that budget (or even under) and produce a product of high quality, there should be recognition of your efforts. And if there isn't, then it's your job to make sure there is. Let them know what you've done. Stand up and be applauded.

Opportunity

#2

To become an overall better superintendent

Tighter budgets are going to make all of us think twice about spending. It can be debated whether this ultimately results in a better product, but I don't see how it can hurt. But what can't be debated is that people rise to the occasion in trying times. This has been proven time and again throughout history. We make do. We get creative. We stimulate our minds. We rise to face the challenge.

Opportunity

#1

To feel the ultimate satisfaction of a job well done

Succeeding in the face of adversity is a heck of a good feeling. This is true in many things in life, including golf course management. When you can take a product, with limited resources, and turn it into something to be proud of, well, I can't

think of a more rewarding career experience. I would venture to guess the satisfaction felt under this circumstance might even be better than that of doing the same great job with unlimited resources. Since I've never had unlimited resources, this is only a guess.

Frank Lloyd Wright once said, "I know the price of success: dedication, hard work and an unrelenting devotion to the things you want to see happen."

Any challenge you face in day-to-day life is going to make you a better person — and a better manager. If you decide to accept the challenge of a tight budget with optimism and resolve and try to employ some of the above opportunities, you will no doubt find you've improved yourself and your golf course. ■

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