

I've attended a few local chapter events around Florida the past few months and the predictions I'm hearing from superintendents and suppliers for a quick and healthy economic recovery for the golf industry aren't very rosy.

Five years or more seems to be a baseline figure. Maybe everyone is still adjusting to the downturn and slow glacial pace of finding the bottom of the gloomy recession and looking for better signs of some silver linings out there. Life goes on but most definitely with carefully measured steps.

Bargain basement initiation fees, dues and greens fees mean continued less revenue to operate the club and invest in maintenance equipment, products and improvement projects. The clubs that did draft maintenance standards to set priorities and had progressive capital equipment programs will weather the storm better because they were sound and proactive to begin with.

Clubs that cut corners and tried to drag out purchases and stall improvement projects are now hurting the worst. The epidemic of course closings is evidence that having a sound business plan and hiring key qualified people from the golf course superintendent to the technician does pay dividends. Of course, timing is everything and some folks got caught in the crunch when the bottom fell out and they already had projects in motion.

Along with some of the course closings and cutbacks, the stream of experienced superintendents being replaced by younger, less experienced persons is growing. I'm trying not to generalize or stereotype too much. Each case stands on its own merits, but perhaps rather than axing someone with local knowledge and a proven track record to trim expenses, negotiating a new salary structure would be more advantageous to the club.

When a less-experienced person takes over, the risks of having a miscue go up. Assistants deserve their chance to move up — that's the way of the business. Everyone needs to make sure the qualifications fit the expectations.

On the flip side, superintendents who may have grown too comfortable in their positions

Are Good Ol' Days Gone Forever?

BY JOEL JACKSON



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need to challenge themselves to learn new skills to demonstrate they're still the best options for their courses. That's what membership and participation in associations can provide.

With apologies to Charles Darwin and those who scoff at his theory of evolution, the golf business has definitely evolved from its beginnings on the grassy seaside moors of Scotland. Course design, turf management knowledge, technology and those who play the game have all changed. The politics of the environment are paramount issues.

If we don't change how we approach the marketing and management of most golf facilities to include family-oriented programs that embrace new golfers of all ages and backgrounds, we'll be in a continuous spiral of declining participation that will kill the industry. In addition, golf course owners and managers must take all the steps necessary to insure their golf clubs can be touted as positive environmental and economic assets to their respective communities.

Golf maintenance facilities need to upgrade wherever needed to exceed compliance to the rules of the Environmental Protection Agency and Occupational Safety and Health Administration. The industry needs to utilize the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America's baseline studies and Audubon International Sanctuary Programs to document and publicize these efforts.

Recent economic and political events have changed forever the way golf courses will operate and how the game is embraced. If we don't change the old paradigm, forget the good ol' days — it may just be the end of days.

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