

"If you think you can, you can. And if you think you can't, you're right."
- Henry Ford

Killing time?

I hate articles that start with quotes. This article is about your attitude and doing what it takes.

The kind of greenkeeper you are will depend upon your attitude about things. It will depend on what you care about. Your knowledge, skill, imagination and standards will all have their impact on the condition of your course. Ultimately, the condition and presentation of the turf is a reflection of you.

Our attitude is what we think and feel about things. It stems from our values and beliefs and it guides the way we behave. Our attitudes help us form internal goals and they power our drive to achieve them.

Open up

Attitudes can be held about anything. The strength of feeling will depend on the subject. Our own attitudes are unique but they can also borrow from those we admire. They can be positive and negative in their outlook and impact. It just depends. They are formed as we go through life and they can change over time or depending on mood. We can master our own attitudes if we need to, primarily by learning, to help us achieve.

Attitudes stem from what we believe and what we value. Our beliefs are what we perceive to be true and they come largely from experience but they are also formed through education. Our values are what we view as being good or right. These are our principles and they help determine our goals in life. For example, I value the qualities of the finer grasses and believe that it is possible to establish their dominance in golf greens. I am driven to write articles to try to encourage the same attitude in you. While you are still reading I have a chance. I must tell you that success is not just about having an over-riding technical knowledge it's also about having the right attitude when implementing it. This is what the Disturbance Theory boils down to.

The relationship between attitude and behaviour is not straightforward. External "intervening factors" can have an impact on our response to feelings. We don't live in isolation. For instance, the situation may preclude the desired course of action

(through lack of resources), unforeseen events may have a negative impact (bad weather) and other people may be influencing the situation (golfers!). You might not be able to proceed in certain situations. You may not want to proceed. People also commonly have conflicting attitudes about things that might also hamper proceedings. Valuing the finer grasses as well as a verdant green colour won't get you very far. Some people aren't interested.

You will need a clear consistency of attitude to be properly focused on goal achievement. The greenkeeper needs to be clear in his values and beliefs to have a chance of producing the desired results. This works in all areas; course presentation, construction work, surface playing quality, staff motivation etc. It's all about you.

Inspiration

Attitude has its biggest impact on motivation. Our internal drive to achieve. You will need a strength of conviction coupled with an objective focus will achieve your goals. Encouraging the finer grasses needs a plan based on sound principles coupled with a strong will to succeed. A positive attitude drives an ambition to move on to bigger and better things. A positive attitude can be inspired from peers, consultants, articles, books, your successes and even failures. It feeds itself with the right will.

Aspiration

For UK greenkeeping, the "bigger and better thing" is more sustainable putting surfaces. Progressive thinkers demand the establishment of quality surfaces with the finer grasses. We are talking about putting surfaces comprising an even blend of bents and/or fescues with minimal annual meadow-grass. Establishing this kind of equilibrium gives high quality surfaces with reduced vulnerabilities. They are easier to look after and cost less to maintain. You know the arguments.

To achieve this goal you may have to alter your attitude about turf management. The Disturbance Theory technique is simple but slightly different than the common belief, so to pull it off you might need to change your ways. Essentially, all you have to do is move the environment away from constant aggressive surface preparations to one more settled with occasional controlled beneficial stress. To succeed you will have to stick to your newfound principles for an uncomfortable while in the face of imperceptible changes. Be clear on this, we are not talking about stressing-out your greens, that theory is now redundant, we are talking about gradual change without deterioration. But you must remember that the transition to the finer grasses can be slow and it can test your resolve. You will need to stay positive and fully focused at all times.

Copping out?

I know 90% of UK greenkeepers already value the finer grasses. Everyone would take a bent/fescue sward tomorrow and be proud to show it off. So why aren't they more commonplace? Where are we failing?

I don't believe that our past failures are due to lack of greenkeeper knowledge. All the greenkeepers I work with are very knowledgeable and highly skilled. Maybe it's the way the knowledge is being applied. We should not discount the strong impact of possible "intervening factors" throwing us off such as; golfers who value colour, fertiliser salesmen who value their bonus or advisors who value the easy option may be to blame. I don't know the answer but there are probably a lot of things at play. You know the answer. I do think that a lack of greenkeeper belief is a big factor in our failure to properly establish the finer grasses. A lack of supportive evidence may be a reason for this.

Who do you trust?

If you want to favour the finer grasses you have to believe that it's possible. If you want to know how to go about it there are a number of sources available. There are true believers out there who are willing to help. It might be time to learn from people who know what they are talking about. You will easily sniff-out the charlatans.

No compromise

The Disturbance Theory essentially advocates traditional greenkeeping values but tries to make them workable in the modern age. Don't be under any illusion that it doesn't require full commitment. Traditional minded greenkeepers who already value and strive for the finer grasses tend to have a no-nonsense down-to-earth attitude. The intervening factors don't get a look-in. A hard-nosed and strong willed conviction to make things better isn't easily swayed from the path. The trick is to manage the transition without adversely affecting the playing quality and the path is clear. Get your method right.

Help!

The two developments in recent times have been; the Danish model of encouraging the fescues; and the move by The R&A to champion a wider adoption of their techniques to promote better and more sustainable surfaces everywhere. The Danes are already walking the walk and I'm sure that they'd be delighted to talk to you about what it takes. The R&A are putting their money where their mouth is and funding research into this area to come up with workable proof. Their website (www.bestcourseforgolf.org) is also very informative. If you need fully convincing, help is at hand. The STRI are back.

To do what it takes you just need to have the right attitude. The technique won't test your resolve because the greens get better immediately. It's actually very simple. If resources are an issue then spend your money wisely. For the vast majority of Clubs, however, it's just a case of reallocating resources. Now is the time to take your fate for a ride. Positive attitude is a good vehicle and it tends to get you there in the end.

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