

# IT'S A MATTER OF OPINION

Environmental issues and government regulations are making us reconsider old concepts and practices that have long been taken for granted. Following is some food for thought from three speakers who have opinions on how to handle the changes.

## Backing Into Professionalization

by STAN METSKER

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**“P**ROFESSIONALIZATION seeks to clothe a given area with standards of excellence, to establish rules of conduct, to develop a sense of responsibility, to set criteria for recruitment and training, to ensure a measure of protection for members, to establish collective control over the area, and to elevate it to a position of dignity and social standing in society.” (Herbert Blumer)

Everyone has heard of the ladder of success. On the top rungs of the ladder are representatives of well-recognized professions, including doctors, lawyers, and professors. On the bottom rungs are farm laborers, bus boys, and watchmen. All professions compete for a high place on the ladder because higher positions bring greater social recognition and, usually, a higher standard of living.

What does it take for a profession to move up the ladder? Edward Gross, author of the book *Work and Society*, lists six criteria for evaluating a profession. These are listed below, along with some editorial remarks about how they relate to our own profession.

1. There needs to be an unstandardized product, like a golf course.

2. There needs to be a degree of personality involvement, like my golf course.

3. There needs to be a wide knowledge of specialized technique, like what we're involved in on a day-to-day basis.

4. There needs to be a sense of obligation to our art. In other words, we need to be dedicated.

5. There needs to be a sense of identity to our colleagues. GCSAA, our professional association, fits that bill.

6. The profession needs to be essential to the welfare of society. This point may be more difficult to deal with.



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It would be easy to say that a doctor does a lot of curing, and is therefore essential to society. A lawyer might be a little harder to justify, but he does handle an essential service. In our own case, we provide a recreational facility.

When you go to a legislature and try to convince them that you are really important because you are providing this essential service, and you try to get legislation to regulate entry into your profession so that only qualified people participate in it, you get nowhere. So golf course superintendents have never been able to be officially certified or registered like engineers, doctors, or lawyers. As a result, we have been forced to accept a voluntary certification program.

There is another side to this, however. It's called the 'hurt' factor. In other words, doctors and lawyers can do a lot of harm if their activities aren't monitored and regulated. That, in effect, is how governmental agencies are finally looking at us. They have finally recognized that we can be harmful to the environment and to our employees. Regulations are pouring down on us and are really bringing us in the back door to legalization. We now are being recognized as important people. Even though we can't get in the front door to be officially certified or registered, all this attention to our profession might well help us move up the ladder of recognition and success. That's my main point.

In his book *The Sociology of Work*, Theodore Caplow lists four steps a profession goes through on its road to recognition and professionalization.

1. An association is formed to keep out the unqualified.

2. The name is changed, asserting a technological monopoly.

3. The association then asserts social utility, sets up public welfare rationale, and develops rules to eliminate the unqualified and unscrupulous. A Code of Ethics is enforced.

4. There is prolonged political agitation for recognition. Training facilities are directly or indirectly controlled by the professional society. Working relationships with other professional groups are strengthened.

It is clear that GCSAA is well on the road to professionalization for golf course superintendents and recognition for its members. It is not a process that can happen overnight, but the prospects are bright for our profession moving up the ladder of success.