



# LESSONS IN "REAL WORLD 101"

By Monroe S. Miller

I was doing some leisure reading a while ago and came across an entry Commodore Perry made in his log when he was trying to reach the North Pole some 75 years ago. He had traveled an entire day toward the Pole, pushing his sled dogs to their limit. That night he checked his bearings to determine his latitude and was shocked to find he was much farther south than he had been at the start of that long day.

It seems that all day long he had been moving north on a huge iceberg that was being drawn southward by a strong ocean current.

This entry shook me to a reality about the NOER CENTER that I previously hadn't focused on. Because of proximity and interest, I have been involved in trying to get this turfgrass research facility built for years. Frustration has been a big part of that involvement and has been primarily the result of my impatience and naivete. About the time Tom Harrison and I think we'd moved a good step forward, we would have to take two steps back. Why? Maybe we had forgotten to tell the WTA Board what we were up to. Or we would forget to mention costs to the UW golf course committee. Or we had failed to visit with the Chancellor's office or the CALS Dean.

We certainly had the charge to move ahead, as members of the NOER CENTER Committee. But the failure to keep others posted of our progress on the project frequently doubled our work. As we checked our bearings to determine the "latitude" of this project, we found that we were "farther south" than we were the previous month. LESSON: Inform and communicate.

Another well of frustration has been the reluctance of many golf groups and golf clubs to embrace the NOER project at all or near a level we know they should and are capable of doing. I've written about the tax plan we dreamed about and then gave up. I didn't mind that so much because I felt there would be great value in that notion. But once

we hit the streets to "sell" the research facility I was somewhat shocked to experience the disinterest some have. Regardless of where you live in America, your life has been enriched in a substantial and general way by your community's level of civilization. That level of cultural and technological development is due in a large part to the country's state universities. Everyone has profited from one of those land grant institutions. The University of Wisconsin-Madison is part of that network and even if one never was a student on that campus, even if one's children were never students in Madison, his community's life is higher and richer because of this school. This is a truth; I know it, believe it, advocate it. What our state would be today without the University of Wisconsin is unthinkable to *anyone who knows the institution*.

Herein is the problem. The NOER CENTER will be of great value to this institution because it will broaden its capabilities. For many, that is reason enough to support the NOER project. But I've encountered roomfuls of people in our state, intelligent and competent and well versed in the turfgrass sciences, who have never heard how the state land grant universities were founded, who have no idea about what the vast total of their students has been, nor what a true miracle it is, was, and will forever be for Wisconsin and the whole country that they came into existence. LESSON: The fact that the NOER CENTER will enhance the already formidable abilities of our University of Wisconsin is not reason enough to expect total support of it. We need to demonstrate how each golf player will prosper from this project.

It seems obvious, now that we are this far into the fund-raising program for a turfgrass research facility, that our job is one of education. We do not need to educate ourselves — if we don't know the depth of the need we are in serious trouble. Rather, it comes down to educating the end users of

turfgrass research. Once educated, persuasion for financial support shall become a straightforward proposition. In our situations, the end user is the golf player. I've suffered discouragement in this task to the point where I've had to do serious thinking about it. This matter of education and persuasion really is a matter of salesmanship. Curt Larson, Ed Devinger, Neil Richter, et. al. undoubtedly could have told me this many years ago, but I think there is value in learning the lesson independently, from the school of hard knocks.

Salesmanship requires enthusiasm; we have that. But it also requires a cool perspective that we may not always have. Emotional pleas, I've discovered, will not work; tough questions must be answered with openness, honesty and objectivity. A sure route to bad salesmanship is failure to view the NOER CENTER with a candid eye. We must "move away" and look at it with a stance similar to those we are visiting with, in hopes of garnering financial support. LESSON: Salesmanship of the NOER CENTER requires an objectivity we cannot offer if we become too intimately involved. Stand back a bit.

Probably the final lesson any of us will learn from this adventure will occur when it is all over. Then we will know how much easier the job could have been, knowing at the outset what we know at the end. But then, isn't that one of life's greatest lessons?

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