

Let's Give Credit Where Credit Is Due

Oversimplification of the reasons for success, or failure, hinders your ability to learn and teach others.

by JAMES FRANCES MOORE

NO DOUBT ABOUT IT — we are definitely in an age of endorsements. It seems as if every product has signed on a spokesperson. Maybe you, too, would like to see your name in lights. There are two basic requirements that must be met in order to attain this particular brand of notoriety.

First, endorsement candidates must have achieved some degree of success in their industry. Note that there are two types of *success* sufficient to qualify you in this regard. Ideally, your success is due to outstanding personal achievement that has resulted in your name and face being widely recognized by those who might be tempted to buy the product you are helping to pitch. Famous actors and athletes are the most obvious examples of this type of endorsement success.

The second type of success that qualifies you is the fact that you are working for a well-known company or organization. Such endorsements invariably include pictures of the company (or golf course, in our business) in the background in a manner that makes certain the potential customer knows the product is in use at this course. The strongly implied message is, "This course is successful because they use our product." In these cases, the individual's endorsement role is merely to serve as proof that the product is in fact being used.

Assuming you qualify in terms of the success level you have achieved, there is a second requirement you must meet in order to embark on your endorsement career. You must be willing to give total credit for your success (and/or the success of the course you manage) to the product. The message must be clear that without this product, you would not be

successful and neither would the course you manage. This product made the difference!

It is obvious that I do not think highly of this endorsement trend in our industry. I have no problem with sharing information about products (both good and bad) and, in fact, I feel it is vital to today's golf course management, with so many new products that have little or no unbiased scientific research to back them up. What bothers me about endorsements is the willingness to give so much credit to a single product.

I recently completed 12 years of visiting golf courses across the ten states of the Mid-Continent Region of the Green Section. During that time, I also had the opportunity to visit courses in many other parts of the United States as well as in other countries. Not once, not a single time, did I visit a successful course or golf course superintendent who attained that success solely as the result of the purchase of a single product. No fertilizer, water treatment, cultivation tool, pesticide, soil amendment, or even green construction method deserved such total credit.

In my opinion, those who are willing to promote the concept that a single product can have such influence do our industry a disservice. They help fuel the hope that by simply buying the right product the green will not have to be rebuilt, the irrigation system will not have to be updated, a well-trained crew with good tenure is not so important, and money can be saved by hiring a superintendent who has limited experience and professional training.

The most important lesson I learned in traveling the Mid-Continent Region over the past 12 years is that the basis of success for golf course management

programs (and therefore the most successful courses and superintendents) is actually very simple. The programs rely most heavily on basic turfgrass and business management concepts instead of wasting time searching for the alchemist's formula to turn lead into gold. Please note that I said the programs are simple — not easy. Establishing a sound program by implementing proven management practices requires a tremendous amount of hard work and long-term commitment on the part of the superintendent, the leadership of the course, and the players. Prime examples of these types of management practices include: providing good growing conditions, traffic control, making time for proper soil cultivation, adhering to planting dates appropriate to the turfgrass species, planting a grass suited to the climate, providing good drainage, proper irrigation, and providing good working conditions, just to name a few. Notice that most, if not all, of these goals can be obtained by every course, regardless of budget.

The temptation to seek an easy alternative to commitment and hard work is nothing new — just ask anyone who has ever been on a diet. The temptation often becomes overwhelming to a Green Committee faced with major problems on the golf course. As the industry of golf course management grows steadily more technical, and promises of *miracle cures* more prolific, our employers and our industry are depending on us to commit to long-term improvement instead of the "quick fix."

JAMES FRANCES MOORE is Director of the Green Section's Construction Education Programs.