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## RUNNING SCARED

When I was in journalism school, I once included a line in an article that stated something stupidly obvious (e.g., “The ice was very cold”). My professor struck it out and wrote “NSS” next to it and gave me a D or something. I asked him the next day what NSS meant and he explained I’d written a “No Sh\*t Statement.” In short, it’s something you read or hear that makes you say, “No sh\*t.”

Well, here’s a NSS: Things today are not what they once were in our happy little industry.

We are collectively paying the price for the big party we had for about 20 years when we all blithely bought into the idea that golf would grow forever. Now, we find ourselves slightly screwed in so many ways.

I’ll offer two more NSSs as proof:

- **There are far too many courses.** There are still nearly 15,500-plus courses competing for about the same number of rounds (and less revenue) despite 150-200 closings a year. If I found a magic lamp and the genie inside offered to grant me three wishes, I would ask him to make about 2,500 of the worst-run, worst-conceived and worst-financed courses vanish and solve this problem instantly. (Then I’d ask for \$1 billion and infinite supply of Ben & Jerry’s “Chunky Monkey”). But, since there doesn’t appear to be a magic solution to the oversupply problem, it’s something we’ll need to live with and manage through for at least another decade.

- **There are way more potential superintendents than there are jobs.** The churn rate on jobs is, by my estimation, lower than it’s been in decades. In the good-old, bad-old days, idiots were building courses as fast as possible and people left good jobs

for better jobs with some frequency. Now, a super is likely to be in the same position for 10 years. That’s partly because there aren’t any new jobs, partly because fewer supers seem to get fired on whims these days, and partly because you are hunkering down and sticking with a mediocre or bad job.

But that means, at best, maybe 1,200 real superintendent jobs a year come open at any type of facility (by my estimation, about a quarter of all courses are family-run, pitch-and-putt type deals, or others operated without a turf pro). And only maybe a third of those are really good jobs that pay well and offer some measure of career reward. That means there are about

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400 real jobs a year in play. If you’re trying to stay local – as most are – the number of opportunities gets very small, very quickly.

And then there’s the delicate matter of age. I turned 50 this year and many of the guys that I “grew up with” in this industry are about that age now, too. They’ve largely been successful, moved up the ladder and many have even been in their “dream job” for 10-15 years. They’re comfortable, making six-figures and well-established at their facility. Maybe too well-established.

Unfortunately, dream jobs turn into nightmares when the boss utters those dreadful words, “We’ve decided to make a change.” It may be money. It may be stupidity. It may be because the super has simply worn out his wel-

come. Could be lousy weather, lousy communications skills, lousy politics, lousy new GM...it’s just a lousy deal.

It seems to happen most often to my friends in the 50-something category. Too often, they never hear the bullet. It comes out of the blue for them even if others around them sensed it for months. You get comfortable or you just choose to ignore the warning signs. Either way, you’re unprepared.

I’ve asked tons of “mature” superintendents about the fear factor lately. Are they running scared? Some will smile quickly and say, “Nope...I’m good.” I worry about those guys.

Others will admit they are...and they’re not taking anything for granted. They stay around the club more. They pay attention to little things to make sure small stuff doesn’t turn into big problems. They manage budgets to the penny. They keep their ear to the ground to listen for the muffled jungle drums of member discontent.

Either way, it sucks. Either you’re compartmentalizing and ignoring the risk or you’re doing your job from a position of fear.

This isn’t me writing about some big megatrend in golf. This is me telling you to be very self-aware right now. Measure your strengths and weaknesses carefully. Honestly assess your position with your employer. Here’s one more NSS: Unless you have naked pictures of your boss with a sheep, you cannot assume you have total job security in today’s climate.

But, all that said, running scared is no way to go through life. If you believe you bring value to your position, act like it. Making decisions based on fear is no way to make decisions. Don’t let that dictate how you work and live. The safe thing is not always the right thing. **GCI**