



Admissions and Confessions

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

We are guilty. We plead guilty to all charges against us. Alleged, unsubstantiated, or borderline ridiculous... all charges against us are true. Anything that anybody has said about or against us... whether to our faces or behind our backs... is totally and unforgiveably true!

We confess to all of our wrongdoings and will accept any penance or penalty that is imposed upon us by a jury of our more perfect peers. We desire to cleanse our hearts, minds, and souls by admitting in public... here in this column... to some of our many and numerous professional sins over the years.

We all have our secrets in this line of work, I think. Haven't we all screwed up, spaced out, pulled a boner, or simply screwed the pooch... probably many times over?? Yes... I have!! Yes... you have, too!! Admit it, big man. You're worthless and weak... just like everybody else!! You are not perfect, nor am I.

The humorous part of it all is that nobody ever seems to want to admit or confess to their mistakes! When that sales rep walks in or in talking to a fellow superintendent,

club owner, or green chairman... do we ever willingly admit to or confess to a huge mistake? Heck no... it becomes our little secret!! I will privately gnash my teeth, kick myself, or bang my head on the concrete... but I'll be dipped if I'll ever admit to anybody that I've made a mistake.

Does this sound familiar to you? If so, join me as we review a career full of missteps, mistakes, and Nixonian coverups! Don't deny yourself the chance to mentally come along on this cathartic journey through 20 years of golf course stumblings and bumbblings... as one guy opens himself up and admits and confesses to a few poor decisions along the way.

Our spokesman is... a humble, everyday mouthpiece who is truly representative of all that is truly good, yet entirely average in the world of golf course management. If you can't identify with our hero and see yourself making at least a few of these rookie or veteran mistakes... you are only kidding yourself! Everybody makes mistakes... it's just that some make more than others!!!

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So let's review the early years...

1) Do not spray fungicide tank mix 'A' over the top of fairway fungicide research plots 'B-G' when left in quasi-charge for the weekend. Dr. Worf seemed to understand that I was just a dumb college kid... Miller, however, was not quite so understanding!

2) Do not forget to watch out for fast approaching thunderstorms when night watering. It's a pretty scary thing to have a dozen or more sprinklers to disconnect... when suddenly your hair stands on end... and your attention is riveted on that huge bolt of lightning that illuminates the course like a stadium!

3) Never try to impress your girlfriend too much! Pouring a 'hot' water soluble fertilizer mixture directly over her landlord's annual flowers will usually result in direct phytotoxicity and lots of embarrassment for the fledgling horticulturalist!

4) Always remember to invite true friends to weddings... I'll never quite forgive myself for forgetting to invite Kay Morgenthaler... among others... to our wedding. That's right, macho men. Take the time to review and think about those important occasions in your life... do not dump on your fiancée and force her to make practically all of the arrangements!

5) Do not drink heavily during university registration week parties. It may lead to extreme sickness, intense hangovers, and major heckling from the crew... I do believe that I was once poured out of a car as I arrived late for work on a Sunday AM!! In hindsight... it is still a most pleasant and humorous memory!

6) Do not drink heavily during your bachelor's party... unless you're better able to hold your liquor than the average guy! This average guy ended up trying to crawl into the Weber grill... while exclaiming... "this thing is great, guys... what is it???"

7) By approx. age 40... stop the drinking... heavily or otherwise!!! Nowadays about two bottles of beer act upon me like nature's best laxative... and isn't it difficult enough rising super early on weekends without having to deal with any ethyl alcohol in the system??? Learn your lesson, man...

8) Make sure... above all else... that your rough is mowed and dandelions are under control before hosting an event... like the 1983 NEWGA Spring Clinic. As a rookie superintendent... I'm quite sure that I truly impressed Stan Zontek, Rod Johnson, and many others... with my horrible golf game and horribly conditioned golf course. I still remember Zontek saying that my tee shot was 'out in

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the cabbage again! That was truly a humbling day! Thank God that we now have these huge rotary rough mowers that keep things under control in the roughs!!!

9) Do not job hop... do not keep looking for greener pastures... do not bitch and whine... and please stay in place longer than 18 months at a crack. I basically had to move to Illinois in 1994 to escape the shaky reputation that I'd built for myself in my early years...

10) Remember always that Wisconsin... is no more beautiful than my adopted state of Illinois! I have learned to love the beauty of the endless cornfields, the stench, the craggy beauty, and the graceful gulls that one associates with the landfill mountains just east of town! This bit of advice comes from a guy who has been in the Land of Lincoln for 7-8 years now. If you doubt me or think me sentimental... think about living in beautiful Onalaska as compared to living on the fringes of those beautiful south ChicagoLand suburbs. Ah... Chicago!!

Admissions and confessions are so cleansing and liberating... whether recounting ancient history or more recent happenings... these days, my admissions and confessions revolve around the whole Spanish/English/translation thing. And yes, there are many enlightened people down here who admit and confess to their ignorance of the latino culture thing when they boldly state that "Hey, Pat, you speak pretty good Mexican!"

We like to think that we speak pretty good Spanish... when in reality, my Spanish sounds only slightly better than their English! I admit to making many language errors... resulting in little mistakes such as;

- pura gasolina* being filled into a weed whacker that requires gasolina mixtiada
- esa maquina se usa gasolina y no se usa diesel
- esa maquina se usa diesel y no se usa gasolina

Maybe amongst our successes we should admit to our mistakes, and confess our golf course sins a bit more. Then... at monthly meetings guys could have tons more fun roasting and toasting each other instead of taking

things so seriously!! Maybe more superintendents should admit to and confess to a few of their own whopper mistakes... such as letting fungicide tanks overflow due to distraction... or calibrating things just a bit off rate... oops!!! Or simply using a tad bit too much greens fert just before July Fourth weekend... and later admitting to self that reading the fert label would have been a good thing!

Inspire yourself as you help mow greens on a too early, too cold Sunday A.M. with nothing else on your mind. Think about some of the cute little magic tricks performed by yourself or your staff during the current season or in years past. Start a poll in your head about your own "Top 10" screwups... or 'best all-time whopper mistakes by the maintenance staff'... or best all-time boners by either a golf professional or club manager. It can be great fun...

As I've aged... I've also assumed lots of other fun responsibilities at this public golf facility. Part of the trick with senior management is to get other people to realize that it's not a heinous crime to make a few mistakes... if they're out there working hard, being creative, and being highly productive. The biggest mistake most people seem to make is to underestimate their own abilities... and then underperform as a result. The other trick with senior management is to make everybody... from the cooks to the greenkeepers to the cart kids... realize that the foundation for a solid professional career starts NOW... with the job that you have right now!!! And even if you're multi-talented like superintendents everywhere... you'll make mistakes. Then someday... you'll be able to make a few self-secure admissions and confessions... which will make your staff secretly chuckle as they discuss your foibles in a foreign language around the lunch table!!

If you can come up with at least a few admissions and confessions... and see the humor in your errors... then you can survive in this business like the old farts have! Don't be too public, though, about your missteps... you might end up like me... admitting to everything and confessing to things better left unsaid! 🌿



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