



10 Rules for Leadership and Balance

WITH CHRIS TRITABAUGH

Written by: Joel Johnston, Superintendent, West Haven G&CC. Photos taken by: Meg Matera, Meg Matera Photography

In the Superintendent Universe, Chris has long been a leading advocate for mindfulness and balance. Never taking himself too seriously, Chris is a big proponent of being rested, empowering staff, and knowing when to go home.

He began his talk helping the attendees understand Acute Stress VS. Chronic Stress. Acute stress can be experienced daily, but for the most part, can subside when the stressful situation is resolved; opposed to chronic stress, which is a consistent sense of feeling pressured and overwhelmed over a long period of time. Chris emphasized that understanding our stress can play an instrumental role in limiting and controlling it. With that said, he began to discuss his 10 Rules for leadership and balance.

10 RULES FOR LEADERSHIP AND BALANCE

1. Know the puzzle you are putting together.

This principle references the idea of having a set of guiding principles. These values could be agronomic such as, maintaining creeping bentgrass over *Poa annua*, preserving the integrity of USGA putting greens, or more philosophical ideologies like providing championship level conditions daily or limiting disruptions to member play. Having these principles can provide clarity and direction when the mid-season distractions inevitably arise.

2. “Clean up the Kitchen!”

Cleaning up the kitchen is symbolic for the idea of prioritizing your “team at home.” Chris provided the values he applies to his family life.

- Be home when you say you will be home.
- Help around the house, put out the garbage, put the sheets on the bed and clean up the kitchen.

- Stop and get groceries on your way home, even when you just want to go home. If you forget, go back out.
- Take pride in being a great parent and partner.

Following these values can help to make your family a great team.

3. Getting it Right VS. Being Right

This idea presented was that sometimes we are wrong, that can be hard for many to admit. Can we learn to embrace that member criticism may sometimes be valid? If we recognize and accept this, it can provide an opportunity to grow. Ultimately the members want the same thing we do, to make the property better and provide a better experience; it is our job to execute that, not to be right!

4. “A Pizza Party a Culture does not Create.”

Culture should be based on shared responsibility and ownership. Getting cool gear and having pizza parties should be a fun additive to a culture, not the foundation of one.

5. Beware of The Circle.

Chris references ‘The Circle’ to a Disney experience. The susceptibility of getting caught up in an experience and losing reference points is similar to a season on a golf course. It is very easy to become so focused and task-oriented that we go overboard and burn ourselves out. Burnout can make all aspects of our lives more difficult, and measures should be taken to avoid this. Culture in our industry is changing and long days of overextending ourselves are no longer a badge of honour.

6. Strive to Develop Character and Ability, Not Status and Power.

Who are you, rather than, what are you.

This is a powerful concept. With the long hours and investments we make keeping a golf course alive, it’s easy for us to let our jobs define who we are. If we make the effort to focus on our process of growth and being a passionate driven person, our goals will naturally come to fruition. His advice was to “prepare for the job you want by mastering the job you have.”

7. Be a Leader.

The first time I met Chris was in 2018, when another OGSA member and I were visiting the Toro headquarters as well as Hazeltine National. During this visit, Chris spoke about empowering with roles rather than tasks.

“Being handed a role, and the responsibility that comes with it instills a great deal of confidence in people, especially young people. Rather than just completing tasks, they become part of achieving the result. When given the responsibility to oversee a result, it’s human nature for them to want to improve their area of oversight through innovation and improved efficiency.”

He proceeded to share a ‘big brain’ vs. ‘multiple small brain’ concept by drawing it out, demonstrating that many people collaborating and sharing unique ideas is far more powerful than one person assigning tasks. This hinges on listening, being the last to speak, and being adaptive. We simply paint a picture of a final product and allow our staff to figure out THEIR process.

8. Give Yourself a Break - No one will do it for you.

Chris shared some excellent pictures of places he’s taken time to rest, including the 2023 Ryder Cup. Without rest, we don’t think as clearly and the effects can even be seen physically. We need to know our bodies and listen to them. No one knows when we personally need rest like we do. Not everyone will begin hanging a hammock on their property or napping in the office. This may equate to going home early now and then or trusting key staff more on weekends.

9. Practical Action over Organization.

By using our time to take practical action rather than organizing, we can get things done faster. Being organized is a great habit, however things rarely go exactly as planned. We deal with many factors such as constantly changing and unpredictable weather. Learning to accept that things don’t always go according to plan and accommodating these obstacles by taking concrete and deliberate steps can help us to achieve goals.

10. Walk.

I remember when Chris first shared the idea of walking the course on Twitter. It garnered quite the attention. Many felt they didn’t have time. After putting this in practice, you might notice that you see the golf course more, and as your members see it. This can help set priorities for maintenance. The other byproduct of walking the course is the exercise. Not only does walking increase our cardiovascular health and burn calories but it can also improve our overall mood and mental health.

We appreciate Chris’ insight into these rules that have no doubt played a massive role in his success and quality of life. Every time I converse with Chris or hear him speak, my number one take away is his accessibility; always willing to help others, you can reach out through email and social media. Chris embodies the idea of giving back. He has a genuine interest in everyone he speaks too and wants all to share in and benefit from his balanced mindset. ■



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