



A Springtime Venting

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

There's this thing about spring. Actually...it's a lot of little things. Things like the weather, the opening of the golf course, spring course maintenance, spring course projects, new crew members, and existing crew members!

It's things like the new golf professional, the new golf shop staff, existing bar, restaurant, and shop staff, staff returning, staff leaving for greener pastures, existing staff... who all feel that they totally deserve...sizable (huge) compensation increases!

Or things like the club newsletter, club finances, club priorities vs. course priorities, memberships coming in, members not renewing, and members with their suggestions! What's bothering me? Nothing at all...except a lot of little things.

Hey!! It's been raining for three days now...which is great! These are million dollar rains...April so far has been seemingly full of 'million dollar rains'...which is a sort of rationalization of the fact that **we're bringing in absolutely no money at all during these rainy periods!! But that rain is worth about \$1,000,000 per inch of precip...so we should have at least \$3,000,000 extra sitting in the bank, right?**

Wouldn't it be nice if there was some monetary value attached to April cold or wind? I can just imagine some guy bitching about the cold and wind in April...and some other guy scolding him...**"Hey fella, these are million dollar winds...and those raw, blustery days are really, really good for the course!"**

And hey, are we raking in the cash this month, or what? People down here in ChicagoLand are so crazy that they'll consistently golf in any kind of weather. Rain, cold, windy as hell...it just doesn't matter! Our course is full each and every day! And to top it all off...no special spring pricing needed to entice golfers! People are so willing to pay full price that there's no need to spend any money whatsoever on marketing or advertising!

As you can see...all of these little things combine into one big thing...leaving a guy no other option than to vent a little...steam and frustration...and go on a rant! I've actually learned this technique to the point of perfection over the years...as have most veteran superintendents.

Any veteran superintendent can clearly see that it's a subconscious college conspiracy thing...implanted into the brain of even the sharpest of young turfgrass minds...the unknown, deeply implanted ability to tolerate authority without question and have nothing but total enthusiasm for the turfgrass profession upon graduation.

As these turfies go out into the real world, however, strong forces begin to work against their minds...slowly eroding their will to hold their true feelings in check...resulting in a middle aged venting and ranting that can sometimes result in total career and family destruction!!

I fear that I may be embarking upon that path...just the other day I barked back at a foursome of senior know-it-alls (retired farmers) that "no...these fairways are not Common Redtop...it is called Creeping Bentgrass!!! Penncross Creeping Bentgrass!!!!"

I then stalked away muttering to myself.

Actually any superintendent should know how to rant. Trying to juggle all of the facets of our daily management leads to stress...which needs to be vented off somehow.

The guys who are seemingly always cool and logical are undoubtedly very good at finding an obscure little corner of the course to retreat into for their venting and ranting.

They go off somewhere...get it all out of their systems...and return for the rest of the day...refreshed and eager to tackle more problems! The experienced people in our turf world make absolutely sure that venting is done in private...sort of a personal thing.

Never let your casual acquaintances, neighbors, friends, adversaries, and especially your members or patrons see you venting....they'll either be highly amused, highly afraid, highly skeptical, or highly critical.

Do not let people see your 'dark side'....do not give in to the 'dark side'...which is all Star Wars talk, right? We should all be experts on 'the force' and 'the dark side'...because everybody reading this has seen and has purchased absolutely all of the Star Wars movies!!! Admit it!! You're all Star Wars junkies...just like my warped, pathetic little family!!!

Over the years everybody mellows...so that the ranting and venting takes on less violent overtones and becomes a sort of verbal/cynical/sarcastic sort of thing.

Here at NCCC (sort of a hip little acronym), we started off the year here with lots of change. Lots of change usually means lots of opportunity for venting. Lots of sudden activity...such as opening a golf course for the season...usually means going from 0 mph to about 200 mph in about 2-3 days. Too much to do-lots of venting!!

People who have been through it all before know what to do and have a good chance of keeping their cool and keep things moving ahead. It is dealing with

all of the other, less experienced people that causes even the veterans to freak out mildly.

So, on any given early season day we have the rookies who are really freaking out...the veterans who are freaking out just a little bit, and trying not to show it...and the owners who want to come on out just to make sure that nobody is freaking out!!

There are also those rookie employees who are so lost that they don't even realize that the least they could do is freak out a little bit.

In this situation...freaking out at least shows the veterans and possibly even the owners that they do really care about the great career opportunity that they've been given here! The types that don't freak out at all are quite possibly the ones who have no ambition whatsoever...and are destined to scour the 'Help Wanted' ads in the local newspaper...possibly for their entire lives.

This spring I am determined to control my ranting...at least in public. I am going to enjoy my job, enjoy the golf course, and enjoy the rush of instant daily adrenalin when I realize that...there's way too much to do!

I am going to pause and relax when my wife calls...and not give into the urge of wanting to violently scream at her..."I've got to go...right now...I do not want to chat...I never like to chat!!!"

This spring I vow to renew all of my golf course acquaintances...and accept everybody as they are...when I'd really like to show a few of my special favorites just how deep our wet well really is!

This year, I will keep my patience intact as I daily observe our ancient greensmowers trekking their way across our large greens...hoping like hell that major disasters can be averted this season.

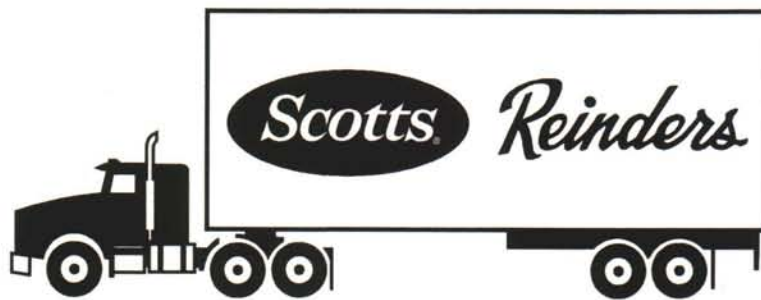
Next year we'll have a pair of new triplexes...or somebody may end up getting bludgeoned into understanding that course equipment is just as important as new clubhouse computers!!!

This year, I will laugh and chuckle when I hear about little, tiny problems in the clubhouse that constantly get magnified and overblown in importance. I will not blow my stack and point out that the reason that the golf course gets rarely mentioned is that it's properly managed!

We will continue to take care of our own problems and make progress in spite of equipment breakdowns, irrigation leaks, etc...it's part of the daily grind. We will make the golf course beautiful and continue to enhance our reputation as a course that's always in good shape! We will not vent too much...and we will not lose control!

Thanks so much for listening. I feel better already! ♪

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