

# When the Going Gets Tough, the Tough Get Going

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*Editor's Note: It seems appropriate to complement the excellent original science-oriented articles in this issue with an article about management in our organizations. This article appeared in the Summer 2001 issue of Cornell University Turfgrass Times, Volume 12, Number 2, pp. 18-20. It appears with permission from the editor of CUTT, Prof. F. S. Rossi.*

We have often heard the cliché: "When the going gets tough, the tough get going." We do not question whether turf managers are tough. We know they are. We do

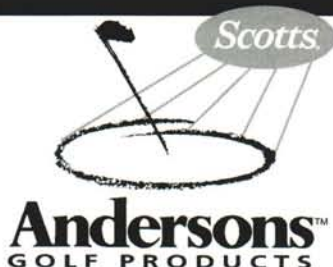
not question whether they are ready to get going. We know they are. The question is: What should a golf course superintendent or other manager of a turf business do to "get going" and where should he or she be "going?"

Let's start by looking at a business we can all relate to. This is a small business, like most golf courses and turf businesses, with a small number of employees where the manager provides labor, management and in some cases ownership. They have a similar dilemma about how to "get going" and where to "go."

The example is Myrtle's Diner. The diner has been serving meals for over 40 years. Myrtle and Frank started the diner in 1957. Their son George now has primary responsibility but rarely a day goes by without a visit by Myrtle. The diner has successfully supported Myrtle and Frank and now George and his family.

Recently, however, business has been declining. With the strong local economy have come difficulties in hiring competent cooks and wait staff. As a consequence, food quality and service has declined. A recent case of food poisoning

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added to the difficulties faced by Myrtle's Diner. A large restaurant from a popular national chain opened nearby a little over a year ago. Myrtle's Diner is under great economic pressure and George is feeling severe stress.

George is "tough" and ready to "get going." Consider two alternative strategies for George:

A. George could be "tough" by working long, hard hours. He could reduce labor costs and improve food quality by doing more of the cooking and waiting on tables himself. Perhaps he could get his family to work more as well.

B. George could be "tough" by focusing his energy on improving Myrtle's Diner and by carefully considering the future of the business. He could begin by working with the current staff to rekindle their excitement for this business and satisfying the diner's customers. He would focus on training, increasing employee satisfaction and recruiting. George would also begin a careful analysis of Myrtle's Diner's future to determine needed changes including dramatic changes like closing the diner.

Now put yourself in George's shoes. What would you do? The first choice might well have short-term benefits but would not likely resolve the underlying business problems. The second choice, while counter to most of our instincts to plunge in and "work" harder, has a greater chance of success. The second alternative would enable George to address the critical but extremely difficult issues facing Myrtle's Diner.

Many turf managers are in George's shoes. They have crucial decisions to make to conquer the current crisis, successfully complete this season and/or resolve longer term personal or business issues. It is easy and appealing to follow George's first alternative. Even knowing that the second

approach is correct, it is often not followed because of uncertainty as to what to do. How to implement George's alternative B is the topic of this article.

In times of change, managers and others must develop increased resilience. Resilience is "the ability to bounce back from the consequences of change." Change

experts including Daryl Conner, author of *Managing at the Speed of Change*, have identified five characteristics of resilient people:

1. Positive
2. Focused
3. Flexible
4. Organized
5. Proactive

Although each characteristic

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has unique qualities, none is mutually exclusive. Aspects of all five characteristics are needed for business success in the future.

### The resilient turf manager is positive

In a recent episode of the new TV series CSI, the crime scene investigators were solving a bombing at an office building. The culprit turned out to be the high school son of a fired employee. The son was so incensed by repeatedly hearing his father's bitter complaints about being fired unfairly that the son determined that it was his duty to "get even" with his father's former employer.

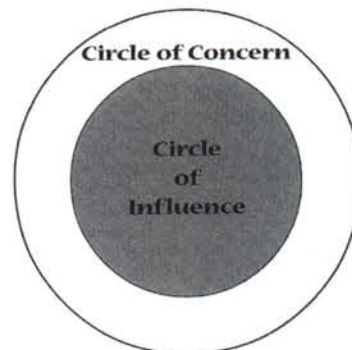
Although fictional, this story illustrates how dramatically both our words and attitudes impact ourselves and those around us. The father in the story had no idea

how his words and attitude were impacting his son; in this situation with devastating results.

If an individual is not positive about what he or she is doing – whether a golf course superintendent or a university professor – it is time to seriously consider a change in attitude or job or both. In fact, personal development experts are unanimous in the recommendation that each of us must consider making whatever changes are needed – including changing jobs – to develop a positive attitude about what we are doing. Each of us must seriously examine our attitudes for the sake of ourselves and for the emotional health of those around us.

One help in staying positive is to concentrate on things that we can influence rather than things over

which we have no influence. In the diagram below, the circle of concern includes everything in the white and dark circles. The dark inner circle contains only those items that concern us *and* which we can influence. Staying inside our circle of influence will lead to a more positive attitude.



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Weather, for example, is in our circle of concern but is not in our circle of influence. Dwelling on the weather only creates frustration because it is not in our circle of influence. In times of inclement weather, it is almost impossible to focus on the weather and stay positive. We can, however, move to our circle of influence by concentrating on making plans to be prepared when the inclement weather has moved on.

### **The resilient turf manager is focused**

The quote, "Without a vision, the people perish," originates in Proverbs and is used by motivational speakers and management consultants to illustrate the importance of vision to individuals, businesses and organizations. Most of the readers of this article are a part of business with a mission that involves turf.

What is your personal and course or business vision? Golfer or homeowner enjoyment? Community beauty or well being? Personal growth and development? Providing an environment for golfer growth?

We believe you know your personal and organizational vision. By more clearly articulating your vision you are in a position to clarify or even alter your mission. You may find, as have many turf managers before you, that there is more than one alternative that can fulfill the vision for you and your course or business.

One danger of not being focused on your real vision and mission is that you can get stuck and resist change when that change would improve your situation without deviating from your vision. You must continuously ask how important it is to your vision to do things a certain way, to use a particular technology, to work on a particular course or place of business.

We can all become more

resilient in regard to change if we know and focus upon what is really important – our personal vision, the vision of our family, and the vision of our course or business.

### **The resilient turf manager is flexible**

Dr. Peter Senge, a well-known professor at MIT, asks his students to view change as a biologist. This seems like an interesting analogy for those of us interested in turf, but what does he mean? Think of turf or another plant that is not growing well, perhaps it is wilted

or diseased. What do you do? Do you tell it to grow? Of course not; you figure out what is wrong and take corrective action.

When we find ourselves or others not changing, what do we usually do? We often tell ourselves or others to change. That would be equivalent to telling the ailing plant to grow!

Dr. Senge suggests that we should approach change similarly to how we approached the ailing plant. Focus on why we or others are not changing and then remove the constraints to change and provide need-

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ed support to enable the change.

What are some of those constraints? It may relate to our attitudes. We may be negative and need to become more positive. It may be that we are stuck in the outer portion of our circle of concern and need to move into our circle of influence. It may be that we need more information and need to take the time to collect, analyze and use that information.

The second part of Dr. Senge's suggestion is to provide support for those who need to change. For others that means encouragement and assistance. What, however, does that mean when we personally need support to change? We suggest that it means reaching out to your family, friends and colleagues and ask for their support in your efforts to change.

#### A concluding comment

You are likely reading this arti-

cle in the dog days of summer. You have been working too many hours and are becoming "burned out." What should you take away from this article?

1. Lighten up. Think about those things that are frustrating you that are not in your circle of influence. What can you do to move to your circle of influence? When you find yourself being angry, anxious, or frustrated, ask yourself: "What is it about this situation that I have control over?" This moves you back into your circle of influence.

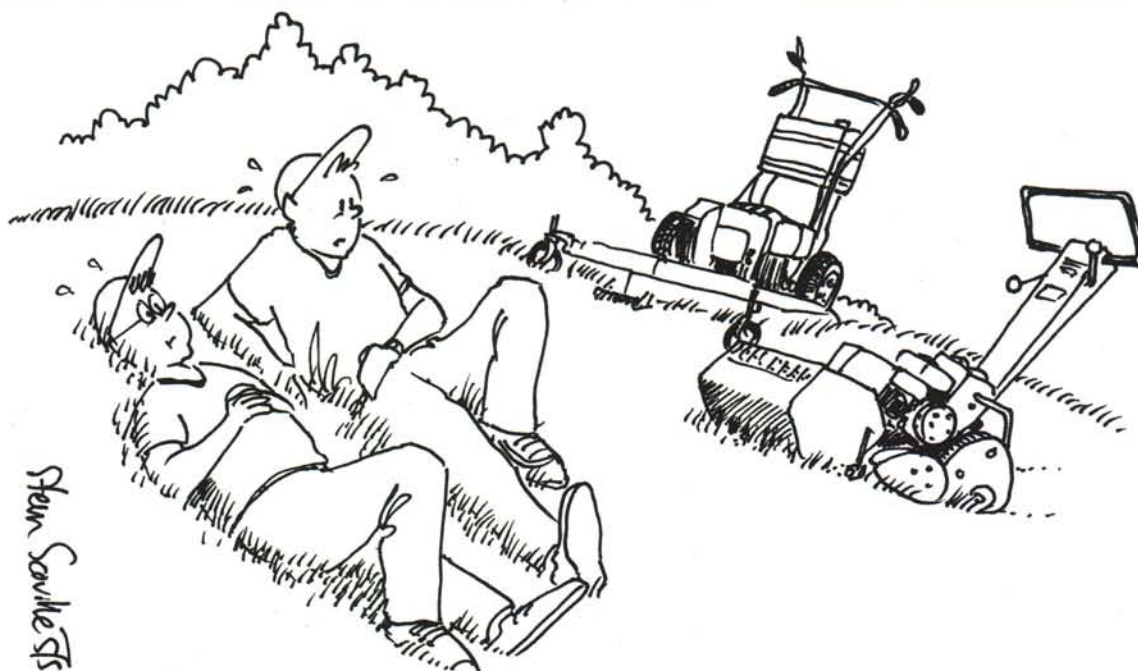
2. Be more positive. Think about the many great things that have happened already this summer. Start first with how you talk about things. Reframe them in positive words. A more positive attitude and behavior gradually comes with positive words.

3. Seek support from others. Think about issues you have that are troubling you or you are avoiding.

Stop avoiding them and ask for help in finding solutions.

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