



Substance Over Symbols

By Monroe S. Miller

"Labor disgraces no man."

U.S. Grant

It's a curious emotion I'm experiencing this winter morning. Despite the fact that the golf course belongs to winter for a couple more months, I'm feeling a sense of deep satisfaction. Usually that comes during the season when the first player of the day hits his golf ball or when a project has been well executed.

This satisfied feeling swept over me after this morning's visit with my crew, something we do every morning. I sort of stepped aside and more carefully listened to what each man had planned for his day.

David had an engine in hundreds of pieces and expected to get it reassembled and running before day's end. Val planned on completing the rebuilding of the last Greens King cutting unit. And if his work went well, Brian would have it in the grinder, squared up and ready to sharpen first thing tomorrow.

Joel was putting the finishing touches on some signage for the golf course — woodworking done in our shop. These beautifully crafted redwood pieces that are cut by sandblasting cost our Club about one quarter the square foot cost of commercial work. And ours are better; we have Joel's pride in each one.

Pat was going to complete loading some changes in the irrigation system into our Network 8000 program. That involved the IBM PS/2, Model 30 computer that has become pretty important in our golf course operation. Then he was going to check on the tree trimming crew and be certain their skyworkers were traveling in safe areas on the golf course.

The serious approach to their work told me, or reminded me again, that they care deeply about their work. It's more than a job; it is serious business. Their pride was obvious albeit unspoken. They considered how one's activities affected another. They understand that the payback for good winter work comes in the golf season.

This satisfaction from what was going on in our shop reminded me on a typical winter day of that feeling you see so often in the summer. It's a pleasure to watch an employee stand back and enjoy his work while putting the flag stick back in a green he has just mowed. What a miracle it seems when we transform mountains of soil into beautiful new golf course features. Satisfaction is a marvelous emotion to experience. It is also a great motivator.

We are lucky in our profession to have the opportunity to experience these feelings ourselves, as well as the chance to see staff people relish the results of their efforts, frequently manual efforts.

There, I said it — manual labor. Those dreaded words. Those dirty words — manual labor.

The sense of satisfaction from manual efforts is something this country is losing, in my view. And it is extremely unfortunate. We seem to be leading our young people to an attitude that manual labor is like the plague; that it is contemptible and should be avoided.

It's like Victor Hugo said: "Nothing is more dangerous than discontinued labor; it is a habit lost, a habit easy to abandon and difficult to resume."

Too many don't want to "work" for a living. That attitude is quickly picked up by the younger generation. So often I hear from colleagues complaints like, "I've got the money in my budget for this program but I just can't hire the people to do it." Or, "Kids don't seem to want to sweat anymore."

I see it, too. Manual labor avoided seems to imply some sort of weird status.

It's difficult to believe that we have intentionally inflicted everyone with a "white collar only" mentality. Three generations ago, few people reached that status. Our leaders were farmers and storekeepers and repairmen. People were proud of their specialty and their skills.

But the deep desire to improve one's lot through education led to a sort of snobbery that I'm starting to resent.

Too often the white collar worker clings to the petty and fictitious notion that he is somehow superior to the manual laborer. My crew, however, chuckles when the paper shufflers who work in the state offices around us flood out-of-doors during the noon hour, even in the dead of winter. There are few happy or smiling faces; there is a grim look about these "white collar" workers. There are many more satisfied looks and far more smiles on the faces of my crew as they come in for lunch, despite a morning of "manual labor".

I don't know why it is, but American parents don't seem to want their kids to be artisans or craftsmen or electricians or skilled golf course staff. They push them to be "businessmen" (whatever that means) or "professional" people. I have even less of an idea what that word means in this generic context.

Too many are pushed into a college program that interests them little. But they hope that degree will propel them into some job that will confer proper "status" in our society. Prestige instead of job happiness or satisfaction becomes the chief motivator. And it is a very poor one.

This attitude, which is becoming so pervasive in this country, that there is something unworthy about non-intellectual work leads kids into jobs they are ill-suited for. It is as if labor which involves manual or mechanical skills is something to be embarrassed about or ashamed of. Nothing is farther from the truth.

Such a stupid, backward attitude has to have a lot to do with the trouble we have getting good, skillful employees in our golf course businesses. It also goes a long way in explaining why more and more we are losing manufacturing jobs to the Japanese and others. They are not insulted to have careers as welders, assembly specialists or painters, like we seem to be.

Maybe we have to take a look at some of those other countries and
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learn (again) from them. In Europe today, a craftsman is a person of high order; he is proud of his work. The work we see often in our country is that of negligence and sloppiness. It probably won't change until we change our attitude.

In our operations and our own shops, we can do something to help in this matter. Good work should be rewarded. Full time staff people who have a career based on our golf courses deserve a wage they can live and prosper on. That gives them dignity.

Good work should be recognized — openly, honestly and sincerely. Recognition is a powerful motivator for even better work and craftsmanship. Like-

wise, sloppy and mediocre work should not be accepted. If that is all a person gives you, then that person should be dismissed. He is an insult to those successfully making the effort.

Good work should be expected. It should be the clear goal of everything that goes on within the work boundaries, every day of the work week.

There is some truth, I think, in that old saw that says "you don't hire good people, you train and make them." A good golf course superintendent should be a Pygmalion for all his employees. I try hard to do that. And I have had some success. It is wonderful to have a person who worked on our golf course 15 years ago come back to tell you that "many of the lessons of hard work and effort I learned on the golf

course crew have helped me in my own profession."

A lot of what we can do is psychological. There also needs to be some prestige in the work our key staff people perform. That prestige, if you figure out how to extend it, is powerful incentive. It is a matter of honor.

Understand that I believe you should be all that you can be, if you **want** to. For some that includes college and a button-down shirt and necktie. Fine.

But for others, like this wonderful group I get to work with, it is a variety of crafts and skills that deserve the highest respect and honor, despite the blue jeans they wear to work.

I think I'm going out and watch Joel work with those redwood signs; there's so much I can learn from him.

THE GENTLE GIANTS

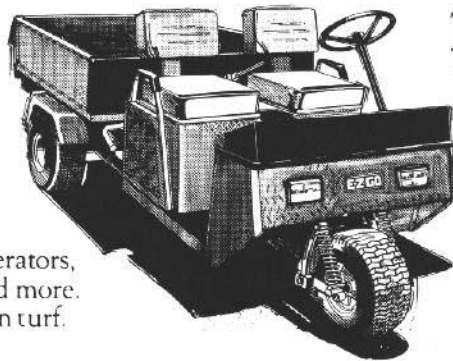
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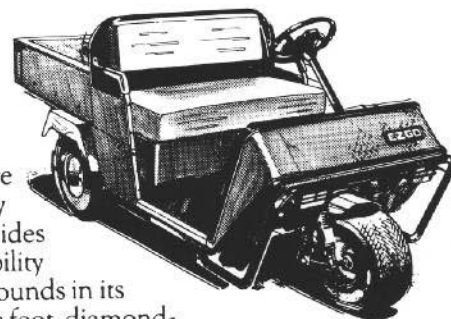
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Reliable, economical, this mid-size hauler more than pulls its own weight. It has a two-cycle, 244cc engine with rack and pinion steering, heavy-duty springs, and hydraulic shocks, plus a whopping 1000-pound load capacity. Options and accessories such as cabs, bed covers and loading ramps make it an ideal all-around utility vehicle.



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