

The *MORE* Things



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What do I know now that
I didn't know then?
And am I a better
superintendent for having
learned those things?

Change . . .

Veteran superintendent reflects on **what he knew 22 years ago** compared with what he knows now

BY RON FURLONG, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

The year was 1988. George H.W. Bush was in his first year as president. “Who Framed Roger Rabbit?” was the big moneymaker in movie theaters. The Cure and R.E.M. were slowly replacing the heavy-metal bands on my car stereo.

It was also the year I began working on a golf course.

And 22 years and six golf courses later, I’m still working on a golf course.

So, what does the wily, old veteran know that the young punk back in 1988 didn’t? Well, for one, he knows what’s good for his body and what’s not. Although, in retrospect, the younger guy probably knew but just didn’t care as much as the older guy.

But, more to the point, what has the modern-day superintendent learned in his 20-plus years on the links? And am I a better superintendent for having learned these things?

Good questions, and I shall try to answer them.

Let me say this: Of course I know more now than I did 22 years ago. I wouldn’t be much of a superintendent if I didn’t. But, what major things have I

discovered? And not just in maintenance philosophies but within myself? What changes in attitude and practices are different? What opinions did I have that I would scoff at today?

Here’s a quick overview of a few of the more dramatic differences between young Ron and old . . . I mean, *mature* Ron:

Love thy Earth

Mother Earth. The big blue. I’m pretty sure I wasn’t real concerned with the future of our planet 22 years ago. I thought she’d be fine. In fact, probably not many of us were real worried about the planet. So this “going green” thing is a new fad.

But, of course, we now know Mother Earth isn’t infallible. She is vulnerable, and she needs our help. She needs buffer zones around wetlands. She needs safer chemicals applied to her turfgrass. She needs us to recycle and compost and reuse. She needs us not to waste her water. Let’s face it, she is very high maintenance, kind of like we imagine Angelina Jolie might be. (High maintenance, but worth the effort.)

These “love thy earth” things are concepts that 1988 Ron couldn’t have comprehended.

What have you done for me lately?

This section could also have been called — “You’re only as good as last month.”

I’ve learned that no matter how well you’ve kept the golf course over the years, you’re only as good as, oh, maybe a few months out. You’d better not only have done well in the past, but you’d better have kept it up.

I’m not faulting anyone for this mindset; it’s just the way it is. We all just need to be aware of that going in.

Keep raising the bar

This kind of falls into the above category, but is a little different.

We all learned years ago that technology and ingenuity would allow us to start doing our jobs better. The bar started to rise then. Water-injection cultivation came along. So did rollers, light topdressers, better and faster sprayers, plant growth regulators and a zillion other things. And, of course, when the superintendent at the golf course down the street raised the bar, he inadvertently forced you to raise the bar as well. Again, not a bad thing, but just the way it is.

It’s fun to keep making the product better. However, in lean times like we’re

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Things Change

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in now, it has become a double-edged sword. We try to keep raising that bar slightly, but we're trying to do it with fewer resources than we had in the past — or, another way to put it, with less money. That's where the difficulty now lies. It's kind of fun if you can get creative and find new ways to do things, but

when you discover you can't duplicate a particular result, it can be frustrating.

The answer to this dilemma may be a change in mindset by the powers that be. But that's a topic for another day.

Respect

This may be more a personal one for me than for everyone else, but then again



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we're talking about me and what I've learned here, right?

When I say respect, I'm talking about people who work for me and, just as importantly, the golfers who play my course. Younger Ron tended to look out for younger Ron. He wasn't much interested in what the golfers had to say, or what the seasonal kid who string trims the ditches and around the trees gave for input. Younger Ron was always on a time crunch. Things could never get done to his satisfaction, and he had convinced himself that it was people not following through, or people (golfers) getting in his way.

Older Ron has learned from these mistakes (at least I like to think he has). He has a heightened sense of respect for others. For some, this happens at a younger age; they're better people at 25 than most are at 40. But for the rest of us, it's something we need to acquire, like a taste for olives or beets (OK, I still don't like beets, but I've tried).

I like to think that now I actually listen to input and accept it. I have time for golfers, and even listen and try to respond to favors or suggestions they may have, even if I don't agree with them. Listening to others may actually make your job easier and more efficient.

Perhaps this is the one thing I've learned that's more important than anything: Respect *everyone*.

The year is 2010. Barack Obama is president. "Toy Story 3" is the top moneymaker at the movies. John Mayer and Jack Johnson have replaced R.E.M. and The Cure on my car stereo.

And I'm still working on a golf course.

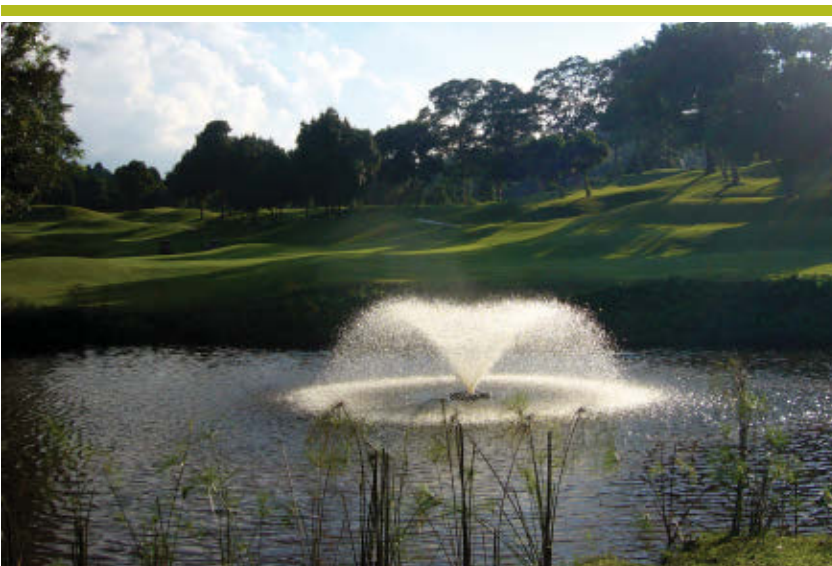
The more things change, the more they ... well, you know the rest. ■



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