

The Work - Life Balance

Chuck Barber, St. Charles Country Club

This article started out as a few pages about how we in the golf course management position manage the “Work/Life Balance” we hear so much about. I went so far as to write a page or two with the help of some of MAGCS members that were kind enough to help out.

Then November 22nd, 2013 came and went like all the days before it, and it changed my focus. November 22nd is an important date for many of us, especially as we pass the 50-year mark on John F. Kennedy’s assassination in Dallas, 1963. This date, November the 22nd, means so much to me that it provided me with a perspective I have carried with me each day since. This date, November 22nd, formed the way I chose to view the world from that point on, at home, at work, from each vantage that I would gaze upon the world. November 22nd. In 1993.

Where were you when: The Challenger disaster occurred in 1986, when two separate airplanes struck the World Trade Center in 2001, when JFK was assassinated? These dates are significant and immediately take those who remember them back in time, if only for an instant. I can tell you that on the evening of November 22nd, 1993 I was watching television in the basement of our family’s Western Pennsylvania home.

I was 17 years old. My sister was in the midst of her sophomore year at Harvard (yes, Harvard) University. My father, a 30 year salesperson for a steel company, was on the road selling, well, steel. My mother and I were at home. It was a school night, a Monday if Google is right, and it was early in the evening. Our home was pretty big and it had a HUGE basement so when the phone rang upstairs (cordless phones hadn’t made it in to our home yet) I had to run to get it before the machine picked up.

My friend Brian greeted me with a “Hey, what’s up?” that indicated nothing special. I thought it was odd he’d call as late in the evening as he did but responded with the typical, “nothing, what’s up with you?”

“Are you sitting down?” Brian asked. There was nowhere to sit within cord’s reach from the kitchen.

“No”. I was anticipating some difficulty with Brian as his home life was not without difficulty. His problems were nothing serious but from time to time things became tense. I guessed that he needed an ear to complain to. I was wrong.

“Jason was killed in a car accident today” That was the next, and last, thing that I heard over the phone in that conversation. I went downstairs, told my mother what happened, and then I punched a hole in the door to the laundry room with my right hand.



My close friend Jason.

Jason was a very close friend. We were the type of friends you have for the rest of your life. We both had a lot of acquaintances. He and I were friends. As it turns out the only thing I could do for him instead of stand up in his wedding someday was to help lower his casket in to his grave

There are 5 stages of grief and loss. I will not bore you with the list but just please believe me when I say I experienced them all. I grew up in a loving home where I wanted for nothing. I had no

mechanism to deal with this type of loss. I was devastated, I remember being inconsolable.

In time, I was able to talk my way through my feelings with my parents, my friends and Jason’s family. The final stage of grief and loss is acceptance. This is a gift not afforded everyone but I remember very clearly accepting that Jason was never coming back. From that point on I had a new appreciation for living. I

have viewed each day since then from that prism.

Someone recently told me that life is a lot like a roll of toilet paper: The closer you are to the end, the faster it goes. All potty humor aside, there's a lot of truth in that. There are only so many seasons we get out on the course. We are only allowed so many sales calls, site visits, construction projects and committee meetings.

At this point in my career I don't look forward to the season being over. I can look back and see what worked, what didn't, where we hit a home run and where we struck out. Life must be lived forward but learned in reverse. As 2013 comes to a close I find myself lamenting one less summer, one less chance to 'figure it out', one less opportunity to have fun doing a job that I love. Yes, there's much to do in the winter months but it's not quite the same when the game of golf is front and center every day.

I seem to be reminded more frequently than I would like that perhaps in another 20 years or so I might not be so enthusiastic about going to work every day. I hope that's not the case but I can't focus too much on the distant future. Therefore, I choose to enjoy today. I tell young people in high school and college that whatever it is you decide to do, you had better enjoy it. We all have the rest of our lives to work so it would be counterproductive to go to work and be miserable.



The Barber family at STCCC

I think of Jason still. My memories of him strike at odd times and when I least expect it. The pain of his loss has subsided. The sadness in his passing is still fresh even all these years later. It's hard to imagine that it's been 20 years since his passing. I suppose the only way I could ever hope to honor Jason's memory is to get the most out of the days I've been afforded. Both at work and at home. And I guess that's the balance I'm trying to find. @

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