



In Bounds: Complacency

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(Editors note: The following column is an oldie but goodie brought back from the archives. A friend of mine encouraged me to reprint this article on complacency.)

A few years back I was visiting with a fellow tenured superintendent regarding the plight of one of our peers who had been let go. While counting our blessings he mentioned to me that, in our business, most often the demise of a superintendent was self-induced, or as he put it, "complacency equals the front door." Wow, what sobering words of wisdom.

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, complacency is the noun of complacent which means to be self-satisfied and smug. In the above-mentioned quote, complacency is interpreted as being self-satisfied to the point of taking a position for granted. In this case,

and in many, the superintendent had assumed that what he was doing was good enough because he was satisfied with his product. Unfortunately for him he failed to regard the demands of his players and thus failed to counter issues that demanded his attention.

Many in our business would consider my daily regime of cutting cups personally a bit retentive. However, how else am I going to really see the course from both an agronomic and player perspective? Of course someone else could be trained in the art of pin locations, but by doing this simple chore I am forced to visit every green, tee, fairway and rough complex on the course every twenty-four hours.

In the afternoon I am again out on the course with pen in hand or hand-held recorder to compile my "list." You know, the ever-changing assortment of big and little projects that need to be prioritized and then implemented. Sure, I could rely upon my capable assistants to do the task; however, it forces me to be in my member's faces as I travel the course with an

open mind. Along the way I ask questions, give answers and monitor the ever-changing conditions of the course. My membership is my greatest ally when it comes to limiting complacency. If I miss a step they let me know and you can be sure that I am quick to get back into line. But there is no contact if I am holed up in my office.

Other complacency busters include having my staff wipe down the benches,

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tee signs and ball washers every day. There is no better way to spot damage or chipped paint. And as crazy as it may seem, we Armor All the plastic wastebaskets monthly and the bunker rake handles mid-summer as well as during the off-season. And every day we paint a beauty ring around our cups. You can imagine the look on the player's faces when they witness these finishing touches. Pampered? You bet. Over the top? Perhaps, but it goes a long way to prevent the perception of "taken for grantedness."

The complacency concept can be applied to all aspects of an individual's life from the job place to the home front and even into personal issues such as health, both mental and physical. At work, rest or play, individuals have to be mindful of their surroundings so as not to become overly satisfied.

Reflecting upon my first marriage I can see that it was very easy to take my home life for granted. My mind set was that if I labored hard and did a good enough job at the club I would be rewarded at home.

And work hard I did, putting in 70 plus hours each week in the quest to create perfect playing conditions for my players. Unfortunately I became complacent in my family relations and suffered the consequences.

When was the last time you brought flowers home for your spouse? How many school-sponsored field trips did you attend during the off season? Have you sat down and visited with your parents recently? Does your dog get enough hugs? And when did you take time out and effectively RELAX, alone? Besides maintaining a close tie with loved ones, an individual must take care of himself or herself.

Out of college I weighed in at 155 pounds. A lean, mean, grass-growing machine! Eight years and 70 pounds later my body threw in the towel and demand-

ed attention. Not just physical either. Besides becoming complacent with my muscles, my mind had deteriorated as well. Thankfully I committed myself to some serious mental consultation and changed my life from disarray and randomness to a focused purpose. Through exercise, sobriety and inner reflection I was able to really "clean up" my act.

Now I'm not attempting to lecture anyone on how to live their lives, but from a professional and personal perspective I have seen many great people slip and slide down the slope toward complacency. Attentiveness takes dedication.

Awareness requires close observation. Responsiveness necessitates the reflection upon the whole picture, not just a second in time. To ride the crest in our profession, especially in this day and age of greater and higher expectations, golf course superintendents cannot afford complacency.

Whether with my wife and children, on the job, meditating or relaxing with a good book or fishing rod, my goal is to maintain awareness and truly be the best that I can be (to coin a phrase from the Army). I let my family know how much I love them every day. My employer gets 100 percent of my vocational attention. And when I take time to enjoy the gifts that life has to offer, I truly take a moment or two or ten or one hundred. My whole life is too short to be complacent. - JM