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SEASON OF CHANGE

What should you do when it's time to move on?

There's a reason they call this season "the fall." It's not the leaves – it's often superintendents' jobs. Summer is over, in many parts of the country the prime playing season is winding down, and members'/golfers' frustrations are boiling over, and supers are taking the brunt of the criticism. Out with the old...

So there are many golf course superintendents losing jobs, seeking new opportunities, upgrading their current positions. Which is all well and good unless it's at the expense of someone else's misfortune. And this year is likely to be an especially busy game of musical chairs in employment thanks to the awful weather – hot, wet, or both – that blanketed the country almost coast to coast.

No surprise, my phone has been ringing off the hook with calls from supers who've been dismissed. Of course, without cause (or so they say). Right or wrong, the revolving door will be spinning faster than usual this year. If that door is hitting you in the rear end or offering you a chance to move up the ladder, a few words of wisdom and caution.

First, if you are actively searching for a new job, remember that your opportunity may be someone else's misfortune. There's nothing wrong with seeking out a new position, but before you get too deep into the hiring process, try to learn if the opening is because someone resigned, retired, or was let go. Just that little piece of information can tell you a great deal about the situation you'd be entering.

There's nothing wrong with trying to improve your employment situation, and there are lots of perfectly good reasons: a new opportunity, a new place to live, upward mobility, family concerns, etc. But every job has its good points and its bad points. And

every job will have its politics.

Here are some factors I'm hearing far too much about, and which you should be careful of crossing:

LOCAL HIRING. I live in New Jersey. Say a job opens up in the "Garden State." Is someone who studied at Rutgers University and worked at a Jersey golf course an "expert" at growing local turf grass? Possibly, yes. And with that local knowledge often comes a local network, local mentors, and local resources. But should that automatically preclude someone from another region applying for – and being seriously considered for – the position? Absolutely not. I don't like seeing qualified people not getting due consideration because of geography. It's wrong for local chapters to close ranks and try to shut out "outsiders." (It's true among club pros too, and is just as narrow-minded.) Courses and clubs should not only be more open-minded but remember that the main concern is who can do the best job. In fact, I can give you numerous examples when bringing in someone from "outside" was the smartest choice, not only for his talent but because the candidate was willing and able to bring new ideas with him.

TAP THE TALENT POOL. Just as misguided as blindly striving to stay local is when regional superintendent associations pressure a club to hire one of their own guys – someone involved in association politics or with "friends in high places" – rather than surveying the entire available talent pool. Again, going outside the easy and obvious buckets can be very good for a club, especially one that hasn't been well served in the past by the easy choice.

PROPER PROTOCOL. It makes sense of superintendents to visit other clubs,

talk to other supers, broaden their knowledge base and find friends and mentors in the business throughout the industry. However, sometimes these seemingly innocent visits are really opportunities to negatively review a fellow superintendent's work and spread nasty rumors in an effort to tout one's own knowledge, skills, and availability. Here's a simple response to that: Do unto others...

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REAL REFERENCES. Search committees and others involved in hiring a new superintendent (or evaluating the present one) should be wary when an outside vendor or salesperson calls to suggest or recommend an applicant, apply pressure, or call attention to a candidate who will be mutually beneficial to both entities. If you're being considered for a new position, you'll have the chance to give a list of references: Be careful who you get to speak on your behalf, especially if it's someone who stands to benefit from you getting the job.

PROMOTING FROM WITHIN. There's nothing wrong with promoting the first assistant to the top job. Everyone needs that big break. But number one shouldn't be replaced by number two simply to give a club bragging rights, or worse, simply to save money.

Something else many superintendents tend to forget: Sometimes a

(MORAGHAN continues on page 64)

(MORAGHAN continued from page 8)

firing is justified. How do you know your job is in jeopardy? Members (and especially those who sit on committees) stop talking to you. Meetings are held without your knowledge and attendance. Outside consultants unexpectedly show up to evaluate your efforts. Other superintendents unexpectedly show up to “look around,” or play golf with the pro or members. (The professional thing to do is to call the superintendent and let him/her know that you’ve been invited over, even if it’s possibly for his job.) And sometimes it’s just a feeling that things aren’t right.

Can you turn around a bad situation? Probably not. And given the message that the club is sending, do you really want to? Maybe it’s time to take the initiative and go, before you can be pushed out. But if you do leave, and expect to get another job, remember how you felt when in that awkward situation, and don’t put a fellow member of your industry in that same situation. **GCI**

(FLOODING continued from page 42)



Above: Two images of the new channel next to the old one at Reid Golf Course.

right – across a valley – to a putting surface on the far hillside. Players used to fly that concrete channel with their approaches. Soon they will crest the hill and see a beautiful, winding, naturalized water feature. Yes, of course, that feature is part of a system that can now handle a 100-year storm, and the water exiting that system is 10 times cleaner. But the 12th hole will also be a more beautiful golf hole, and that should count for something. It’s already counting for something.

“I haven’t golfed for about 15 years,” Neuberger says, “but I’m going to play when the course reopens next spring. I’m excited.” **GCI**

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(BRAUER continued from page 18)

and satisfying for very little extra cost. While I promised not to focus on value, the old insurance salesman adage of, “Good architecture only cost pennies a day” applies.

Golf can range from deadly dull to inspiring. While everyone prefers the latter, they often preclude even the chance for the best golf possible by treating golf course architecture as less important than it truly is. Poor architecture usually ruins your golf, so when you have a chance, don’t shortchange your course when it comes to architecture. **GCI**

(DELOZIER continued from page 36)

declined. In those markets, property taxes also should have declined. Check with your local taxing jurisdiction to see if your property value declined and if your tax needs to be adjusted.

The question to ask: “Have I explored the possibility of a decrease in property taxes with my local tax authorities?”

The start of 2014 is still more than three months away. But your planning should be well underway. That process starts with the budget. **GCI**

(KAMINSKI continued from page 52)

playing conditions to bring out the hatchet. In these cases, it’s usually not really about the grass.

Although I simplify the impact of Mother Nature to regional generalizations, I have to add a qualifier. Regional conditions can not only be variable from state to state and course to course, but also from hole to hole. We can’t forget the impact of microclimates that can result in poor growing conditions and continued decline in turf stands year after year. Correcting some of the fundamental agronomic issues – shade, air flow and drainage – is essential to growing healthy grass.

So with all of this in mind, I encourage you to assess where your problems were this year, get things healthy this fall, and fire up the chainsaws this winter. The season’s coming to an end and 2014 will be here before you know it. **GCI**