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## Turf M.D.

■ THE DOCTOR IS IN THE HOUSE

*"To teach is to learn twice."*

—Joseph Joubert, French essayist

**W**hen I returned home for my holiday break during college, I'd would work at a golf course where I was employed during the summer. With spring semester just around the corner, I was always thankful for the extra money earned during the holidays.

I was also fortunate to gain the winter golf course experience. Besides the obligatory blowing leaves and picking up sticks, I was able to hang around the shop and help out with the equipment maintenance crew. A few things I remember doing was reel grinding, back lapping, setting the bench height, tuning up utility vehicles, and replacing batteries and springs on golf cars.

The winter experience occurred in a more relaxed atmosphere, not like the hectic stressful summer months. The things I learned gave me a greater appreciation and respect for the equipment that would run the following summer. The winter experience also made me a better employee during the summer.

Although the number of people employed during the off-season varies among golf courses, winter is the time to prepare your staff for the coming season. An agronomic analogy would be managing your turf from fall through spring for the purpose of surviving the summer-stress period. If the turf is not conditioned to go into the summer-stress period, there is little you can do but hold on and react. It's not much different than training a staff member how to perform during the heat of the battle.

Preparing your staff to perform during the summer is to train and educate them now. The first step is envisioning the characteristics and knowledge base you desire in individuals for the coming season.

The second step is to assess your current staff and historically the type of seasonal staff that you expect to hire. The assessment would include categorizing those who are highly motivated and eager to learn, those who could

# Winter Provides a Fine Time to Train

BY KARL DANNEBERGER



THE FIRST STEP IS  
TO ENVISION THE  
CHARACTERISTICS  
AND KNOWLEDGE  
BASE YOU DESIRE  
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THE COMING SEASON

be motivated to work at higher skill levels, and those who just want to go to work to get paid.

The third step is developing a program for educating/training those individuals identified as having the desire and your trust to learn. As examples, staff development areas could be irrigation, equipment maintenance and operation, calibration and pest identification/scouting. The key is identifying the skills or aptitude needed in your staff that compliments you. This sounds simple, but a critical point is your own self examination of what you do well and what skill sets will help you the most. This also provides a means of guiding your own continued education.

The fourth step is developing the training program. My only suggestion is to develop a program that works well for you. If you are a hands-on-type person, one-on-one training might be the most appropriate, or if not, develop a more independent book-learning experience. At no time in our industry is the availability of information so available and accessible through aides like videos and Internet access.

According to a recent study, 79 percent of American adults go online for a minimum of 11 hours a week. I have also observed superintendents using other superintendents, mechanics or suppliers as lecturers to their staffs during the winter.

And, finally, providing some sort of reward or recognition for staff accomplishment is critical.

Many of you who are reading this column conduct staff training in some fashion. Maybe it's time is to institute a formal training program.

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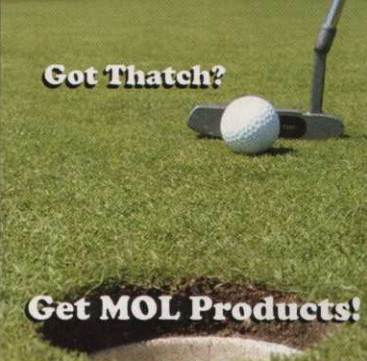
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# 'dangerous' book

**I**t smelled like something was burning as I brushed the weeds off myself. I had crashed our homemade go-kart that was being pulled behind a motorcycle through the field at my grandparent's farm. The rate of speed, obviously, broke the normal bounds of safety along with the rickety contraption, which sported iron back wheels that bent in at a striking angle. I rubbed my rear and discovered the source of the smell: The back wheels of the go-kart had eaten into my jeans, leaving two nicely-angled burn marks right on my seat.

Such memories from my adolescence came flooding back as I sat down with Conn and Hal Iggulden's wildly informative "The Dangerous Book for Boys," a veritable field guide, almanac and encyclopedia for how to be a boy of adventure and learning. Leafing through pages filled with astronomy, tales of peril, paper airplanes, dinosaurs and famous stories, I recalled cleaning fish, shooting BB guns, reading "Hardy Boys," tossing firecrackers, cutting firewood and the pungent smell of my Grandpa Decker's Captain Black Royal. In a way, this compendium of things that boys need to know, penned by two British brothers, reminded me how many things — working, hunting, fishing, building, joke telling, cards, cooking and farming, to name but a



A HANDY MANUAL FOR BEING A KID,  
NO MATTER WHAT AGE YOU ARE

BY MARK LUCE

few — I learned from all three of my grandfathers and how badly, in fact, I miss them.

But the wonderful thing about reading through "The Dangerous Book for Boys" is that those thoughts of the past turned rather cheerful because grandpas Decker, Kimball and Luce would have devoured this book. Hell, they could have written entire sections of it.

Merlin Decker, a strapping chiropractor turned farmer, could build damn near anything, be it a makeshift battery (page 16) or go-karts (page 79). He knew his cloud formations (page 112), stars (page 182) and how to choose the right stone for skipping (page 171). Technically, he was my stepgrandfather, but he treated and considered me as family.

Eugene Luce, who taught flyboys how to be pilots down in the Big Easy in World War II, was a carpenter extraordinaire who could knock out a treehouse (page 21) or a workbench (page 141) with grace and ease. He could also make sticks of gum appear

from my ear or make coins mysteriously vanish (page 191).

George Kimball, an Air Force mechanic and raconteur par excellence, spent winters in the bush in Canada with an Indian tribe. "Shorty" could play a mean hand of poker (page 198), tie any type of knot (page 9), knew his trees (page 226) and his artillery (page 209), and certainly could tan a skin (page 241). I can't be sure, but I wouldn't be surprised if Grandpa George knew Navajo code talking (page 100) as well.

These men influenced me profoundly, and although I started this column wanting only to tell you all what a great gift this book would make for the holidays, I am more than happy to thank George, Merlin and Gene for helping me to learn how to be a dangerous boy.

*Mark Luce lives in Kansas City, Mo., where his son is almost ready to make a bow and arrow (page 35). He can be reached at [msluce@everestkc.net](mailto:msluce@everestkc.net).*

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