

LOOKING FOR GREENER GRASS

By **Tony Rzdski**, Golf Course Superintendent, Woodside Golf Club



This story begins back in November of 1997 when I began my quest, my search for greener grass. To be sure, what I thought would become a pleasant respite from my daily, distasteful ordeal at the golf course, became a very unpleasant pursuit. That is why a year and a half ago, I began making mental notes about my experience. I thought that I might share some of my experience with you. I felt that this might be important, for in order for me to begin my journey, I had to end my career as a greenkeeper.

If any of you know me, (I'm sure that most of you don't) you would at first wonder, "Why would he do something like that? He's got almost 20 years in this business!" Then you would probably say to yourselves... "the pressure got to him, upper management must have finally cracked his back, or it's the constant battle with the weather." Then you could quickly dismiss the matter and understand how any of these reasons, and more, can contribute to a fellow greenkeeper's demise.

To be sure, these things were wearing my shoulders down. And to be honest with you, it was not just one problem that caused me to look at greener fields, but a number of difficulties had emerged that began to overwhelm me to the point that I began to question my abilities and my talent. I had lost confidence in myself and self doubt was slowly creeping into my psyche and I felt that I wasn't in control anymore. Relentless projects...during the playing season...and constant changes to a brand new golf course were slowly eroding my character. Any small

mistake that an employee might make, I took as a catastrophic failure on my part. I didn't have the foresight to prevent "things" from happening. I had a strong feeling of inadequacy that was gradually leading me into depression.

As you can see I was pretty mixed up emotionally. I don't know if all of this insecurity culminated into a mid-life crisis and if that is actually what I went through, but I will tell you this before I go any further. If you get this messed up inside, don't do as I did, don't bottle it all up inside.....talk to someone or two people that you have confidence in...*please talk to them!*

I decided to walk away from it. I decided that a change of scenery was in order. It was time to look at the other side of the business and try something new, so I went to work for a local equipment dealer. The thought of a regular work schedule sounded great! "Hey, I won't have to get wet anymore. And Mother Nature can take a hike! No

more diseases to worry about, temperamental irrigation systems, and bad golfers complaining about 'poor' pin placements. Yeah, I'll have it made in the shade!"

Let me tell you something, as often as your sales representatives stop by pulling their trailer with the latest equipment, and you may think, "boy they've got it made!" Believe me, it's not as easy as it looks. They do an awful lot behind the scenes to best represent their products and business. And they often put in a lot longer hours than a golf course superintendent! My hat is off to them and I will always respect them and their work. I worked hard at it, but after several months I realized that I was not cut out to be an equipment salesman. Every time that I stepped on a golf course or visited a fellow superintendent I just wanted to jump into their shoes! It didn't matter what type of course it was or what problems they were having, they were growing grass....and I had to pull

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my trailer. I was honest and up front with my boss. In August of 1998, I told him that I was considering going back to the golf course. He was very supportive and wished me well in my search and continued my employment. To that I am very grateful.

But what did I really learn from this experience? Well, I learned that some of the greatest discouragements in our lives come after some very successful accomplishments. I had to learn patience. I had to learn what it truly meant to be humble. You see the new search for greener grass (employment back at new golf course) took over a year to accomplish. I had been very successful in the past at former golf courses that I had been employed at. Now I was learning patience, I was humbled by my shortcomings. Leaving a superintendent's position for another occupation can thwart your credibility. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise.

To say the least, discouragement was almost a daily event. When the mail came from a potential new employer and the letter read..... "thanks for applying for the superintendent's position, but we have chosen another candidate"...believe me, it wasn't an easy time. I had a lot of people pulling for me and an inner strength and resolve to accomplish my new search. I also had discovered something that I had known all of my life, but had never accepted. Just about the time I was leaving my golf course career in 1997, I had accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. I have been a Christian all of my life, but I had not had that 'born again' experience. With my world crashing around me that fall of 1997, I sat on my backhoe and tearfully prayed to God to take this burden from me. It wasn't long after that prayer, as a matter of fact less than an hour, that answers began to fly at me. I will never forget that day, the day I decided to let God

drive the golf cart and lead me down the fairway.

Now you may say, "how could God lead you somewhere that you would be totally unhappy?" I believe that He had to let me *experience* the other side of the business. I had been in quite an emotional quagmire. I believe that I had to rediscover who I was. Why am I here? And where am I going?

Patience, humility, and discouragement must have been a weakness in my character, and God decided to test those attributes. He also taught me to truly count my blessings and I developed a new focus and perspective for my life. I learned that spiritual forces, God living in your daily life, has a much greater impact over physical needs. The spiritual realm of God empow-

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ers your physical life and needs...if you allow Him.

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they don't sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?"

"And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith. So do not worry saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." Matthew 6:25-34 NIV

God had a dream for us. Who you are is more important than career and physical needs. I believe God needed me to discover that. What we experience while attempting to accomplish our objectives is more important than accomplishing the objective itself. Henry Marsh was the guest speak-

er at this year's GCSAA General Session. Mr. Marsh ran the 3500 meter Steeplechase in the 1984 Olympics. He did not win...he came in fourth place. After the race he collapsed on the track and was taken off on a stretcher. For that one event in his life he had given it his all! I was amazed and heartbroken as I watched that video. The tragedy of life is that so many miss their destiny. But Henry's life was not to *win* that race. Henry was destined to talk to us that day about the *experience* of it. You see if Henry had won that race, maybe he would not have been able to inspire us. His view of life may have been skewed as so many are, that all that matters in life is winning.

While I searched for greener grass I discovered my spiritual side and began to experience God in my life. Now I daily strive to develop a closer relationship with God. I am determined not to be so self reliant and let God and prayer work for me. I am a steadfast believer in the power of prayer. If you earnestly, sincerely pray to God, your prayer will be answered. It may not be the response you were waiting for, but God does answer prayer. You may not get an immediate answer, but things will happen when the time is right. And remember, "No!" is an answer too.

I learned to accept things and people as they are, and deal with problems as they present themselves. Struggling to change impossible situations and personalities can be a tremendous task. By accepting circumstances I learned to lead by example and to show people what *really* matters in my life. Not every one will accept me, but at least they know where I stand and what I stand for. I let people know that work is important, but my greater job awaits me somewhere else. My values, ethics, and morals mean more to me than my wage here on earth.

Psalm 37:23-24 NIV says:

"If the Lord delights in a man's way, he makes his steps firm; though he stumble, he will not fall, for the Lord upholds him with his hand."

I sincerely believe that I am a person that God has truly blessed. Sometimes we all need to stop for a few moments and take a look around us. We need to appreciate more all the blessings that we are given, for they *are* truly gifts from God. Adversities will come in your life. That is the nature of our world. And to be honest with you, that is what I feared the most before I accepted Jesus into my life. I was sure that if I "let go and let Jesus" rule my life, something bad would happen to me or my family. I have had some other personal misfortunes in my life and I was sure something tragic would happen once more. But that day in September 1997, I decided to let God run my backhoe and let His Spirit dictate my life. Yes, a few months later He led me away from my career, but that was meant to be. It was in His providential plan for my life to get away from the

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golf course for awhile, even if it meant some hardships later.

I learned from that experience to enjoy every day. When people ask me, "How are you doing?" I often reply, "Well I'm six feet above the ground and still sucking wind!" There is a lot to be said about someone that can have a great positive attitude and portray that presence to everyone he encounters. It is an infectious and great feeling! I wouldn't change one thing that has happened on my life's road, because God meant for it to be the way it is.

- *"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."*

The 23rd Psalm of David is probably one of the most recognized chapters in the bible because it is so often read at funerals. Maybe you should read it again and see how the Lord is *leading* David in his daily living.

I also learned to genuinely value my career as a greenkeeper. I have been back at it since last September and I haven't had a bad day at work yet! It is a great profession! I earnestly endeavor to make every day at work rewarding and pleasurable. Even when I am handed those lemons, I look for

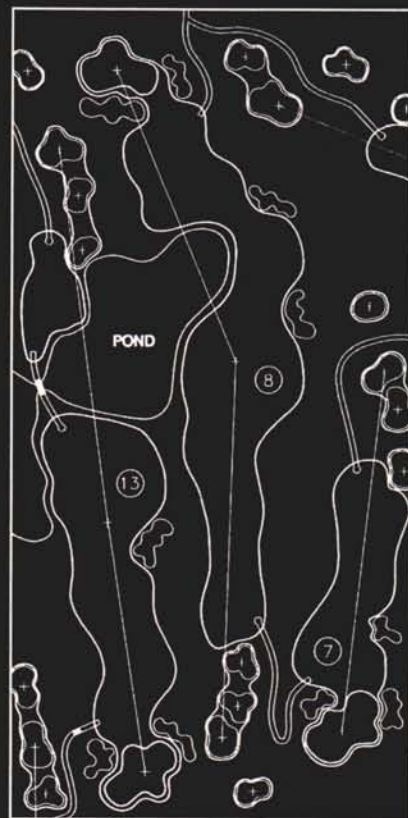
the lemonade pitcher and attempt to see what experience I will encounter.

So if you are contemplating a search for greener grass, you may not want to follow the path I chose. You may need to take a few days off....not a year, and get away. You may need to look inside yourself and prioritize what really matters. You may need to shorten your hours a little and get back in touch with your family. Or maybe you need a few moments with God every day. You know that our careers allow us to watch the sun rise every morning. This can often be a beautiful and spiritual path way to start each day. Marvel at the wonders God paints in the sky. Hear the birds announce the morn and give their glory to their maker. Smell the fresh grass, feel the breeze on your face and just say "Thank you."

If you are beginning to look for greener pastures, maybe you should take some time for yourself first. Become your own best friend. Talk to others (maybe even your employer). You may be surprised he may be able to empathize with you and understand your stress. There is one thing that you should be sure of if you decide to get out of the game. Be very confident in where you are heading and what you are trying to achieve. And if you have the Lord in your corner, He will make your drive down the fairway of life much straighter.

As I am now back in the saddle and constructing a new golf course, I can now look back and sincerely say how much I missed the creativity and challenge of golf course work. I sorely missed the daily nourishment that the grass under my feet could give me. The enrichment of all the endeavors, natural and man made, the sunshine...and the rain! I guess when it's in your blood, you can never leave it behind. ♻

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