

The subject of the e-mail was "Checking In." It was golf course architect Bobby Weed writing me. When I opened his e-mail and read it, I wondered what planet Weed was living on.

Considering what he wrote — "I, for one, have never been more excited about the business!" — I figured Weed had moved to Mars. Heck, there's more golf course design going on there than here. More golf courses have closed in America than have opened in the past five years. This isn't a good time to be in the golf course building business in the United States.

But the phone number Weed left me to call him back to discuss his elation was a Florida exchange. So, no, Weed wasn't designing courses on another planet.

Now, I'm one of those people who doesn't view the cup as half full or half empty. To me, it's just half. But I couldn't wait to talk to Weed to find out why he was on cloud nine — or cloud 10, in his case.

And after speaking with Weed, I realized he's not a space cadet at all. Weed is actually well-grounded when it comes to knowing what the golf course industry needs to do to whip itself into shape. And his attitude toward getting it into a better state is one we should all take.

"I don't know if the business has ever been any tougher," Weed told me. "But at the same time, I want to be part of the solution, not part of the problem."

Weed says the golf business is speaking to us — all of us — and we'd better dang well listen. Hundreds of golf courses have closed in the past five years and more will follow. What does that tell you?

It's a strong statement that a golf course has to be run like a business. And that's not happening, according to Weed.

Last winter, I heard Henry DeLozier of Global Golf Advisors, an international consultancy service, give a talk on business plans. But according to DeLozier, only 3 percent of golf course operations have any kind of business plan at all.

Welcome to Weed's World

BY LARRY AYLWARD



"I, FOR ONE, HAVE
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GOLF ARCHITECT SAYS

Three percent? That's downright absurd, not to mention mind-boggling.

To Weed's point, the many phases of the golf industry — design, construction, operations and maintenance — have to be scrutinized. "We have to peel back the layers and take a hard look at each level," Weed says.

It's time to find out where business is going wrong and where money is being wasted.

If you ask Weed, what the golf world needs now is more short, fast-playing and affordable courses (many of them nine holes) with a variety of holes (and plenty of half-par holes) that golfers of every caliber can play and enjoy. And the maintenance on all of these courses must be streamlined with less emphasis on the rough and out-of-play areas to reduce costs.

This is the way Weed is going because he believes it's the way that will help save the industry. And he's excited about it — and rightfully so!

"Frugality will be the norm going forward," Weed says, noting that courses shouldn't carry any debt unless that debt is helping to grow the business. "We can't continue to build golf courses that don't make business sense."

Weed is insistent that the golf industry get off its behind and do something to help itself. That's why Weed wrote me an e-mail. He wanted to use me as a conduit to get his message to golf course superintendents and others.

By writing this column, it's clear what I think of Weed and his ideas. He's spot on. We *need* to listen to him. We *need* to be part of the solution. And we *need* to be excited like Weed that we're part of the solution.

The world needs more people like Weed — specifically the golf world.

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