



# Ask the Expert

By **Pat Norton**, Golf Course Superintendent, Nettle Creek Country Club

One of the most amusing things about life...as we all get a bit older and more philosophical...is the fact that as adults we are constantly faced with responsibility and the need to make wise decisions! Our children look at us and see...experts...in the game of life...who are supposed to always be there...always be right...and always make the correct decision!

Excuse me, people...but inside this 41 year old body lies the heart and soul of that same 14 year old kid who is now looking at Dad for...**expertise!** Having your own children is a great stimulant for reflecting back on one's own youth...which I seem to do quite a bit lately.

If you're like me, you tend to reflect back on the years with a sense of 'woulda, coulda, shoulda'... instead of looking at feats actually accomplished and challenges overcome. I always seem to look at the world and constantly compare myself to others...their relative successes in life compared to my own. I think that I'm going nuts with all of the self-analysis...I hope to hell it's a normal enough thing to do!

Every day, all day I seem to be constantly talking to myself...or to other people who aren't even present (i.e. wife Susan)...as I make my way around my world/the golf course. I usually tell myself what I should do next...or just what part of Dante's inferno that she's welcome to explore (when we happen to be feuding)...alternating that with what I should have done about any one particular problem on the course. I tend to expect of myself that I'll always make the correct decision...and that things will

always go as planned. As they say, hindsight is always 20/20.

It is sort of fun for Susan and me to look at our maturing children (ages 14, 11, and 7)...starting to make their own decisions. When they were younger it all seemed so much simpler. The parents basically made all of the decisions...and the children followed suit. Now we've got this rapidly maturing trio that think that they're all the experts! Are they questioning my expertise? You betcha! Are they being prompted to question my expertise by my lovely wife of 16 years? Definitely you betcha! Do my wife and my children ally themselves against the patriarchal expert of the family when they happen to disagree with my expertise! Sadly it is so.

And though my experiences in life should qualify me to be an expert in certain areas other than the golf course...isn't it ironic to note that the golf course is really

the only place in which I'm truly regarded as the expert!

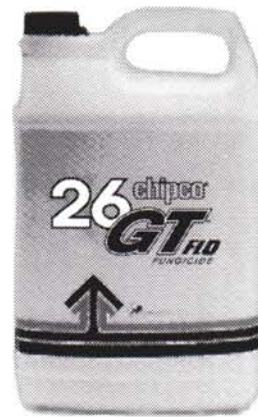
If you doubt me on that point, consider just how many times your spouse has questioned your expertise on matters concerning the home lawn, home landscaping, or the wisdom of yet another tree???

Some would call my wife assertive...which is usually true. Most would say that I'm more unassertive...which is also true. But I must say that I do love to assert my landscape expertise...by bringing home yet another unannounced arboreal specimen.

My inner expertise has been nagging at me for about 3-4 months now that we need a tree/landscape bed behind the old basketball hoop...which is happening unbeknownst to Susan. The other part of having this expertise is knowing that not all decisions need to be mutual...I think it's called unilateral decision making.

Some day soon I'll just show up

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with the trees and materials...making it impossible for her to assert her own expertise into the situation!

Out on the golf course every superintendent is, or should be, regarded as the expert. In addition to the golf course expertise, I have a somewhat unique situation out at Nettle Creek. I'm the only one that can really communicate with my crew of Mexican guys. So I just love to show my expertise by making sure that there are plenty of people around when I grandly announce in Spanish..."Trampas(bunkers)...verdes(greens)...y collares(collars)! Every day I repeat the same thing...and somehow the guys know what I'm trying to say!

I think that my problem is that I'm just a lonely English speaking guy surrounded by an entire crew of Spanish speaking Mexican men. They're desperately trying to com-

municate with me in their language...which is fine to a point. Then I blurt out in English... "Hey hombres, I am not an expert in your language! Slow down and maybe sprinkle in a few key words of English!"

Of course they cannot do that...so then the two of us turn to the third guy in this conversational adventure who implicitly understands that the Spanish being spoken isn't being digested by my American brain. He then starts over...explaining to me in what's probably about fourth grade Spanish...*we're telling you, senior Patricio, that there are two piles of dogcaca in the sand trap on #15....not 15 piles of sand ready to be cleaned up near the dogleg on #2...do you understand us now???*

All kidding aside...my expertise

over the last five years does tell me that these Mexican men are excellent employees and excellent workers. Almost all of them are very hard working and dedicated...and extremely conscientious. All of these guys send money home to Mexico for their families or their parents...each and every month!

One of my guys...Roberto Santana...is here working in order to send his two oldest children 'to the university'. He would not have the opportunity to earn enough in his native country to supplement their government scholarships and give them the opportunity to earn a college degree!

So here is this guy...almost exactly my age...living and working in a foreign country...doing basically manual labor every day...to help his family survive and his children to substantially better themselves.

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I am certainly not an expert on Mexican sociology, but I must say that I wholeheartedly support and respect these men and their families. And I do get a little bit angry when people in town give them little or no respect. I am enough of an expert on this whole matter...I work closely with these families every day. They are good people and have good families...

Other areas of professional course expertise are as follows...see if you can identify yourself in these situations:

**a) the spring pile up**...happens every April and May...and means that basically no matter the amount of expertise...there is suddenly way too much to do! This expert finds himself changing his mind almost hourly as to the priorities for the next few hours, days, or weeks!

**b) the fert and chem backlog**...in which the expert decides to order too many products and then can't find the time, trained personnel, or cooperative weather in which to apply everything! This is a personal pet frustration of mine...and one that I've learned to deal with over the years by simply being in no hurry whatsoever to order too much product! The turf suppliers that I deal with are somewhat frustrated with me...which translated means that they're not calling...and have moved on to easier marks, I guess. My expertise tells me that soon I'll have to order and organize my purchases in earnest. But for now, I'm not in that much of a hurry...I really do hate to carry too much inventory. Too many times I've been caught using up product at the end of the season...that I'd overordered the previous spring or summer!

**c) irrigation system overexpectations**...in which the hurried superintendent pressurizes the system...probably too quickly...and then expects everything to work properly...with no leaks whatsoever!

er! My own personal expertise also tells me that I'm very guilty of waiting too long to make system or head repairs...instead opting for manual operations...and too many nightly inspection trips to see what's really happening out there!

**d) equipment overload**...I am really guilty here of trying to stretch things too far! Today, for example, I am out spraying greens and tees...with Heritage(Take-All Patch)...in really lousy, wet, cold weather. After calibrating and testing everything on the MultiPro...we loaded the chemical and proceeded to the PPG. Perfect morning for this product...no people and a nice steady rain...but the booms quit after only 1.5 passes! Back to the shop to correct the problem...which took us some time to diagnose originally. Solve the problem...then back out I go. Now I'm pissed and noticing all of the negatives...like the almost bald front tires that we postponed replacing back in March...something is going to happen, I say, with these damn tires...soon...anytime now I'll hit something that'll puncture these puppies! Fortunately, nothing happened this time...

**e) wildlife and other incidents**...in which well meaning golfers, homeowners, or golf shop personnel call or radio to tell me that there is a problem on the course with moles(every spring), geese, beavers, or muskrats. One lady called the other morning and left a message that there are four

geese making themselves very much at home 'on the pond behind lots 30-32!' "Hey lady, I don't care! And furthermore, I don't know which lots you're talking about...and incidentally missy, have you ever tried to make geese leave an area that they're trying to defend? The intelligent expert gives nesting geese a wide berth"... Most of the time when I do admit to my negligence and lack of desire to eradicate these varmints...people think that I'm somehow not doing my job! But truthfully...the mole runs from two weeks ago are healing up...and the little critters seem to disappear...without me doing my Bill Murray/Caddyshack imitation.

Expertise is a funny thing. Proclaiming too loudly and too often to be the expert...as does happen with others that we deal with at our courses...can create a backlash and bite a guy in the butt.

Superintendents are expert at what they do...and I'm sure are constantly complimented on the condition of their courses...further reinforcing their status as 'the experts'.

Most superintendents prefer though...to be the quiet, confident type of expert. The type of person that's a bit humble and not very willing to jump into the verbal limelight.

We do not have to resort to such tricks. The golf course is always out there...a permanent, silent testament to our expertise. Let it do the talking for us. ♣



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