



# Dilemmas in Golf Course Management

By Pat Norton  
Nettle Creek CC

Life is just chock full of dilemmas, isn't it? A dilemma is defined as...among other definitions...as **a choice or a situation involving choice between equally unsatisfactory alternatives**. Everyday life can sometimes seem like one grand dilemma in the sense that choices and decisions must continually be made concerning...

**Home**...as in...should a guy press really vigorously for his remodeling and home improvement ideas? Or surrender to the inevitable...in any number of domestic decisions in which the man will *definitely and ultimately* lose the argument? It's best to surrender here, guys, and avoid any dilemma over such things as wallpaper, paint colors, decorating schemes, housework priorities, etc. Sheer logic says that usually these things matter much more to women...while guys like myself don't really care. In fact, being consulted for my opinion in this area drives me crazy!!!

I usually 'get my way' on the exterior of our home when I show up with yet another tree to be planted or some mail order package of bulbs or plants that I've impulsively ordered from Michigan Bulb or Jackson and Perkins...while secretly paying with my VISA card. There are ways to get even in the dilemma filled battle for control of the household...

**Family**...as in...how ticked off can I afford to let myself get when my seventh grade son...who usually gets 'A honor roll' type grades...reports an 'F' on his mid-term progress report for Language Arts? Do I...after careful consultation with Sue...decide to...punch his lights out...ground him from watching the Playboy Channel...or simply appeal to his honor as a responsible young man who should take greater pride in himself? That, truthfully, was a recent dilemma in our household! Fortunately, that crisis and dilemma has now passed...and rest assured...we still...as Wisconsin liberal types...allow our rapidly maturing son to discover the pleasures of...naw, just kidding, folks!!!

**Career**...as in...how much time should a golf course superintendent...or any other father...have to devote to a job or career...at the expense of time lost with his family? That, as everybody knows, is a universal, never ending dilemma...

Golf course superintendents...in my opinion...are about in the middle on this one. There are those ultrasuccessful, ultradriven types in other professions who have lots of money...but a terrible family and home life.

On the other hand, it's especially easy to recognize in a smaller, rural town...those people for whom work is a forty hour thing...with limited financial compensation...and a limited future...but who have tons of time to be at everything for their children.

I am right in the middle, I think. During the winter I am able to be at every one of my childrens' functions...and thoroughly enjoy it all. The other three seasons of the year

are a different story, though. I certainly do miss some of their happenings. And I definitely would love to be able to go with my oldest boy on his upcoming Boundary Waters canoe trip with the Boy Scouts, but alas, it is not to be...

**Faith**...as in...how does a forty year old man reconcile the fact that...as he ages...certain things may not ever come to pass...that former goals were maybe only fantasy...and that certain people have faded into the past...never to be seen again? It's a dilemma in the sense that it's difficult to know when to let go of certain ideas and beliefs...and be able to accept and embrace your life and your family.

In the past couple of years here in Illinois, it's been really something new for me that my interest in attending church and being involved more in the community has really heightened. The feeling that life and people are there to be enjoyed in the present tense is really becoming strong within me also. The result is...I'm not continually hoping for some magical future...that will not happen unless I'm ready for it all.

I'm guessing that all of you Baby Boomer superintendent types out there are experiencing some of these feeling as we progress through our careers and our years.

So right now, faith doesn't really pose a dilemma for me...it's easy to have strong faith when things in life are going pretty good...it's how any of us would react when a family tragedy would strike at us to really test our faith.

That is a question that I ask myself when I ponder what's happened to people throughout difficult times in history or even when reading about any tragic automobile accident in a newspaper. Handling misfortune, especially to my family, would be extremely difficult...and it makes me wonder if I'd have the strength to go through it!

**Relatives**...as in...How do we all, as adults...maintain long distance relationships with our siblings? It really seems that the relationship between my parents and their

## THE GRASS IS ALWAYS GREENER ...TOPDRESSING WITH TDS-2150 SAND

- Consistent Quality
- Lab Reports with Every Shipment
- Wisconsin's Largest Topdressing Sand Supplier
- Give Us a Call for More Information



**Lake Shore Sand**

A Division Of Construction Aggregates  
Corporation of Michigan

PO BOX 1213  
Milwaukee, WI 53201 (414) 271-0625



siblings was/is much closer than any relationship that I currently have with my brother or sisters...which is unfortunate.

Since moving down here three hours south of Madison in 1994...it's been very difficult to get back up to Wisconsin to visit relatives with any frequency at all. And we do miss not being able to do some of the traditional family things that used to be so easy...which is very unfortunate. That is a recurring dilemma for our young family...especially since our roots here are starting to grow stronger.

We all have our personal dilemmas in life...and don't we all have our own golf course management dilemmas to contend with also? Let me illustrate five or six of the recurring dilemmas that I've had to face over the years...see if you can relate!

**Dilemma #1**...is the fact that many of the superior, intelligent, motivated, hard working people that pass through golf courses on an annual basis inevitably move on to bigger and better things...a huge problem for golf operations like ours that offer too little incentive...very average wages...no benefits...and limited overtime.

As a result, each and every year is a guessing game as to what type of course lineup we'll be able to field. Fortunately, some of these people still enjoy working at the golf course on a part-time basis, which does help us out immeasurably.

**Dilemma #2**...is the constant battle to provide top quality playing conditions and a great looking golf course on a limited budget. This dilemma is very difficult for me because I have a vested interest in holding costs down and contributing to the overall profitability of our privately

owned public golf course. On the other hand, I've been trained almost my entire adult life as to what a beautiful golf course needs to look and play like...which costs money.

In the end...our group strikes a balance right down the middle...we have a very nice course that requires a middle of the road operating budget. We understand very well that we'd need to jack up fees and memberships significantly in order to try and compete with the truly superior public courses in ChicagoLand. In 1997 we were named to the 'top 35' public golf courses by ChicagoLand Golf in their 'Best Of' polling of their readers...which is probably about as high as we'll ever reach considering all of their various criteria.

**Dilemma #3**...is the problem of when to speak out as an individual and when to be a team player with the others in the ownership group. All too often I find myself being a team player in situations in which assertiveness could miraculously work in my favor...or seriously backfire! I think that every middle manager...in whatever field...must contend with this thorny problem!

**Dilemma #4**...is facing up to the fact that golf pros make significantly more money than superintendents...mainly due to the fact that golf professionals deal directly with the members/golfers...and the revenue...and are usually a hybrid between an employee and an entrepreneurial businessman. Superintendents work long and hard hours because of their love of the golf course...but can  
(Continued on page 19)

## Tournament™ Golf Course Accessories



### EQUIP YOUR COURSE WITH LESCO.

Featuring Quality  
Cups, Poles, Custom  
Flags, Bunker Rakes,  
Ball Washers & More.

Contact your LESCO  
Professional Golf  
Representative or call  
(800) 321-5325.

Grow With Us™

**LESCO™**

LESCO, Tournament and Grow With Us  
are trademarks of LESCO, Inc.



## LESCO... a team of professionals serving your turfgrass needs.

•Fertilizer •Repair Parts  
•Seed •Equipment  
•Golf Course Accessories

LESCO and Grow With Us are trademarks of LESCO, Inc.

# (800) 321-5325

**LESCO™**



(Continued from page 17)

burn themselves and get easily taken for granted by all sides. There is not usually the opportunity for superintendents to be able to make more money as their workload and stress increases...which is a major shortcoming of what we all do for a living!

**Dilemma #5**...is deciding after twenty years of being a superintendent...whether or not to continue with it all...or shift gears and try something else. This relates back to what type of operation a guy manages currently...and what type of treatment he receives from his employers...and what his ultimate goals might be in life!

**Dilemma #6**...is facing the annual sales presentations from the fert and chem reps...and then making the purchasing decisions that will delight some...and disappoint others. My problem is...most of these guys are great people...and I've learned it's best to treat them like the professional colleagues they are! They usually come from similar turfgrass backgrounds...and many times are former superintendents themselves! It is tough to say no unless the supplier rep somehow rubs me the wrong way.

**Dilemma #7**...is reconciling the fact that I'm no longer very active in any GCSA...in any area. I'm no longer active at monthly meetings...annual conferences...USGA events...or any other golf related associations. And it only bothers me a little bit...a very little bit. The fact of the matter is that activity in turfgrass associations adds up to sig-

nificant dollars...that I'm not willing to request from our group. It all also requires a lot of time...which is scarce in a limited labor golf course situation like Nettle Creek.

There are just tons of other identifiable dilemmas out there for us golf course/turfgrass/father types...and we each deal with them in our own unique way. The important thing is that we all do deal with these dilemmas...we are, after all, trained to be decision-makers.

And, in the end, these problems or dilemmas are really nothing more than disguised opportunities to showcase ourselves. It could also be said that the days filled with dilemmas/problems are sometimes frustrating, yet usually intense and interesting.

And what if we didn't have these dilemmas to face? What if our toughest daily dilemma was to be able to endure the boredom of forty hours in some factory each week? Or to decide what to do if your giant multinational employer decided to cut 5000 white collar jobs...leaving you suddenly unemployed with serious job retraining in your future?

Our dilemmas are not all that serious...and are nothing more than a part of everyday existence as **golf course superintendents** in the lush, green world of golf.

And finally, in the very name of our occupation lies a great dilemma...how did anybody ever settle for the lousy, longwinded, hard to pronounce title of '**golf course superintendent**'?

Somebody out there needs to solve **this** aging dilemma...and come up with a catchier title for this thing we all do! It would be a breath of fresh air!! 🌱

## CANNON TURF SUPPLY, INC.

1227 Naperville Drive  
Romeoville, IL 60446

**Where Success Is Based on a  
Commitment to People...**

STOCKING A COMPLETE LINE OF PESTICIDES, FERTILIZERS,  
GRASS SEED AND ACCESSORIES FOR THE TURF PROFESSIONAL

**TOLL FREE 800-457-7322**  
**VOICE MAIL PAGER 888-815-2437**  
**CUBBY O'BRIEN**