

Hi everyone.

So this week, I had a tweet that went somewhat viral, or about as viral as you can expect any tweet in the turfgrass industry to go.

[In the tweet,] I've voiced my frustration with the — maybe the perception — that the quality of a golf course is a reflection of how much work you put in.

When [golf course] conditions suffer, it means that you're not working that hard, when in fact I think that's the total opposite.

As I went on to say — that, you know — when the conditions are the worst, the green-keepers are usually working the hardest, and when the conditions are the best, often, it comes quite easily in — and it's not too much work.

But, you know, this kind of — this frustration of mine — it kind of touches on a deeper mental health issue that I think affects a lot of people in the industry.

And they say that we should talk about our mental health, so let's talk.

So I mean, I love my job.

You don't write 200 blog posts about growing grass for a job that you don't like.

Now, even though I'm passionate about my job, it doesn't mean that sometimes I don't struggle mentally, or feel a lot of stress.

And sometimes, like, this year especially, feel like quitting my job on multiple occasions.

This year was, maybe, one of the hardest years yet.

With another you know extended drought and an irrigation system that was designed to run 21 days not 121 days.

A season [where] my stress levels have been high.

Eventually, you know, the challenging weather outstrips the ability for the crew and the resources that you're given to produce acceptable [playing] conditions.

So, we work a little bit harder, but still the conditions on the course suffer.

And this is this is one of the most frustrating things to me.

You know, you work the hardest, and you're not rewarded with good conditions, and that's kind of what inspired that semi viral tweet.

So, I've been in search & rescue for 10 years now, and one of the, you know, one of our number one priority is safety.

And it's not just what you'd think, like physical safety, like falling off a cliff or drowning, it's mental health — the safety of our brains.

And, in particular, critical incident stress.

So, after a stressful call-out, we enact our critical incident stress management procedures to help members deal with that stress that they might be experiencing, and hopefully prevent further mental health issues down the line.

This year, this summer, right in the middle of the stressful golf season, we had two back-to-back [search & rescue] calls [that] were pretty stressful, but nothing out of the ordinary.

I mean if somebody asked me to do those calls right now, I probably wouldn't have any anxiety about them because they were textbook.

We were successful, but following these two calls, I started feeling pretty bad.

And, you know, you go down the critical incident stress management checklist for signs and symptoms that you might be suffering.

And I had them all.

You know — lack of sleep, anxiety, depression — a feeling, of like, doom and lack of self-confidence and self-sabotage.

And, you know talking with a lot of the search & rescue members, and my friends, and my family, and other superintendents — you know, trying to figure out what would what would cause it.

And in particular ...

My wife — she said to me, she's like, you feel like this every summer.

She's like, I don't think this is search & rescue related, and she was right.

I mean, it was job-related, it was grass-related.

You know, I have critical incident stress from growing grass.

You might think that it's silly to be so stressed out about grass.

I'm not really here to defend my emotions or the way I feel.

I don't really care what anybody else thinks.

When you work so hard for so long to nurture a living thing, and it dies, even if only temporarily, it's hard.

I just want to understand why I feel this way, and maybe figure out a better way to deal with it in the future.

So the quality of a golf course depends on a few things.

Obviously, the skill of the green-keeper — it's part of it — as is the amount of resources available, how much money you have, and how much staff, and [...] the property that you're working with

If [the golf course] wasn't built right, there's not much you can do.

But, I think the most important thing that a lot of people overlook is weather.

If the weather doesn't cooperate, it doesn't matter how skilled you are or how much resources you have, you simply will not win.

So in order to understand things, I like to take extreme cases.

So, let's take Augusta for example.

They have some of the best green-keeping staff in the world.

They have what is seen as unlimited resources.

But even then, they still do not choose to fight Mother Nature.

They hold the masters tournament at a time of year when Mother Nature is most likely to cooperate.

So, they've had all winter [...] for that cool season grass to mature.

It's still cool enough for that grass that they have.

You know, it's optimally timed so they have chosen not to fight.

Sometimes though, they still lose.

I mean, if you, if it's a warm winter time, and the azaleas bloom early, I mean, all that work from, you know, they're huge horticultural staff, I mean, it's essentially wasted for the tournament.

Nobody gets to enjoy the fruits of their labor and, I mean, we've all seen pictures of Augusta National now, we have with the internet pictures of Augusta nationally.

In the summertime, I mean, it [Augusta] does not look good.

The greens are on life-support.

All of their ryegrass on the fairways [are] dead.

It's patchy — the fairways are patchy.

I mean, it [Augusta] doesn't look much better than my course does in the summertime.

Maybe that's the biggest difference between Augusta national and everybody else.

It's that everybody else tries to fight Mother Nature.

We try to produce pristine conditions all year round.

And, as a superintendent, you know, when the going gets tough, we think maybe if we work a little bit harder, the conditions will improve, and our stress will go down.

Here's why I think that's total bullshxt.

And, it reminds me of one of my favorite turfgrass quotes of all time from the late James B Beard.

He [said] professional turfgrass culture is one of the few areas of applied plant science where the ultimate goal is perfection, which is seldom achieved — when reached, it is fleeting, and therein lies the ultimate challenge.

This is why most green-keepers [...] love our job so much — there's always room for improvement, and no two days are the same.

Beard goes on to say — upon approaching perfection in turfgrass, the more evident their imperfections become, the more difficult and costly they are to correct — and therein lies the intrigue.

Or I'll add, [perfection in turfgrass is] the source of stress for most green-keepers.

So, even though increasing resources like budgets, equipment, and staff might improve conditions on the golf course, and it might make your golfers happier, it won't help your sanity.

As conditions improve, your stress will be more about the smaller things.

One of the things that I joke about with some of my friends is how horrible [it] would be to work at a golf course where you had no excuses — where everything that you needed to produce perfect conditions was given to you.

You know, being from a small golf course, with a low budget and minimal staff, I mean, I have got lots of excuses.

And, you know, that just kind of helps that idea helps, kind of, me find a lot of happiness where I work, because I know that the grass is not greener on the other side — that working at a course with more resources available isn't going to reduce my stress necessarily.

Even knowing this, I still struggle.

I mean, when you look at social media — when I share in social media — you only want to share the things that that work, the successes.

And, when you see nothing but success, and you're not necessarily experiencing nothing but success, it's hard.

I mean, it's hard, it's really hard to tune into twitter and see all of everybody's perfect grass all the time.

And that's one of the reasons why, I mean, I really appreciated the « tweet-the-ugly-hashtag » this summer, which was just superintendents to sharing some of their, like, less than ideal conditions.

Don't take this the wrong way.

I mean that semi-viral tweet that I made might seem like I'm blaming golfers for the source of my stress.

But, I mean, the reality is that I have some of the most supportive golfers probably in the industry at my course, and they fully understand, you know, the situation that our course is in and what to expect.

[This] means, sometimes, we have fantastic conditions and sometimes they suffer a little bit due to the weather.

I think, maybe, 10 per cent of my stress is golfer-related and 90 per cent of it is internal.

You know, everybody knows.

I mean, I just explained how, you know, a lot of the success we have depended on — is dependent — on mother nature, but a lot of it is skill, and I think a lot of us think that, you know, when the conditions suffer, we take a disproportionate amount of the blame for the or the, you know, the excuses or whatever it is.

I think a disproportionate amount of that blame as a reflection of a lack of skill and knowing that it's the weather.

I mean, we think we need to work harder to convince ourselves, mostly, not just the golfers, but convince ourselves that maybe it's not because we're not useful or we're not good at what we do.

Pressure that I put on myself — I think a lot of other green-keepers — put it on ourselves.

We see the [golf] course as a reflection of who we are and our value as professionals and as individuals.

I think coming to this realization is one of the reasons why I have so much job satisfaction, and why I love working at my course, and why I love working here for so long, and why I probably will continue love working here for so long.

You know the tough days are a small percentage of what I experience, and, for the most part, it's fantastic.

So, while very little of my stress is directly related to golfers, I think it still doesn't hurt to focus some energy on helping golfers to understand why the conditions on the course are the way they are.

I mean, this all goes back to planning and budgeting.

Green-keepers aren't stupid.

We're not the idiot that's portrayed in movies like Caddyshack.

We're serious professionals.

We know what it takes to produce those conditions.

Hopefully, we can even easily communicate that to our golfers, but we also need to communicate that if conditions aren't ideal, weather conditions aren't ideal, this is what happens.

And I mean, leave the decision-making up to the golfers.

If they want to have great, you know, or the perfect playing conditions, or a certain set of conditions, or when the weather is extreme, it's easy for us to let the golfers know what resources we need to make that happen, and if we can't, if they can't give us the resources, then this is what they can expect.

It's tough, I mean, I don't like making excuses.

I mean, and but I think it's essential to help manage the golfers' expectations before we try to manage our own internal expectations.

I saw this great interview last week on a new YouTube channel by T-Jay Creamer where he interviews Paul Robertson.

He asked Paul Robertson how has he survived 20 years as a premier golf club.

Paul replies, you know — it's about communication, and it's about, you know, under-prophezing and over-delivering.

I think we need to do the same thing with our personal expectations.

But it's also, you know, equally is important to do that with the golfers.

We need to help the golfer understand that more resources and more skill isn't going to always mean better conditions.

Golfers sometimes use the Augusta example.

Sometimes there's nothing you can do but limit the damage and, you know, keep the damage to a minimum, and wait for better weather.

One of those things that, kind of, helped me keep my sanity a little bit ...

I mean, I could keep 20 staff busy on my course, except I have 3, including myself.

So, knowing that, it kind of helps me understand that, you know, after I work [an] honest hard day of work, I mean, I can keep 20 more people busy.

Me staying extra — is it really going to help ?!?!

And, I ask myself — is this really going to make a difference to the work that I'm doing, the stress that I'm putting [on myself], like , physical stress that I'm putting on myself — and can i, you know, is there a point for me staying late — and often there isn't, I mean, unless there's like a big irrigation break, water gushing into the ground.

I mean, I go home after 8 hours.

A lot of what I talk about is working smarter not harder.

I mean, that's kind of one of the main themes of my blog, maybe, but even then, even though conditions have improved on my course since I started here, I have more stress than ever.

And, this is why I think it's important for us, you know, maybe, I need to take my mental health a little more seriously.

I think we all should, probably, take our mental health more seriously.

And, I think the first step, obviously, is to talk about it, let's talk about it, but, I think, we also, I think, we need to go do more than just talk.

I think we should take more mental health more seriously.

And, you know, we can deal with it personally talking with friends, e-mails, private messages.

I mean, I do all of that a lot, and it really helps, but I think that, you know, just like the British Columbia search & rescue association, we deal with mental health on the association level, and we have resources available to help the members understand what critical incident stress is, what just job-related stress is.

What are the symptoms, the signs, why might you be feeling it.

Here are some tools to help you cope, and here are some resources that if you aren't coping that we can give you to you know help prevent the bad things that can happen with mental health issues.

I find one of the most useful things, though, is going to see another superintendent, and when I go there, I, all I want to see is — show me your dead grass.

I don't want to see your good grass — show me your dead grass because I want to feel better about mine.

You guys want to see some dead grass ?!?!

Well, I think it's important that, you know, first step to a lot of us take is just talk, with talk it out with others, and share how we're feeling with others.

I think that's an irresponsible approach to, or an irresponsible to think, that's the only thing that we should do.

I think that that's similar to saying — oh you got a broken leg, well figure it out for yourself.

When you're dealing with mental stress or mental issues, often you don't realize that, you're sure, you're, that you need help, and you need help from the outside.

And, I mean, we all heard of the people who have, you know, commit suicide, and we had no clue that they were suffering.

And, so, this is why I think that we need to have more of an organized approach to ensure that our peers and, you know, people that are members of a same profession, that we're looked after.

So, thanks to everyone who's, you know, reached out to me this summer.

Phone calls, e-mails, texts, private messages, not private messages.

It really means a lot, and, you know, some of my favorite times this summer was I was talking to other superintendents on the phone.

When I'm stressed out, like I was this summer, I mean, I try really hard to not be an asshole, especially to my friends and family.

And, I mean, you know, being negative to them isn't going to make them feel any better, and it's not gonna help anything.

It's just gonna make everything worse so, you know, if I was a bit of a jerk to you this summer, sorry about that.

Thanks for watching.

I really hope that, you know, by breaking down the issues that I have, in this way, will help me prevent, you know, suffering for me in the future.

And maybe next year, I'll be, like, oh a little bit better.

I also hope that maybe it helps you deal with some of the stress that you deal with that your job, and so, if you are, and if you are, feeling this kind of stress, job-related stress, feel free to, you know, send me give me a call.

So, I mean, e-mail, send me a private message [...], and if you think this might help somebody else, please share.

Thanks.