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HERE'S YOUR SIGN

I adore Bill Engvall, the “Blue Collar Comedy” comedian. He’s less well-known than his compadres Jeff Foxworthy and Larry the Cable Guy, but no less funny. Engvall has a common-sense approach to life and an amazing ability to laugh at himself.

His signature routine is “Here’s your sign.” It sounds goofy to those who haven’t seen him, but he’s basically saying if you ask a normal question and get an incredibly stupid answer, you deserve to wear a sign that says, “I’m an idiot.” He metaphorically hands them out to the many morons we encounter in daily life.

Here’s a classic bit of Engvall to demonstrate my point: “It’s like before my wife and I moved. Our house was full of boxes, and there was a U-Haul truck in our driveway. My friend comes over and says, ‘Hey, you moving?’ Nope. We just pack our stuff up once or twice a week to see how many boxes it takes. Here’s your sign.”

Well, I’m reminded of the need to be smarter than the average redneck as our industry goes through a significant correction right now. Frankly, it’s more than a correction, and – you can quote me on this – the overall golf industry as we know it is going to continue to be in the crapper for the next two or three years.

To be more specific, courses that continue to conduct business as usual are going to flail and/or fail during the next 36 months or so. Anyone who believes differently should be bitch-slapped immediately with a five-iron.

So, is your place conducting business as usual and just wishin’ and hopin’ things will change? If so, and you’re not taking personal or professional action to change things, here’s your sign.

Allow me to offer a few signs that you have problems and it’s time to reassess, get your resume in order and maybe get the hell out of Dodge.

The owner or general manager keeps the overall financial position of the facil-

ity secret. Do you receive the entire P&L, or do you receive only your part of it? Are you kept out of revenue discussions? Is the club putting up new drapes in the ladies card room while you’re inexplicably being told to cut your fungicide budget? Are you being asked how much those new walk-behinds you fought for would be worth on eBay? If so, here’s your sign.

Unless you’re a genius superintendent whose course is on the U.S. Open rota or you have compromising pictures of the club president, don’t pretend you or the facility are immune to the problems the entire industry faces.

The facility’s marketing budget is cut to the bone. How, exactly, do you think you’re going to reverse the downward trend? Is the Member Fairy going to fly into your bedroom and put them under your pillow while you sleep? Will Tiger Woods drop by unexpectedly and hold a press conference to declare your course is the greatest he’s ever played? You can be providing the finest conditions in the world for the dollar, but unless management is telling people about it, you’re screwed. It’s a death spiral. Do you believe you can compete against 16,000 other suppliers without marketing? If so, here’s your sign.

The good members are bailing faster than a half-drowned sailor on a leaky lifeboat. You know who they are. They’re the good ones ... the members or regular players who care about the facility but who sense something’s not quite right anymore. They’re the ones who stop to talk to you, know your name and have legitimate inter-

ests in what you do and how you do it. Do you think the facility will be just fine without them, as they resign their memberships to go other places? If so, here’s your sign.

The management team isn’t talking with one another and everybody’s pretending nothing bad is happening. Let’s see, you work at an upper-tier club in Detroit, and most of your members are auto executives. Or, you’re at a high-end daily fee in Phoenix, and most of your players are in the speculative real estate business. Yet, the obviousness of the dilemma goes unspoken. If no one’s speaking up to suggest it’s time to change your business model, shouldn’t you just keep your nose to the grindstone and assume that everything is hunky-dory? If so, here’s your sign.

You are vaguely aware (or you know specifically) malfeasance is occurring in the organization. Let’s face it: There are highly placed thieves in too many facilities. Some of you know someone above you in the organization is stealing. Embezzling, cooking the books, misappropriation – call it what you will – but it’s a felony, and ignoring it won’t make it go away. So, you can turn a blind eye to someone else’s criminality and everything will be OK, right? If so, here’s your sign.

You’re sure you’re irreplaceable. You think everyone unanimously agrees the place wouldn’t be the same without you and they couldn’t possibly ever find someone better (or cheaper), could they? If so, here’s your sign.

Sure, I’m making light of the situation, but I’m also hoping to shine a light on the facts. This is a serious time for our nation and business. Unless you’re a genius superintendent whose course is on the U.S. Open rota or you have compromising pictures of the club president, don’t pretend you or the facility are immune to the problems the entire industry faces. It’s time to make a serious assessment of your employment and future. If you want to commit to your current position and this industry – as it is right now and will be for the next few years – be realistic, be proactive and be businesslike. Otherwise, you might be wearing a sign. **GCI**