



## The Flame Of Obsession

By Pat Norton

Ah, winter! That cold, quiet time of the year when we all have too much time on our hands. Golf courses in Wisconsin are much too quiet this time of year. My shop telephone may sit for hours without ringing, while the home telephone rings constantly. It rings for others—my sole function is to answer it and pass the telephone over to Sue or the kids. Even at home these days I have way too much idle time on my hands!

Either at home or at the shop, winter is the time for thinking and pondering the future. As we all paint, sharpen and repair our way through the winter months, we think and ponder. We consider our personal and professional situations, and wonder to ourselves just what it is that the future will bring.

Every time that a seemingly juicy career opportunity pops up, the flame of obsession burns brightly inside of me for awhile. As I consider the possibilities, I realize that it's no longer a simple question of "What do I want" or "Where do I want my career to be headed?"

Now there are many more people involved in the decision-making process—a school-aged family, employers that must be treated honorably, and co-workers that will be left behind. Also to be considered are the supposedly greener pastures that beckon to a superintendent. I have jumped the fence into those greener pastures only to find myself landing in thistles!

It only takes a few of these landings before the flame of obsession begins to cool rapidly. As one acquires age, maturity and a bit of wisdom, hot opportunities are coolly analyzed and given time to mellow. The negative aspects of a career change become more prominent, while the positives of one's current situation become a comfort factor.

What it boils down to is a matter of goals. If you are obsessed with the goal of being a hotshot superintendent at the most exclusive club possible, then go for it. Go for the new job, the new club, new community, new church,

new neighbors, new schools and all new friends for your children! Just be sure, pal, that it is indeed a greener pasture that your obsession has led you into.

My obsession, or goal, is along those lines, but is a little bit different. Anymore I do not care about having the hottest superintendent job at the hottest club in the state or region. Superintendent openings that cross my desk interest me little or not at all.

I see too many reasons to stay put, and too few reasons to relocate as a superintendent. I also see too many limitations to long-term success in this profession.

It seems that the higher that one climbs in this business, the hotter the club politics can become. And I, like most others, absolutely detest the petty politics that are part of this business. We all have seen peers and colleagues disappear from the golf scene. Sometimes there is just cause for dismissal, but there are also those instances when a change is made primarily at the whim of some green committee or governing board. The fact is that we are all replaceable employees thrust into sometimes very political situations. That's a very real part of this business.

I believe that by the age of thirty-five a superintendent should have a strategy for long-term success. This long range obsession should be self-dictated, provide for a healthy family environment, education for one's children and ultimately leave a guy in a great position for retirement.

I am obsessed with the fear of not being prepared to send children to college. I am also obsessed with the fear of not setting aside enough money for a happy retirement. Those fears help keep my obsession flaming brightly!

The ideal future that we all hope for can be achieved by us all but probably not by working our prime years away for someone else as a golf course superintendent.

This profession has its limitations. It is definitely a young person's business, has some income limitations,

and generally does not extend strong retirement benefits to those of us in the business. Depending on the loftiness of your goals or the intensity of your obsession, this line of work may not allow you to make sufficient progress toward your goals by the time that your prime years are behind you.

The flame of obsession burns brightly within me when I think of the future and my strategy for reaching our goals. The superintendent business has given us all the golden opportunity to be involved with golf at a time when golf is really a hot sport. It is now up to each of us individually to decide which path to take to insure a successful future.

Each of us must spark and fan a flame of obsession within us as we go through the years. If we keep the flame burning brightly, then real goals and accomplishments will be reached sooner than you think possible.

Fuel for the flame comes more readily to me during the long winter months—there is more time to think about the future. Sometimes the flame burns hot, sometimes it cools to just a flicker.

But it never goes out. It is never extinguished. It is always there.

It is always there. ♣

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