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DING!

People ask, “Pat, how do you think of new crap to write every month?” I wish it was a rational process whereby I consider the pressing industry issues, prioritize them by threat level (“DEFCON 5” or “Pucker Factor 9”) and construct a reasoned essay blaming it all on the GCSAA, Johnny Miller or Donald Trump.

Instead, I write almost all of my columns at the last possible second based on some tiny, random thing. I will sit and scour my brain in a desperate attempt to remember any one of the dozen things that set off my “column alert” in the previous month. I’ll be someplace and someone will say something interesting and – “Ding!” – this little “your-Hot-Pocket-is-ready” bell sounds deep in my brain. Column!

This month, I had to email my pal Darrin Batsky to remind me of the brilliant thing he’d said that made me stop in my tracks and tell him, “That’s a column, dude!” Fortunately, his memory is still worth a damn.

A couple of weeks ago, I was talking with Darrin and a bunch of guys waiting to get on a bus to go see the Carolina Panthers take on the New York Giants as part of Jacobsen’s national distributor meeting. My expectations for the game were nonexistent (much like the Panther defense that night) and I was more interested in shooting the poop with David Withers – their new prez – and the rest of their growing team.

Earlier, I’d done video interviews with Darrin, Mark Clark and several other guys who’ve recently joined the company as tech reps. The boys in Orange are serious about fixing the nagging supply chain issues that plagued them too long and, among a lot of positive steps, they’ve hired a group of well-regarded former superintendents

to get out in the field and work with customers and distributors. Frankly, after scratching my head about Jacobsen for many years, it’s exciting to see them engage their warp engines. It’s good for everyone, even the boys in Green and Red, because it energizes and pushes the iron market.

I interviewed the new field guys about making the jump from super to sales (look for that on our website) and – spoiler alert! – they all basically wet themselves describing how awesome it was NOT to be obsessing about the weather every moment of the day. Seriously, they got all teary-eyed trying to describe it. Turfhead Nirvana, I guess.

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But, we also talked about how the transition impacted their family life. The bottom line: It’s a different version of work-life balance where travel often takes the place of being stuck at the course. Later, when I picked up the course vs. family conversation with Darrin, who’d been near the top of the private club heap in Pittsburgh for many years before a bad summer took him down, he ingeniously quoted Will Rogers and said: “Everybody talks about work-life balance but nobody ever seems to do anything about it.”

My first thought was, “Dammit... I wish I’d said that!” My second thought: “Ding!”

But the interesting thing is as much as I loved the way Darrin said it, I disagreed a little. Conventional wisdom has forever held that work

always wins with supers and things like summer vacations, weekend relaxation and any interests other than the care and feeding of turf were verboten during the season. But, my sense is that’s changing. I can’t prove it with fancy research, but it seems like the pendulum has swung more toward balance.

I have 1,200+ Facebook friends and most are superintendents. There were plenty of pictures on there all summer long of happy families of Northern superintendents frolicking on the beach, going to Little League games, running marathons and otherwise NOT killing themselves at work even during the busy season. At the very least, it’s clear it’s no longer a stigma to admit you need to relax and see your family during the crazy months.

What accounts for this? The Boomer work ethic has increasingly been eclipsed by Gen X and Gen Y attitudes that emphasize balance. Technology lets you manage from afar better than ever before. And as a consequence of the downturn, there are way more veteran assistants backing y’all up leaving the place in capable hands.

To that last point, one silver lining on the dark cloud that’s hovered over our business is that it’s now actually more common to leave the course behind more often, see your family and lead a life that’s “normal.” True?

Even if it’s not true, it outta be. I know that for a fact because my girlfriend had an even better quote when I told her this whole story about how tough it is for you guys and the toll it takes on families and, especially, their wives. She said: “You tell those guys one thing: they better remember that if Mama ain’t happy, nobody’s happy.”

Ding! GCI