

Teaching Young Dogs Old Tricks

February 11, 1997, Las Vegas, Nevada

FOR THE 16TH CONSECUTIVE YEAR the annual Green Section Education Conference was held in conjunction with the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America International Turfgrass Conference and Show. This year more than 1,600 people attended the Green Section's program on Tuesday, February 11, at the Las Vegas Convention Center. Joe England, Chairman of the Green Section and member of the USGA Executive Committee, welcomed the group, and James T. Snow, National Director of the USGA Green Section, served as moderator for the afternoon's program of 13 speakers who addressed this year's theme, "Teaching Young Dogs Old Tricks."

DEDMAN CURVES

Reflections on learning, earning, laughter, and keeping a good balance in your life.

by ROBERT DEDMAN

HAVE YOU heard the difference between a fairy tale and Texas tale? A fairy tale commences once upon a time and a Texas tale commences.

I tell a lot of jokes along the way. I guess, in great part because of that, I'm perceived by a lot of people as being a jokester. I'm perceived perhaps by a lot as just being a big joke. I think it's so important in life that we always take our assignments seriously and the problems seriously, but never limit ourselves too seriously. Whenever we do, in my judgment, we can get so tense and intense that we lose our sense of humor. And, quite frankly, we can burn out too quickly.

We also lose the positive mental attitude it takes to seek and find solutions to big problems. We lose the people articulating skills that it takes to build a consensus necessary to solve the big problems. We also lose the leadership skills that it takes to implement solutions for people. In my judgment, nobody wants to follow a sourpuss. Everybody wants to follow somebody who is positive, sees solutions, and is trying to effect them. So the thrust of my remarks here today will have, hopefully, plenty of humor in them.

There are several more beautiful things about humor. I think that the



Robert Dedman

more we laugh, the more we live. There's another beautiful message in humor and laughter. To have it yourself, as a rule, you have to give it to someone else. We laugh in almost direct proportion to the degree we give laughter to others. So it's such a beautiful message — the more you give it, the more you live.

There are just a lot of reasons to have humor; it's the best quality any executive can have, and all superintendents are executives. If you make it fun and have a sense of humor, you won't burn out. You will have people who will emulate you, follow you, and will want to work for you and with you forever.

Today, I'm going to talk just a little bit about the importance of keeping your balance. I know superintendents have good educations and are the most conscientious people in the golf industry. We do surveys in our own company, where we have several hundred agronomists, and they have higher educational levels and technical credentials than we have in any of our other disciplines, and we have more than 26,000 people in our business. We have the longest term employment with superintendents as partners; they stay as employed partners longer than anyone else, and it's that kind of a glue that holds our company together. So that I know that with all the tensions that can happen in the golf business, superintendents can have high stress levels because they're highly conscientious and highly intelligent.

So I'm going to talk to you about keeping your balance, keeping it all in balance, and looking after *all* of your life, not just your business life or your golf superintendent life. I'm going to enlist the aid here of this four-legged chair that, in my judgment, can make a better speech than I could ever hope to make.

It's very important to keep your balance. A chair just sitting there makes a statement in and of itself, that if any of the four legs were broken or not

looked after, the whole chair would come falling down. I submit that if you don't look at every element of your life, you'll come tumbling down just as truly. I mean by that, you should not only look at your business life, which all of you are highly conscientious about doing, but you should look after your home life, your love life, and your sex life.

I might observe very quickly that if all three of those are the same, than it obviously saves a lot of time. But also you ought to look at your other lives, too, to stay balanced and to live out your whole life with a lot of happiness and fun in it. That would include your athletic life, your church life, your civic life, your social life, your cultural life — all of the various parts of your life. You need to do it through budgeting and time management. Planning. A chair speaks to the importance of staying balanced.

I'll name each of the legs on the chair to add a certain amount of continuity to my remarks. **P, L, A, and N (Planning, Learning, Attitude, Nice)**. In other words, do it by planning and weekly time budgeting.

I realized very early in life that there are 168 hours in a week. If you put 56 hours a week in bed doing whatever, eight hours a night, you have another 112 hours working out of bed. You can use those hours any way you want to. If you use 60 hours of gainful endeavor, either working at your club or on your course, or studying how to be a better superintendent, or even just playing some golf to help your knowledge of golf on the course, then you still have another 52 hours to do other things. And I submit that 52 hours properly deployed is a lot of time. How much time during a week do you dance, do you go to church, or do you make love? You think of all of these things and I'll say very quickly that 52 hours a week, properly deployed and time budgeted, means that you're not overworked when you work 60 hours a week.

I mention a 60-hour work week knowing it's larger than the standard. The difference between people who work 40 hours a week or less usually work for people who work 60 hours a week or more. Usually executives are people who work 60 hours a week or more across the board. And usually they get paid more per hour and they work more hours, 1½ times as long, so they usually accumulate more earthly resources than those who work 40 hours a week or less. But more impor-



The Fazio Course is one of three golf courses belonging to the Barton Creek Conference Resort in Austin, Texas.

tant than that, they have less time to spend their money so they have a propensity to accumulate it, invest it, and end up with better estates. They have more freedom and fun, places to go, and they look after the education of their children, and have a good time in life. So I really submit that the important thing is to do time budgeting.

Now planning is something that we do in our own company. We have all these little ditties: proper planning prevents pretty poor performance. You know, plan your work and work your plan. Plan for the best, pray for the best, and work for the best, but plan for the worst, too. Obviously, superintendents have to do a lot of planning. You have to plan for the worst, too, because the pumps do break down, the water source does get contaminated, sometimes you get some bad fertilizer or

chemical, and sometimes one of your people makes mistakes in how much fertilizer they apply, and sometimes the pumps don't work after the fertilizer has been put on.

I've had all of these things happen through the years. We've burned some greens or burned off some greens and had to start over. There are a lot of things that can go wrong, and when those things happen, you have to have plans on how to handle them. I could talk interminably on planning, but you'll be happy to know I won't.

The second leg of the chair is learning. The more you learn, the more you earn. The more you learn about your business, about how to handle and to work with it, how to keep your course better for less money, the better you will do as a golf course superintendent. You will be at the better courses, get



The Daufuskie Island Club and Resort, located off the coast of Hilton Head, South Carolina, is a new property in the collection of more than 260 CCA properties.

better compensation, and you will be better at keeping your staff.

It's very apparent in life that the more you learn, the more you'll earn. But right behind that is another thing — the more you learn, the more you'll live, which is probably a bit more important. It's not just your business life or your life as a golf course superintendent, but your total life. We know it's not a dress rehearsal we're going through; this is probably the real thing. We had better enjoy it and have a good time with it.

I think the more you learn about everything, the more intently you live. You can enjoy music without knowing anything about it, but the more you know about it the more you experience and live it. You can enjoy art without knowing anything about it, but the more you learn about it the more intently you live and experience it. You can enjoy wine without knowing about wine. But the more you know about anything, the more intently you experience and live. So keep learning about everything, including your own industry.

I wish somebody profound had said that trees are living sculptures by God as constant earthly reminders of his continuing love for man. Because if you see these trees as sculptures as you drive down the road, then you're really living. They're not just blobs on the horizon. If you really know when the different plants foliate and defoliate, then you're really living, experiencing the seasons, and know what's going on. So I will reiterate again: The more

you learn, the more you earn, but more important, the more you learn, the more you live.

The third leg on the chair stands for attitude. If there is one thing that you could give your children, more important than anything else, it would be a positive mental attitude. With a positive mental attitude, you will always win. With a losing or negative mental attitude, you will always lose. So, how do you do it?

I think the best way to get and keep a positive mental attitude is to see the humor in life, tell and receive lots of jokes. I remember as a young man I saw a cartoon one time that showed a couple of guys in chains. They had long white beards, and they were emaciated, their clothes were tattered, and they were on a ball and chain. They were obviously in a dungeon. There were cobwebs around and some rats over in a corner of the picture. The only caption under the cartoon was one saying to the other, "Now here's the plan."

If you have a positive mental attitude, you can always come up with a plan, you can always turn a lemon into lemonade, you can always make a success out of something. I've found there's a key to every lock, and I think humor helps when you get into tough times. You've heard all those ditties. If anything can go wrong, you know it will. Nothing is as simple as it seems. Everything takes longer than you think it will. How about Murphy's corollary — if you have a piece of toast with butter and jelly on it, the proba-

bility of it falling jelly down are directly proportional to the price of the carpet. Well, if you can just see the humor in these things.

There are a bunch of other little ditties. Somebody said, when things get really tough at times, remember, it always gets darkest just before it gets completely black. Somebody said one time to cheer me up, things could be better or things could be worse, so I cheered up and sure enough, things got worse. All those little ditties may not sound like they help, but they get you in a frame of mind where you learn. I remember to the effect that somebody said there's a light at the end of every tunnel. I cheered up because I thought I saw one until I realized it was a train.

The most important thing you can do with a positive mental attitude is set up win-win relationships. Make sure you and all your people win. Usually those who do a better job in life are the ones who win both ways — they win personally and they win professionally. In boy/girl relationships, if one is running at the expense of the other, the loser is going to cut off. In man/wife relationships, if either one is running at the expense of the other, as a rule, the relationship is terminated traumatically for both. It's true in friendships. When you think about it, you're an idiot if you ever expect more from your employed partners and your subordinates — better loyalty than you give them. So you're always an idiot if you think they owe me and I don't owe them anything.

The more you really work in life at setting up win-win relationships in every way, in every facet of your life, the more you're going to win. It really will be a winning experience for you. I have a few more ditties here about other professions. The developer's creed: a dollar borrowed is a dollar earned; a dollar refinanced is a dollar saved; a dollar paid back is a dollar lost forever. Or the CEO's creed: debt that does not come due before I retire or sell my stock is equity. See, you poke fun at everybody. The banker's creed: a rolling loan gathers no loss; you can't write it up, because it doesn't have a due date. You can poke fun at everyone here. The one that I've always enjoyed is the syndicator's creed: you know when you start a syndication, the syndicators have all the knowledge and the experience, and the investors have all the money. Three years later, obviously the syndicators have all the money and the investors a lot more experience.

The last leg on the chair is *be nice*. In my own case, my wife's name is Nancy, so it's easier for me to say the last leg on the chair ought to be somebody's name that you share your life with. If your spouse's name doesn't happen to be Nancy or something like it, and you want to tell the story to your kids for them to have a balanced life, you can tell them the last leg on the chair stands for N or be nice. I have a sign across my desk that says, "Keep your words nice and soft, just in case you have to eat them."

Remember when you were a little kid and your mother said, "Now play nice and be sure to share your milk and cookies with your friends." Well, that's profoundly good advice; be nice and learn to share. If you don't learn to share in life, and that's everything in life, you can get turned so inward and all you ever think about is I, me, and mine. You can get turned inward so badly that you'll be shriveled up on the outside and hard on the inside — like a prune — and that's obviously not good. The more you live outside of yourself and the more you're a giver, then the better and the more fun you're going to have in life.

Interestingly enough, the best way to be a success in business is to surround yourself with givers, because you'll always live with them. They won't be trying to figure out how they can cheat you, how they can not give an honest day's work for a great day's pay, how they can not go above and beyond exceeding members' expectations, as our motto states, and exceeding your expectations is one of ours. If you are a giver, it's easier to attract givers, and givers attract givers. So if you'll be a giver in life, you'll always succeed.

If you are a taker, I think all you're surrounding yourself with are other takers, and you'll always wonder why nothing is working right. It's who you associate with in life that is going to determine your personal and professional life.

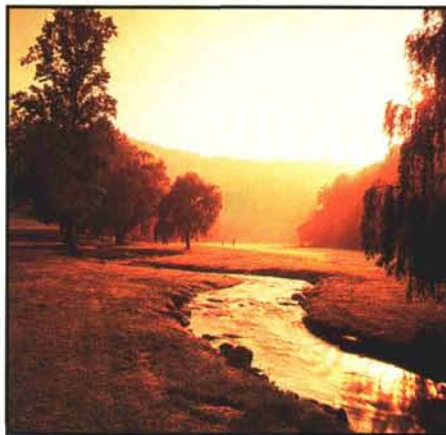
I'll wind up here very quickly by quoting a couple of philosophers. At one time I made what I thought was one of the best speeches in my life, and when I got through and asked my wife what she thought about it, she said, "Well, it was a great talk, but you overlooked several good opportunities."

"Opportunities to do what?" I asked. She said, "To sit down."

You'll be happy to know that very quickly I will do that.

But I will give you some profound advice from two great philosophers. The first is Yogi Berra. Yogi said, "When you come to an important fork in the road of life, take it." You're going to think that's not very profound, and it might not be, and I may have attributed a bit more to it than it really warranted in Yogi's mind when he said it, but I think he's trying to say, you're all leaders. When you're faced with a decision to make, make it. Don't waffle on it. If you don't make it, someone else will do it for you.

If you're at a fork in the road and you just sit there, you'll probably get run right over. If you take either fork, you have a 50/50 chance of being right. No



The Cascades Course at the Homestead in Hot Springs, Virginia, is another CCA property.

matter how important any decision is in life, there's a rule that it is just the beginning of a series of decisions. The sooner you get on with making them, the quicker you can rectify them if you haven't made it 100% correctly the first time. Obviously, the more you learn about things, the probability is that you'll make the decision correctly the first time and the more decisive you'll be. When the staff comes to you and says, "What do we do here?" they're looking to you as the decision maker in your operation.

The other philosopher had a bit more substance to what he was saying. Plutarch was a great Roman philosopher. He said that only a fool learns from his mistakes; a wise man learns from the mistakes of others. If you have the positive mental attitude we're espousing here today, you can continue on. A brilliant man not only learns from his mistakes, but more importantly, from what he's done right, and even more importantly, from what others have done right. That's where the more knowledge you get, the more

you can learn how somebody else faced the problem and did it correctly the first time. When you make a mistake, you know, you still don't know what will work, all you know is what didn't work. So you still have to figure out what to do and you need to talk with somebody, consult with somebody, do the studying that you can continue to do in lifetime learning so you'll know how to do it right the first time. That's why Emerson said, "Hitch your wagon to a star and you'll go very far." Get role models and a good education, because the more you get, the more probability you'll have of making the decision right the first time.

Obviously, I get really turned on when I get among such a kindred group of people. I love golf and I love superintendents. I wish, if there is such a thing as reincarnation, that I'm reincarnated as a superintendent. I'd love to work on golf courses all day long, being out with the birds, trees, the green grass, and the flowers. All of that is one of the most important fulfilled things you can do in life and in our own business.

We often say it's fun to be in the business of selling fun and interestingly enough, the more fun we have, the more money we make. And, interestingly enough, the more money we make, the more fun we have. So those things are reciprocal of each other. I'll reiterate, we only pass along this way one time, so listen, enjoy it, and have a lot of fun in it. I think of those great words from Longfellow:

*Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And departing, leave behind us,
Footprints on the sand of time.*

Obviously, the golf courses in this country and the world are some incredibly beautiful footprints in the sands of time. The institutions like Pinehurst and Homestead will go on forever, as will the USGA, thank goodness. And all of you are making some beautiful footprints in the sands of time. You flatter me by asking me to be with you here today and with your kind eyes.

ROBERT DEDMAN is chairman of the board of Club Corp International, based in Dallas, Texas. Club Corp owns and operates 260 properties, employs more than 26,000 people, and has built its reputation on providing high-quality service.