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## BEING YOUR OWN BOSS

**O**ver the course of my three decades in this business, plenty of things have changed.

First, the technology has obviously evolved. Second, the business has definitely grown – probably too much. Third – and many of you might not believe this – recognition of what you do has improved dramatically.

The number of articles about superintendents (or greenkeepers or conditioning or the environment or whatever) written by local papers or stories done by TV stations has jumped. I'm not sure GCSAA or anyone else is doing the metrics, but my gut tells me that many more golfers actually understand who you are and what you do.

I'm guessing it's getting easier to introduce yourself to a stranger at a cocktail party. I can't tell you how many superintendents over the years recounted how they'd get a blank stare when they met someone for the first time and told them their occupation. Today, golfers and even a few non-golfers are far more likely to have a glimmer of an idea of what your job entails without referencing "Caddyshack."

That's why it's a bit ironic that I now find myself in the same position. I'm shocked at how often I'll be chatting with a longtime industry friend at a conference or someplace and they'll eventually – and usually sheepishly – ask: "So, Jonesy, I know you write these columns that piss people off, but just what in the hell else is it that you do anyway?" Ack!

So, for the record, I'm a consultant. What does that mean? If you look in the "Modern Business Dictionary" under the word "consultant," there's a picture of me wearing a pair of ratty gym shorts and a Kansas basketball T-shirt, barefoot, Marlboro hanging from my mouth and pounding away on my outdated, beat-up laptop in my "home office" in

the garage. Not a pretty picture, huh?

The real definition of a consultant is someone who learned a lot of stuff from one or more serious jobs, left/got fired and decided to peddle knowledge or connections for a living instead of actually working. That's pretty much me.

Of course, I also do a lot of speeches and seminars where I get to see you guys and hear what's on your mind. That's just about my favorite thing in the world, because you always teach me more than I teach you.

So, I have clients ranging from small non-profit associations to humongous companies. I fill in the blanks in their industry knowledge or marketing capabilities. It's interesting, it's different and it's a chance to be my own boss.

I run into superintendents all the time who tell me how much they envy the fact that I do my own thing. They adore the notion of not having a GM, a green chairman or an owner giving them bad direction, distracting them from their priorities or otherwise messing with their heads. I'll bet you're no different. "Hey," you probably think every once in a while, "I could bag this job, go out on my own and be a consultant!"

Before that idea worms its way to far into your head, consider the positives and the negatives of working for yourself:

**Positive:** It's terrific not having anyone looking over your shoulder. Your choices are your own and you can name your own schedule for the most part.

**Negative:** There's no one to blame when you screw up royally.

**Positive:** You can aggressively build your own business.

**Negative:** You have to do that while also keeping the clients you already have... and you will occasionally lose one, particularly in an economy like this one.

**Positive:** You get to work with a diverse set of clients – many of whom are facing challenging circumstances – and see how they function from the inside out.

**Negative:** As Ron White, one of my favorite comedians, says, "You can't fix stupid."

**Positive:** You get to keep what you earn.

**Negative:** Except the enormous pile of greenbacks Uncle Sam wants every three months.

**Positive:** You get to work in a home office and wear your pajamas and slippers all day.

**Negative:** There's a lot to be said for showering before noon, shaving daily and actually interacting face-to-face with the occasional human besides the UPS guy.

**Positive:** You are recognized and paid for being an expert.

**Negative:** You are regularly forced to humbly admit you don't know everything.

**Positive:** More time with your family and time for what you love.

**Negative:** No downside to that.

As I write this, I'm a few minutes late to tie on my old football cleats and head out to coach a bunch of fifth- and sixth-graders who know me only as Coach Jones. I started doing it years ago when my sons (now 17 and 13) were in the program and I stuck with it. Even though my kids are now in high school and middle school (and still both playing ball), I've stuck with the little league coaching. Why? Because I love being part of those kids' lives... and because I can.

The reality of being your own boss is a mixed bag at best. But, if it's feasible and you accept the realities, the rewards are tremendous. That said, it's still nearly impossible to explain what you do at a cocktail party. Oh well... **GCI**