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## YOU GOTTA BELIEVE

**M**y oldest son is now a college sophomore. He's like most college kids: partly focused on classes, mostly enjoying life on campus. And, like most, he really doesn't have a specific career in mind yet. He's trying different classes and seeing what appeals to him and hoping to find that one thing he's really passionate about. As long as he doesn't plan to hang around in college for seven years, I'm totally cool with him being a bit directionless. How many 20-year-olds legitimately know what they want to do with their life?

Last summer, the nice folks at the Cleveland Metroparks Golf Division were desperate enough for extra labor that they hired him to work at their cluster of courses on the west side of town. He actually took to it like a pig to slop. They had him mowing greens on a triplex a week after he started (which I told him would have been highly unlikely up the street at one of the local private clubs). He loved the outdoors aspect of it and seemed to really enjoy the responsibility and solitude of setting up the little executive course they operate all by himself. Hmm... maybe this is his passion.

I tried to ignore the fact that he might be heading into a career in his dad's business but when I finally asked him how it was going, he sent a chill down my spine: "I really like it Dad. It's so beautiful being out there by myself and watching the sun rise and seeing the deer out on the course. It's very cool."

(I gulped hard when he said that because I've heard those same words a hundred times from superintendents when I asked them how they got hooked on this crazy business.)

I tried to be casual but I was already

scheming and thinking if I could pull some strings and get him into OSU's turf program down the road from us. "Do you think you'd want to do this as a career?"

Maybe, he said. (I gulped again.)

It turned out that by the end of summer he had concluded he didn't much like waking up at 4:30 a.m. in exchange for \$8.55 an hour. Could his passion be re-ignited this spring and he'll give it another try? Who knows?

But the whole episode got me thinking about what advice I'd give him – or any young person flirting with the idea of pursuing a career as a superintendent. Here's what I think I'd say:

**“Do I love this so much that I’m willing to live this lifestyle forever?”**

You are about to undertake a journey that is difficult, risky and ultimately won't make you rich. It is not an easy path. The days of getting a turf degree from a state school, landing an assistant position and quickly advancing are over. Plan to spend 10 years making \$35,000 or so and putting in 60 hours a week before you get your first "career" position.

Once you do, you'll be doing battle every day with a fickle bitch called Mother Nature. You will live and die based on what the Weather Channel says. Your employers will likely not really understand what you do or why you spend so much of their money doing it. Your GM might be your best friend or your worst enemy. Your work will constantly be compared to the Disneyland conditions people see on TV. You will largely be behind the

scenes and get scant recognition for what you do.

It is sort of a society of mad monks who live and breathe turf and golf operations. When you join the monastery, you agree to forego some earthly pleasures like sleep, a "normal" family life and casual conversations that don't involve words like "weevil" or "foliar uptake" or "pythium." Your wife/significant other and/or dog better buy into this whole thing, too!

There will be lots of stress. And, just when you think you've made it, your boss might decide you've done your job so well they don't need a superintendent as good as you and you could get screwed. At that point, your prospects for re-employment at the same level suck pretty bad and you may have a tough time continuing on as a super.

But...and it's a huge, enormous, massive "but"...if you are truly PASSIONATE about protecting, preserving and enhancing these wonderful playing fields and you wake up every day excited about the prospect of making your course a little better, you should absolutely do it. It's a lifestyle that has many rewards: a sense of accomplishment every day, beauty all around you, a feeling that you're giving enjoyment to others and an amazing spirit of camaraderie with thousands of other superintendents around the world who feel just like you do.

So, my advice to my son – or any young person thinking about jumping on this wild merry-go-round of a business – would be to look deep inside yourself and ask, "Do I love this so much that I'm willing to live this lifestyle forever?" Unless you absolutely believe that, don't do it.

But if you do believe – down to the very core of your soul – welcome to the best profession in the world. **GCI**