

FROM THE PUBLISHER



Is it the summer workload, or is there really disenchantment in the ranks? Recently I have had a number of calls from golf course superintendents and sports turf managers. They said their summer hours were playing havoc with their family lives. They felt unappreciated and lacking in the respect they thought they deserved. They lamented that they were underpaid and overworked.

After listening to the gripes for a while, I can see their point of view. It is one thing to own your own business and put in long hours. Hopefully it will be very profitable and you will reap the rewards. It's quite another to work for a corporation or municipality on a fixed salary.

I'm concerned. Are we beginning to see an exodus of professionals from the industry? Will the talented people leave for greener pastures? Such moves don't happen overnight; they evolve slowly into action. But if, in fact, disenchantment has set in, can those moves be far behind?

I look at a multi-million-dollar golf course or sports complex as I would view the physical plant at any large institution. It would be absurd to think that anyone would erect a 20-story building and not consider hiring a professional plant engineer to run the place. These qualified people would receive a salary commensurate with the size of the property they have to manage. They would also receive the respect their position deserves.

City managers, school administrators, presidents of golf clubs, and greens committee-men need to take a hard look at the professional turf manager. He has been entrusted with complete responsibility for millions of dollars' worth of landscaped property. Accordingly, his superiors need to respect the vital position a superintendent holds—and come up with a compensation package on a level with those enjoyed by other physical-plant managers.

Equally as important, they can't expect him to put in 16-hour days, seven days a week, or burnout will become a major problem. As more sports complexes and golf courses come on line, the demand for managerial skills will increase. If we lose these talented people they will be very difficult to replace. Perhaps it's because there is a shortage of top professionals that we are beginning to see more contractors being used in areas that were once the exclusive domain of the golf course superintendent and the sports turf manager. New companies are sprouting up, offering turf-management services on a contract basis.

Organizations like American Golf Corporation and Servicemaster offer programs on contract. Some sports arenas and golf courses use contractors for a complete renovation and rebuild. Others contract out the entire maintenance. In either case, we are seeing another niche being carved out. I am sure that some of those managers who left the clubs are now involved in these new enterprises.

This could be a way to go for professionals who experience burnout at one complex. The idea of being an independent businessman may appeal to them. There are pitfalls, to be sure: They will have to learn the business end of the business. They will have to learn how to use their labor corps most effectively and efficiently, because every wasted man-hour will cost them money.

I do feel that many of you turf professionals have most of the skills to begin with. Certainly you have the field skills; otherwise you wouldn't be in your present position. All of you develop budgets and work within those budgets, so many of the necessary business skills are already in place.

I believe our industry is changing, albeit slowly. I feel that the schooling and expertise you have developed in the field will put you in a position of strength in the months and years to come.

Now—how do we get the corporate executives and the bureaucrats to appreciate your very special talents?