

SHADES OF GREEN:

Time to Put On a Coat of Class

By JOEL JACKSON

Dress codes requiring mandatory coats and ties or jackets for local chapter meetings still have value for image enhancement of the modern superintendent. However, there seems to be a ripple of resistance to this long-standing tradition that's spreading across the land. There's no doubt that casual dress is gaining a foothold in the business and social world in which we live. Casual Fridays are popular at many companies nationwide. So does wearing a jacket and slacks instead of jeans and taking off a hat indoors have any impact on a superintendent's image? The answer is still yes.

In this age of declining participation at local chapter meetings, the dress code is often not enforced. Chapters need to either enforce the dress code, modify it or abolish it.

No matter what dress code a chapter has adopted — jackets or no jackets — it seems some superintendents and suppliers still don't get it. Even if jackets aren't required, people keep showing up in jeans, sneakers and hats. Some people refuse to wear ties, and others claim they don't own suits or jackets. Some wear their hats indoors, outdoors, upside down and backwards.

Some folks are just plain mavericks, while others seem to have simply never been taught the basics of etiquette and manners.

As much as associations want to be inclusive, maybe some of these folks need to stay home until they can learn to sacrifice a little individualism for the good of the group. You don't have to be a clone to wear a jacket and leave your hat in the truck.

These folks put chapter leaders in a tough situation. Nobody wants to tell a fellow superintendent that he or she needs to leave a meeting because he or she is not in compliance with the dress code.

I've never seen someone asked to leave a meeting because of that, but some of the older Northern chapters don't have any qualms about telling a violator to scram until he or she can dig up the proper clothing and stay for the mandatory dinner.

I agree with the old adage, "You can't judge a book by its cover." However, there are certainly some book covers that turn me off or give me an indication that I'm probably not interested in the content. Maybe that could be considered superficial. When I walk down the bookstore aisle and see the book covers, however, I get preliminary messages about their content.

It's not a fair evaluation of the plot or the writing, but I do get a sense about the book — a first impression. That's all a book cover can give me — an instantaneous image of what might be inside — and the message is sent immediately.

What message do you and your chapter send? It's likely that a group of professionals wearing jackets in a public setting sends the message that:

They are a group of people to be taken seriously.

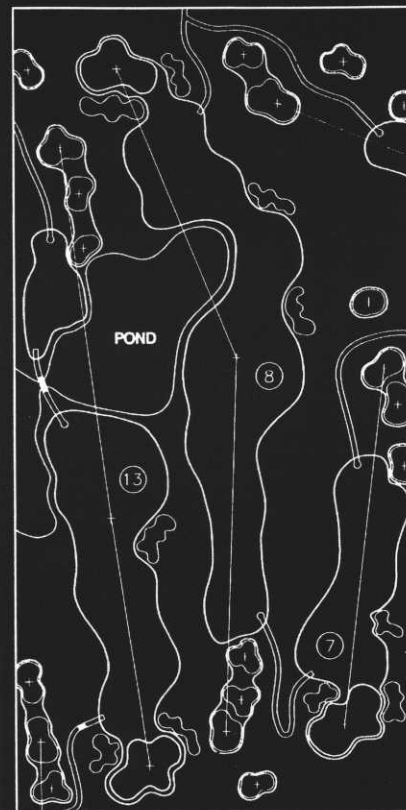
They are a group of people meeting with a purpose in mind.

They are a group of people showing respect for the host, the profession and its history.

Not wearing a jacket doesn't necessarily mean disrespect, but wearing one does elevate and promote an onlooker's perception by the very nature of the mode of dress.

It's a small price to pay for projecting a positive image about superintendents as professionals.

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