



MOTIVATION — *The Long and Short of It*

By Pat Norton

How they do it I do not know. I cannot imagine keeping highly motivated for an entire twelve-month golf season. How do our Sun Belt colleagues keep motivated and inspired during those sweltering summer months filled with heat, humidity, swarms of insects, grass checking out on an almost daily basis, with nothing to look forward to but more of the same? How do they do it? I do not know.

Traditionally, we northern superintendents have kept our sanity intact by realizing that the pressures of Mother Nature begin to abate by Labor Day. So, the three or four months of summer are the months when tempers do flare, staff and superintendent alike are truly sick of weekend work, and salaries are definitely earned.

Having no course management experience in the southern U.S., what I'm about to say is purely my opinion. The southern states are great states to visit, especially in the spring. On every visit south, Sue and I mull over the possibility of moving down there permanently. But, the thought of being in Georgia or Sue's native Florida in summer, trying to hold a golf course together and defy nature, keeps this Wisconsin boy right at home and probably always will.

I am having a problem, you see, with motivation. More precisely, my problem is the temporary lack of motivation. During this ideal summer of 1992 I am having a tough time staying motivated!

Heck, I should be rejoicing—recent ample rains have resulted in picture perfect course conditioning and some very satisfied members and course owners. This summer has been a piece of cake!

Maybe having little adversity or challenge is part of the problem. Many people respond positively in the face of adversity. Golf course superintendents are trained to overcome adversity and perform positively in spite of it. Some hot, humid, sticky weather might just shake me out of my doldrum state of mind!

The greater cause for this lack of motivation is the normal wear and tear of our somewhat short, but intense Wisconsin golf season. This wear and tear affects people who operate golf courses everywhere. Most of us bust our butts to make our golf courses as nice as possible. This means night and weekend hours spent at the course instead of with our families on vacation out West or in Door County. We make these sacrifices because we're either highly motivated or as a professional group just too stupid to take normal jobs with normal hours, so that we could all then have normal summers.

Right about now my motivation level is fairly low. Weekends become weekdays which quickly become weekends again. Summer is flying by as usual—as I'm writing this I remember that grade school begins in three weeks. Our family's summer highlight so far has been for our oldest son to vacation for five days with our neighbors! Mom can't break away—she's got work, kids, house and

Dad to take care of. Meanwhile Mr. Responsible just keeps on plugging away at the golf course. It's been all too obvious that neither one of us has taken the time to recharge and remotivate. Does this scenario sound all too familiar, fellow superintendents?

Enough complaining already! The point of it all is that summers are very similar for us all—they can really be a pain in the butt. I would suppose that Mark Kienert, as he reads this, is saying "Quit your whining. Have a summer like I did at Bull's Eye during the drought of 1988. Then you can tell me your problems."

Long term motivation in golf course management is quite another problem. What motivates a manager or superintendent to remain in the same professional position, year after year after year?

While this may not be one of life's fundamental questions, answering it or related questions is important as one progresses throughout a career.

After ten years in golf management, and having held more than a few different positions, I'm beginning to ask myself these types of questions. Could I stay motivated or inspired enough to remain at this club until retirement? Doubtful. Do I even want to continue on as a golf course superintendent until age sixty-two, which is twenty-seven years into the future? I honestly have no idea. Those who don't ponder their options are probably kidding themselves, don't you think?

These days almost any extended conversation with one's friends or peers ultimately turns to long-term career goals. We all think about it from time to time. As a younger man I never gave too much thought to my future. Now in my middle thirties, I seem to think about the future constantly.

What long-term goals should golf course superintendents have? We progress from managing grass on a golf course to what next? There certainly isn't much of a corporate ladder to move up on, now is there?

Certainly as we all age and acquire more talent and experience, opportunities will present themselves to those who are interested.

These future thoughts are always more intense during the summer as I observe friends and neighbors having a seemingly great time all summer long. After further thought, though, I realized that the overall state of affairs is really pretty healthy and I do love golf course work.

Besides, none of us could ever be ShopKo store managers, pharmaceuticals or paper products sales reps, or insurance agents, like our neighbors. A few weeks of that type of work would quickly convince me that I'd made a career mistake.

Getting motivated to go manage a retail store every day just would not happen for us golf course types. The thought of that bores me to tears.

I guess I'd better motivate. Two or three employees need instruction right now out on the golf course.