



## Fresh Season, Realistic Attitude

By Pat Norton

So you say that another great golf season is almost upon us, eh??? So you say, at least publicly, that you're all fired up for another great golf season to begin???

So, you say that you're kind of tired of being cooped up on your cozy little golf course shop... working those normal 7-8 hour days that others in the modern workplace take for granted... with each and every weekend 'OFF'... as opposed to being locked into the 'ON' position for the other three seasons of the year???

Feeling a little guilty, I suppose, that you're still getting that bi-weekly paycheck while expending only a normal amount of daily effort... as opposed to a few short weeks from now when you'll be expected to pitch a tent in your shopyard, then steal a few hours of sleep between irrigation line breaks, projects from last fall... and other items that are filling up your yellow legal pads so quickly that the paper supply is getting critically short!!!

That is what you're all so anxious to get started with, eh sporty boys??? Let's not get too eager, beaver!!!

About the only tough times that we all experience during the restful, normal winters are those occasions when

we happen to encounter a well-meaning member or patron at church, at the grocery store, or at the post office... almost immediately they launch into a series of inane questions about the health of the golf course... as if... the golf course... might not make it through the winter intact!! Give me a dollar for every time a superintendent is asked one of the following three inane questions during the offseason... I'll then pool all of the \$\$\$... and we'll all head down to Mexico for a month and drink Margaritas with Jimmy Buffet... and try to return in time for the start of the season!

**Inane Question #1;** "Hey, (your name here), How is the golf course surviving the winter and do ya' think we'll have much 'winterkill'???"

Don't you wish that just one time you could say... "The course will be just fine come springtime, please define for me just what 'winterkill' means to you, and next time ask me a different, more intelligent question... and by the way, **GET A LIFE, SPORT...** I'm a lot more wrapped up in that course out there than anybody else around here, and do you see me obsessing about it all of the time???"

**Inane Question #2;** "Hey, (your name here), What exactly do you do all winter???" And, "Gee whiz, it must be nice to be off all winter"...

So I usually reply with just a hint of sarcasm... "Yea, it's really great getting such a hefty annual salary, and such great benefits, for only 6-7 months of work... heck yea, man, I'm way overpaid... and by the way, fella,... it's none of your damn business as to how I spend my winter work days... let's just say that I like my time off, and my privacy during the winter... so do not ever visit me at the shop... I can just imagine all of the interesting questions that you might have if you ever saw all of that cool golf course equipment... and confidentially, putz, we never have to do anything to this equipment at all... ever, ever... it always works perfectly... park it all in November, dig it out in March, start it all up, and away we go to now your greens and fairways!!!"

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**Inane Question #3;** "Hey, (your name here), "How much is the senior membership/regular membership/greens fee gonna be for 1997?? Is John gonna have those 'Big Helga' drivers on sale right away in the spring??? How much are the prices of hot dogs, potato chips, and beer gonna be increasing? It is getting a little bit expensive out there, don't you think?"

These questions really make me chuckle... and they're asked of superintendents all too frequently... don't these people realize that we don't know and don't really care about such things... a good reply might be... "We've decided to withhold your member ship for this season, Mr. Dusty Wallet, because you play the hell out of this course, never patronize the golf shop/clubhouse, smuggle your soda pop/bologna sandwich combo into your golf bag every time, and let's face it you have absolutely no intention of buying your 'Big Helga' metal woods, your 'XXX used Club Specials, or anything else here, unless it's an absolute emergency!!!"

As an aside, gentlemen, how many of you distinctly remember growing up golfing with those famous 'Club Specials', made by Acushnet? After a number of years I graduated to using the 'Finalist', then 'Titlist'... nothing but the best for this 'Watson wannabe' golfer... nowadays, I'm back to using 'Whatever's In the Bag XYZ' as my preferred brand... in my case, it definitely makes no difference since I only hit the ball about 150 yards maximum...

The redundant problem, guys, is not really one of... "Hmmm, I wonder which of these wondrous fertilizer of biostimulant products will really transform this place into the course that I'd really drool over."

That stuff is generally the easy part... the tough part of this business is making the a golf course look great with limited labor resources/funds/budget/'dinero'.

It's much more a question of "Hmmm, I really wonder how I'm going to replace all of these key staff members that have A) found themselves a real job with great wages and benefits, or B) decided that upon graduation form college they'd like to pursue a career in their field, or C) simply decided that the total commitment to turfgrass management should end at 3:30 each summer day... "And why didn't they tell us about all those long hours... and weekends... and maybe I'll change my major... and I guess that I'm not really interested in coming back to work here next season... so don't count on me... for sure, man... OK"??

So, what's left to mull over, debate, and decide on are those late winter/early spring decisions that are part of any golf course superintendents 'rites of spring', namely...

1) How to assemble a great, or at least a somewhat competent, golf course staff... that will hopefully approach the skill level of last year's bunch... before the end of the new season... or before the superintendent has to be committed for psychiatric evaluation!!

2) How to fend off the questionable suppliers that pop up each spring, touting this new 'wonder lube', or that new 'biostimulant'... that's got great testimonials attached from faithful user in Woodchuck, USA... but no research or proof that it'll cure what ails those native soil greens... my personal favorite is the 'humic acid' product that's most certainly going to improve soil tilth... "just try a few cases, and then we'll convince you that you're seeing improved water infiltration and percolation on your greens!!"

3) The next big trick, which is intimately tied to the level of your trained staff people, is... "How to attain the quality

that a guy envisions, while working within the labor budget that the corporation expects will be closely followed." The key here, as we've all probably learned, is to keep a super sharp eye on the budget, limit the OT, and **resist the force, Luke, of your ingrained training from years ago**, and realize that most of the golfers think that this place is really... a pretty darn sweet golf course.

4) A most important factor for golf course types is how to gear up mentally for the long, intense upcoming season... as you may have guessed, I'm having a little trouble as I'm writing this... I foresee a really, really long season with a really, really green golf course crew. Does the training of personnel ever really end?? I don't think so... it's all part of the job, big boy!!

So, what's the magic cure for the mental toughness part of the golf course management game? First of all, drink more beer on the course during the working day.

Then, go up to that really offensive foursome that is slower than molasses, pull their cart keys, and kick them off of 'your course'.

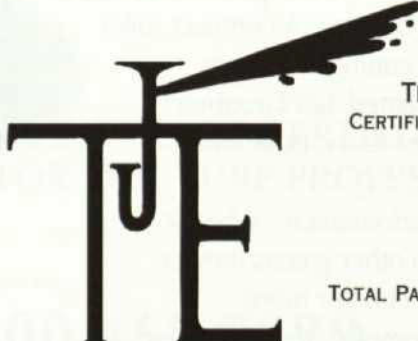
Next, get on the telephone and order, without any approval whatsoever, those 150 trees from McKay Nursery that the place really needs, or that luscious piece of equipment that you've been absolutely lusting over!! Live for the here and now, man!!! Just do it!! Be more assertive!!!

Finally, sit down at your rest and prepare your letter of resignation... you'll soon need it.

And lastly, begin checking out the classified ads in your local newspaper. Pay particular attention to the 'Low Stress Jobs Listings'... they typically pay the best...

Ultimately, as you're all reading this and I'm banging it out on the keyboard there'll be a mental catharsis within each one of us as we realize that our profession may not be as recognized as the medical or law professions, but that it's usually quite enjoyable, satisfying, visual and creative, and almost always demanding.

And given that there are some negatives attached to our line of work, I'll still take it over pretty much anything else in the golf world, and certainly anything else in the green industry. ♣



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