

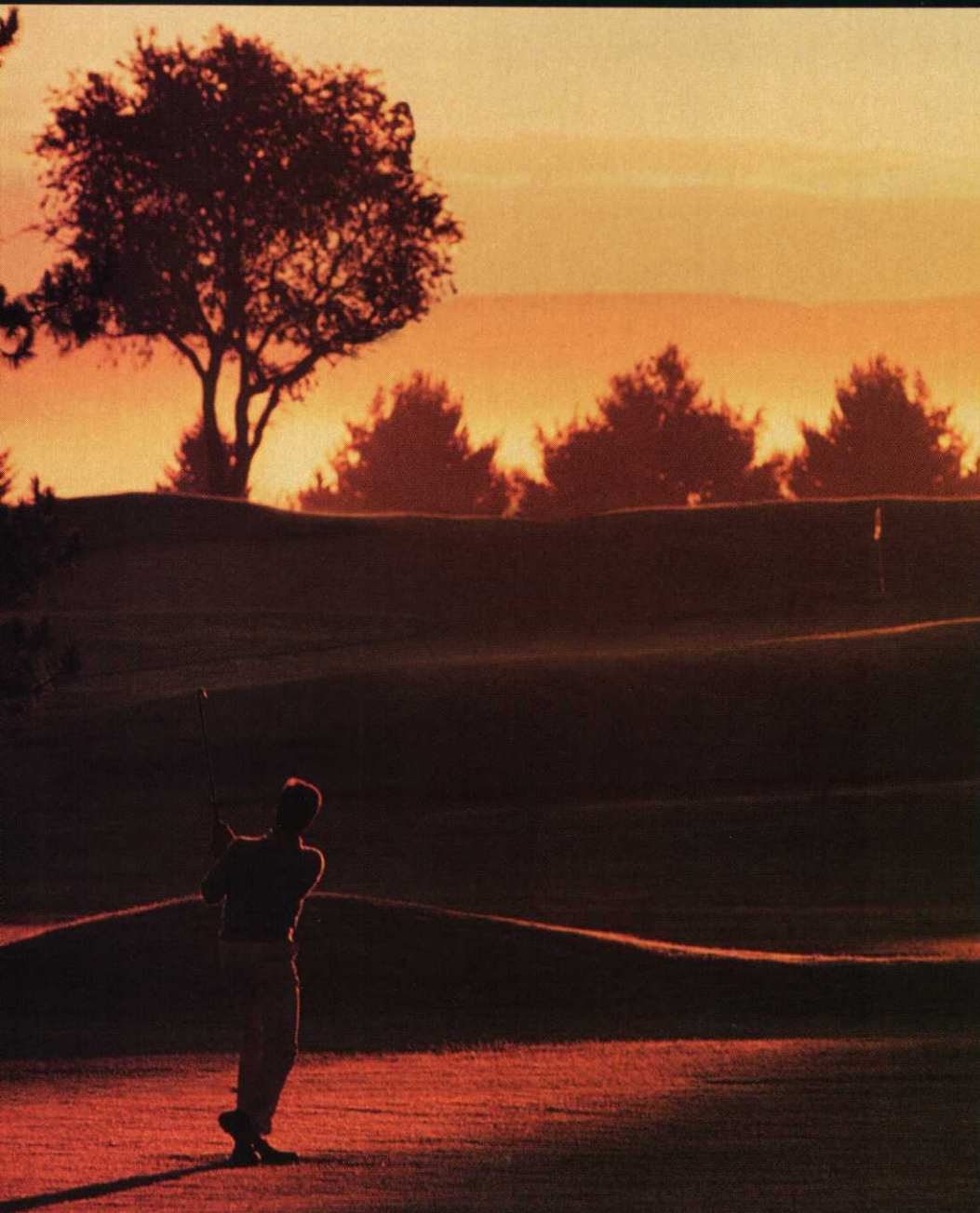
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■ OPINION

Did you ever confront a ridiculous situation in your community where someone is getting away with something bogus or unethical, and all you can do is utter the old adage, "There oughta be a law against that?"

Sometimes we beg for common-sense laws to protect the innocent and control the predators in our society. But our public servants occasionally enact laws without really understanding the issue they wish to solve with legislation.

I'm thinking of places like San Francisco, Seattle and New York, among others, that have banned or are considering banning the use of pesticides in their jurisdictions. And recently California and other states have openly discussed banning pesticide use in schools. Many are now rethinking the folly of their hasty action, having realized that weeds, disease-carrying insects and vermin can spiral out of control.

Not a clue

Recently, in Florida's St. John's County and Citrus County, local officials have begun regulating fertilizer applications. Under the good intention of keeping control of nitrate levels in watersheds, springs and rivers, these folks are instituting local ordinance or development rules that dictate the type, timing and quantity of fertilizer that people can use in the affected areas. Of course, they don't have a real clue of what's going on with nutrients and the turf, but it sure sounds like a real good idea to protect the environment.

I will say that in the case of St. John's County, the two golf courses that were affected did have input into the ordinance, and were granted certain exceptions with which they felt they could live. Unfortunately, lawn care companies and homeowners were left with the short end of the stick. There just aren't too many 100-percent, slow-release fertilizers down at the Home Depot or Wal-Mart garden shop to use from May to October.

Also, there was a provision providing search-and-seizure powers that smacked of Big Brotherism. It was replete with fines and jail time for merely possessing quick-release fertil-

Turf Regulation Without Education

BY JOEL JACKSON



LAWS SHOULD
BE BASED ON
SCIENCE AND FACT
BEFORE THEY
GO IN THE BOOKS

izer. The law was enacted in January and the commission did hold another hearing on industry's concerns in February. We won't know the outcome of those talks for a while.

In Citrus County, the development order dictated that turfgrass could only receive two fertilizer applications a year at a rate of .5 pounds of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet. As anyone who knows anything about turfgrass will tell you, there aren't too many plants that can live on 1 pound of nitrogen per year. In this case, regulators chose not to seek much input from industry prior to the order being written.

Once again, we're forced to come along after the fact and somehow, politely and diplomatically, show these bureaucrats how to get the egg stains off their faces.

Bandwagon jumping

There is no provision for regulating fertilizers in Florida, so local authorities are not pre-empted from enacting local laws governing fertilizer use. If the experiences so far this year are any indicator, I'm afraid we may be in for a crazy quilt of regulations as local authorities jump on the environmental bandwagon. Unfortunately, without exploring or seeking the true facts from turf scientists, politicians and bureaucrats stand the likelihood of getting the bandwagon before the horse as they have so far.

Well-managed turfgrass brings a lot of positive benefits to our communities. With the continual urbanization of our once rural areas, maybe there ought to be a law concerning fertilizer use, but it sure ought to be a good one based on science and facts before it goes on the books.

Joel Jackson, CGCS, retired from Disney's golf division in 1997 and is director of communications for the Florida GCSA.





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What happens when the ladder to success conflicts with time-honored professional ethics?

Matt Shaffer knows all about the ethics that surround the hiring of a superintendent. The current superintendent of The Country Club in Pepper Pike, Ohio, Shaffer once interviewed intensely for a post he refers to as his

dream job. The deal was done, and all he had to do was sign on the dotted line.

Before signing, Shaffer asked his future employers if he could talk to the superintendent to get a feel for current course maintenance practices. The owners balked, and they requested Shaffer not involve their current superintendent in any discussions about the course. Their caginess made Shaffer wonder what was going on. Eventually, those doubts forced him to make a painful decision.

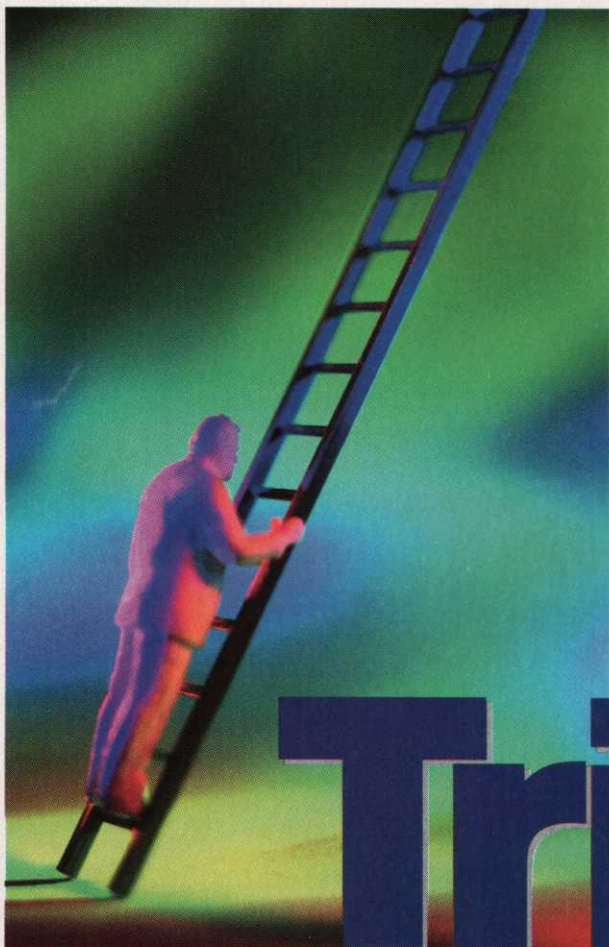
“It was clear they hadn’t told their current superintendent that he had been fired,” Shaffer says.

“It hurt a lot to turn down that job — I really wanted to take it and my wife really thought I should take it — but I had to tell the owners I couldn’t take the job under those circumstances.”

Shaffer says his decision, difficult though it was, prevented him from doing something he would have regretted later.

As the job market increases in competitiveness, particularly at the superintendent’s level, ethical questions shift from the theoretical realm to the practical. Pressures on superintendents

BY FRANK H. ANDORKA JR., ASSOCIATE EDITOR



When the Climb Gets Tricky

anxious to move to higher positions mount as more people become available to jockey for jobs, and the pressure elevates the temptation to behave unethically.

“The majority of superintendents I’ve worked with adhere to the code of ethics set down by the GCSAA,” says Michelle Frazier, superintendent of Boston Hills CC in Boston Hills, Ohio. “You hear stories, however, of people who push the bounds. In this industry, behaving badly is not the best policy.”

Frazier, who is also the director of communications for the Northern Ohio Golf Course Superintendent’s Association, says those who believe anything goes in the hiring process will find it hard going once they enter the market.

“This is a profession whose strength lies in the willingness of your colleagues to help you,” Frazier says. “If you don’t have that support, it’s really hard to make headway into the business.”

But fear drives people to do things they wouldn’t normally do. With the job market growing ever tighter, superintendents worry not only about moving up in the hierarchy, but losing their jobs to youngsters fresh out of college. College degrees look awfully appealing to owners, and a student fresh out of college will often come cheaper than a superintendent with years of experience.

“There are fewer jobs and more people clamoring to get them,” says Darren Davis, superintendent at Olde Florida CC in Naples, Fla. “It’s not surprising that there’s a lot of fear out there, but that’s no excuse for breaking the rules.”

Rules that, for Davis, include:

- never accepting a consulting job from a club without letting the current superintendent know;
- never talking badly about a colleague behind his back; and
- never undercutting another person’s salary just to be hired.

These rules prevent the golf industry from becoming a dog-eat-dog industry, as so many other businesses have become, Davis says.

“People coming into the industry have to understand that every time they don’t behave in an honorable manner, they do a disservice to the profession and hurt themselves in the process,” Davis says. “If I find out that someone has behaved badly, it’s my obligation — it’s any superintendent’s obligation — to let that person know he or she has done something wrong.”

Although superintendents often blame the erosion of standards on the influx of students entering the industry, George Hamilton says veteran superintendents themselves play a role as well. Hamilton, a senior lecturer at Penn State University, blames rising expectations for creating a more competitive market.

In the past, Hamilton says, there were fewer people qualified to take superintendent’s positions. As the requirements for other jobs — spray technicians, mechanics and even crew members — have risen, people in those positions can now also qualify for superintendent positions because they are far better educated than in the past. That creates a situation where more people are willing to do about anything to get a job.

“Whenever I hear a superintendent blame those of us in the turf schools for flooding the market, I have to laugh,” Hamilton says.

Shaffer agrees.

“If I hear another one of my colleagues whine about the fact that all these kids are coming in and stealing our jobs, I’m going to scream,” Shaffer says. “If you don’t like the place where you’re working, then leave. Golf is no different from any other industry. It’s a business.”

Solving an Ethical Dilemma

George Hamilton, senior lecturer at Penn State University, has spent 24 years in the golf industry. His father was a golf professional and a superintendent, so he has watched ethical considerations increasingly take a backseat to getting — or keeping — a job.

Hamilton believes he has at least a partial solution: Create standards that channel turf management students through the system on a track, rather than letting anyone with a turf degree compete for a superintendent’s job.

“What you need to do is give students a clear career path,” Hamilton says. “We need to clarify positions and titles and make clear what’s necessary to do each.”

For example, Hamilton says a student who starts as a crew leader would then have to receive a specific set of qualifications to move up to a spray technician’s position.

To move up to an assistant superintendent’s job, the spray technician would have to get another set of specific experience before he or she could move up again. Eventually, the student will have gained enough experience to compete for a superintendent’s job, but it will give him or her a broader wealth of experience from which to draw.

“This system is fair for everyone,” Hamilton says. “It creates a specific track that allows people to move up in the hierarchy, while still forcing people to earn each level. With the number of people competing for superintendent’s positions reduced, you’ll see far less unethical behavior.”

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"I would also remind superintendents that the people who own the clubs come from a business world and they're used to running things their way," he says. "Some of the things we consider unethical are par for the course in other industries."

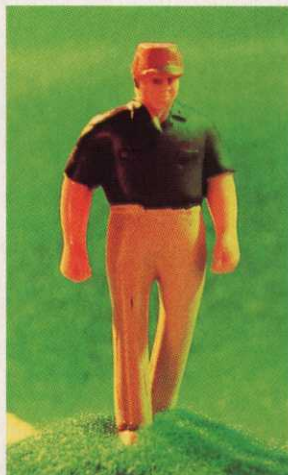
As dire as the situation seems to some, not everyone believes the ethics of the profession have turned for the worse. Dick Kopplin, president of Kopplin Search, a La Quinta, Calif.-based employment search that specializes in the golf industry, feels ethics are still an important consideration for the superintendents he has worked with.

"I've been involved in this industry for a long time, and I don't think the overall ethical standards have changed that much," Kopplin says. "Ethics have been — and always will be — a personal choice."

Headhunters often take heat for weakening the bonds that keep superintendents from preying on each other, but Kopplin defends the profession.

"If you're a reputable search firm, you can't afford to do anything unethical," Kopplin says. "It will ruin your reputation. I'm selective about which clubs and superintendents I represent, and I research the history of everyone so I don't get burned."

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In 1998, the average base salary for superintendents was \$53,205, according to GCSAA.

GCSAA's Code of Ethics (excerpts)

- Maintain the highest standards of personal conduct to reflect positively upon and add to the stature of the profession of golf course management and refrain from any act tending to promote my own interest at the expense of the dignity and integrity of the profession of golf course management, the GCSAA, or a fellow superintendent.
- Recognize and observe the highest standards of integrity in my relationships with fellow superintendents and others associated with this profession and industry.
- Abstain from making false or untrue statements concerning another superintendent or causing public embarrassment to another superintendent.
- Abstain from applying for or otherwise seeking employment in an unprofessional manner. For the purpose of this section of the code, a member seeks employment in an unprofessional manner if he or she does one or more of the following in connection with the prospective employment:
 - a) provides false or misleading information to a prospective employer;
 - b) makes slanderous or defamatory statements concerning a fellow superintendent;
 - c) attempts to undermine or improperly influence the staff of a fellow superintendent;
 - d) attempts to deceive, mislead or misinform a fellow superintendent's employer, supervisor or fellow employees;
 - e) makes misleading, deceptive or false statements or claims about his or her professional qualifications, experience or performance; or
 - f) makes misleading, deceptive or false statements or claims about a member superintendent's professional qualifications, experience or performance.
- Refrain from accepting employment, as a consultant, in an unprofessional manner. For the purposes of this section of the code, a consultant accepts employment in an unprofessional manner if he or she does one or more of the following in connection with such consulting:
 - a) provides false or misleading information to a prospective employer;
 - b) makes slanderous or defamatory statements concerning a fellow superintendent;
 - c) attempts to undermine or improperly influence the staff of a fellow superintendent;
 - d) attempts to deceive, mislead or misinform a fellow superintendent's employer, supervisor or fellow employees;
 - e) makes misleading, deceptive or false statements or claims about his or her professional qualifications, experience or performance; or
 - f) makes misleading, deceptive or false statements or claims about a fellow superintendent's professional qualifications, experience or performance.