

Getting
Over
Getting

Fired

How to endure the trauma of losing your job
so you can move on with your life

BY LARRY AYLWARD
EDITOR

Adespondent Marc Snyder sat in a chair and stared wide-eyed into space. It was a bleak winter afternoon, and the unemployed superintendent had nothing to do and no place to go.

Snyder held the day's opened mail in his hand — two more rejection letters from golf courses he contacted about possible employment — and he wondered if he would ever find work. He had received nearly 100 rejection letters since the spring, and each new one stung his spirit as much as the last.

It was December 1992, and Snyder had been unemployed for eight months. He was fired from his job as superintendent of The Boulders Golf Resort & Club in Carefree, Ariz., in April.

Only a few months before, Snyder was on top of the world. He held a high-profile job at the glamorous club and lived in a big, new

house. He was a successful superintendent and had many awards to prove it.

But Snyder, his wife and three children now lived in the 15-foot-by-20-foot family room of his mother-in-law's home in Bridgeman, Mich. They moved back to their home state a few months earlier because they were forced to sell their dream house in Arizona when they could no longer make monthly payments.

Snyder, who always held steady work and provided for his family, couldn't believe the tumultuous turn his life had taken.

"I was starting not to believe in myself," Snyder recalls. "I felt like a failure."

Snyder, who worked at The Boulders for three years, says his firing was the result of a political upheaval, not inadequate performance. Snyder is not the first superintendent to lose his job, nor will he be the last. In fact, many superintendents believe they're more prone to being fired these days because of the increased

MARK GALBREATH

scrutiny they're under to keep their courses in near-immaculate condition. And whether you're a superintendent with 30 years of experience or two, getting fired from your golf course is one of the most stressful things you can experience.

"Losing your job is like getting a divorce or having a death in the family," says certified superintendent Ted Woehrle, who was fired in 1991 from Oakland Hills GC in Bloomfield, Mich., after 24 years.

Superintendent Jim Wood says he felt like a piece of discarded trash when he was fired in 1998 from Oak Tree GC in Edmond, Okla., after more than 23 years.

"It brought me to my knees," Wood says. "I was devastated and lost."

The good news is that many superintendents are able to get over the trauma of getting fired and move on with their lives. But most will tell you the process is not easy and involves enduring a variety of normal but troubling emotions, ranging from anger to depression. But the key, they say, is to keep those emotions in check and not let them drag you down. Because when you do get over a firing and land a new job, there's a good chance you'll be a better and happier person.

"It's great, and I enjoy it," Woehrle says of his job at the Orchards GC, a public facility in Bloomfield, Mich., where he has been for nearly nine years. "I only have to answer to one person instead of a green committee and a general manager."

"Life couldn't be better," says Snyder, now the superintendent at Rio Verde CC in Rio Verde, Ariz.

Gain control

Stunned, bitter and embarrassed — that's how Snyder felt when he was fired. "There was a multitude of emotions running through my body," he says.

The emotions lingered for many months. Snyder was angry one day and depressed the next. While he felt like a failure, he didn't let himself get too low.

It's necessary and beneficial to grieve, says James P. Kell, an Austin, Texas-based career consultant and associate of Richard Bolles, author of the best-selling job-search book, *What Color Is Your Parachute?* It's also all right to be angry, depressed and stressed. But at some point, a fired superintendent must forge ahead.

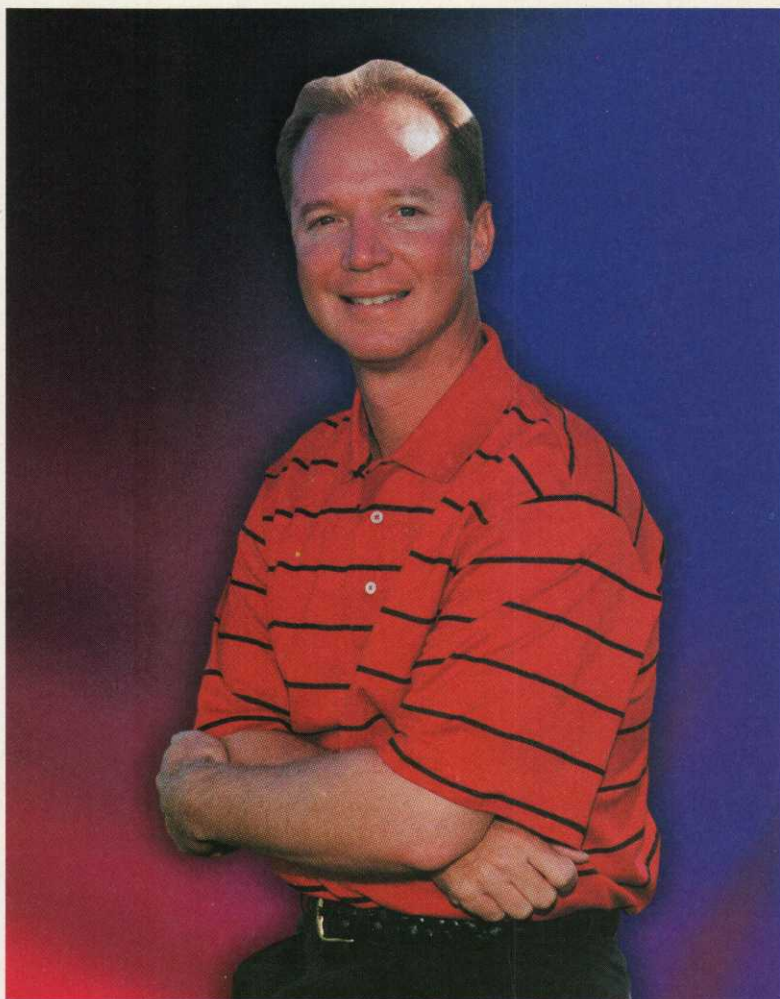


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"You accept the fact that you were fired, and you realize that it's possible to go on with your life," says Kell, noting that most firings occur because of work-place politics and downsizing. "But there's a delicate balance between grieving and moving forward, and no two people do it the same way."

Kell also says it's vital for fired superintendents to ask themselves philosophical questions to gain strength. Kell says they should ask themselves what they have learned about themselves during their troubled times. They should also ask themselves what they've learned about the world of work and the society in which they live.

A superintendent may ask certain questions about himself and discover he must change certain aspects of his character to get along with others. Or maybe a superintendent realizes he needs to work for people who are more like him and with similar goals.

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"You reap what you sow. If you keep sowing anger, frustration and negativity, that's what you'll get back."

— Marc Snyder

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"What happens to a lot of people is that they get run over by the Mack Truck of life, they're at the bottom of the valley, and they don't ask these questions," Kell says.

Woehrle focused on keeping his firing in perspective. He was frustrated and angry because he says he was never given a good reason for being fired. But he kept that frustration and anger in control by telling himself that he was a capable superintendent. "I knew I'd done a good job, and that made me feel a little better," Woehrle says.

If a fired superintendent doesn't reflect on his situation and try to grow beyond it constructively, he may be letting anger and depression get the best of him — and that can be hazardous to his health, Kell stresses.

"You're in terrible danger if you close down your heart, mind and soul and dwell too long on the wrong that has been done to you," says Kell, who advises those with difficulties controlling their depression and anger to seek professional help. "Depression can destroy a person who is overwhelmed by it. Anger, eventually, needs to be resolved."

Someone to talk to

It's crucial that fired superintendents have confidential friends or mentors to consult with about their circumstances, Kell says. They need to talk to trustworthy friends, including peers and clergy, about their anger, stress and depression. Those friends should be good listeners.

"I refer to this process as psychological vom-

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Politics, Pressure and Pink Slips

So you were doing a great job at your golf course, but you were fired because of politics. Join the crowd.

"Usually, there's a certain amount of injustice in firings," says James P. Kell, an Austin, Texas-based career consultant.

People, including superintendents, do get fired because they're incompetent, but most job dismissals happen because of politics and downsizing, Kell says.

Political firings encompass a range of issues. Some superintendents say they've been fired because of politics, which are often tied to personality conflicts. If a superintendent doesn't get along with the course's general manager, there may be no common ground between the two. Hence, the chances of the superintendent getting fired are greater.

Superintendents who have worked at the same courses for most of their careers are also at a risk of losing their jobs, insists Randy Nichols, certified superintendent for Cherokee Town & CC in Dunwoody, Ga. The reason is simple: In 25 years at the same course, a superintendent can alienate a few members each year, some whom might end up on the green committee or board of directors, Nichols notes.

Nichols, who has worked at Cherokee Town for 26 years, says many superintendents are creatures of habit. "They get se-

cure in their jobs, and they don't want to leave," he adds. "It may be better for a superintendent to move to a different course after eight to 10 years. After a number of years at the same course, a superintendent is only compared to himself and not to previous superintendents."

Bill Black, who was fired from Congressional CC in 1993, says most successful superintendents work at courses for three to five years and move on. "They bring the courses up, and they get out of Dodge when they're on top," Black says.

Some blame age as a factor for getting fired. They say courses want to bring in younger and less-experienced superintendents so they can pay them less. But Bob Randquist, certified superintendent of Boca Rio GC in Boca Raton, Fla., says the age factor is overblown. "I've seen people get let go in their 50s, and they still came up with good jobs quickly," he says.

Randquist believes veteran superintendents who are fired from high-profile clubs can find jobs more easily than superintendents who are fired from low-profile clubs. "Clubs think those people had to be successful if they were at good places for a long time," Randquist adds.

Some superintendents compare the turbulence in their profession to that of Major League Baseball managers. A baseball

manager can win three World Series in a row, but he's only as good as his last season.

"You can have a lot of winning seasons, but you're going to have some major problems if you have a few losing seasons," Randquist says.

Nichols says superintendents are under more pressure and scrutiny than he has seen in his 30-plus year career.

"Many clubs desire perfect conditions every day," he says, adding that golfers sometimes have unrealistic expectations.

Interestingly, Nichols says the same clubs that didn't have the money to make certain course improvements five years ago are now coming up with the cash to raise maintenance standards.

"That puts even more pressure on superintendents because the margin of error for such projects is minimal," Nichols says. "Clubs used to say that they couldn't afford to walk mow greens and tees, but now they're giving us the money to do it. We must do it correctly and meet their expectations."

There is good news for superintendents: They're gaining more recognition from their peers at golf courses and receiving better pay for their efforts. But even those career gains might be detrimental if they're perceived as overvalued. "We're victims of our own success," Randquist says.

— Larry Aylward, Editor

Getting Over Getting Fired



“Losing your job is like getting a divorce or having a death in your family.”

— Ted Woehrle

Movin' On

You've been fired, and you're wondering how it will affect your search for a new job. For starters, don't hide the fact that you were fired from a previous job. Volunteer the information rather than let an interviewer drag it out of you, says Richard Bolles, author of the best-selling job-hunting book, *What Color Is Your Parachute?*

Bolles also stresses that in a job interview you shouldn't appear angry about getting fired. That will only reveal that you're stuck in the past and not looking to the future.

James P. Kell, an Austin, Texas-based career consultant and an associate of Bolles, says a fired superintendent should also talk openly about why he was fired. But he shouldn't criticize his former boss in the interview, Kell stresses.

It's important that a fired superintendent contact someone from his former golf course — who knew the qual-

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ity of his work — to obtain a letter of recommendation, Kell adds.

During an interview, a superintendent should ask himself:

- Is this a job I would like to have?
- Is this a job I think I can do and do well?
- Am I comfortable with the person interviewing me, and the person and the golf course I'll be working for?

If a superintendent believes an employer may discriminate against him because he was fired, the superintendent might tell the employer that he'll work for two to three weeks without pay, during which time his performance can be evaluated. But he should get the course to agree to pay him and offer him the job if it is satisfied with his work. If the employer is not satisfied with his work, the superintendent should agree to leave without pay.

Smith took a job in Alabama and worked there for about four years before returning to Arizona as superintendent of the Golf Club at Eagle Mountain, where he stayed for 4.5 years. “We were close prior to our unemployment, and it brought us even closer,” Smith says of his relationship with Snyder.

While Kell suggests fired superintendents look outside their immediate families for advice, Wood says his wife, Carlotta, was his rock when he was fired from Oak Tree. They've been married 27 years, and she helped Wood create a resume and gain strength through her encouragement.

“She told me from the get-go that everything was going to be fine,” Wood says. “She's a strong person, and she helped me hold it together.”

Snyder says his wife, Denise, also provided reassurance that helped him get through his toughest moments. “She was at her strongest during those times,” Snyder says. “That's what marriage is all about.”

Patience and faith

No one should expect to find a job the week after getting fired. That goes for superintendents who have hosted U.S. Opens as well as those who've only hosted city leagues.

It took Wood, who hosted a PGA Championship and U.S. Amateur at Oak Tree, about six weeks to find his current job at Lincoln Park GC in Oklahoma City. It took Woehrle, a past GCSAA president, more than a month.

Many of Woehrle's peers told him that he wouldn't have a problem finding a job because of his experience and stature. But after he sent out 100 résumés and received no responses, Woehrle began to worry. “I thought I was going to have to find another field,” he says.

About three weeks into his unemployment, Wood thought about starting a lawn service because he was worried about his finances. “Things looked bleak,” Wood says of finding a job as a superintendent.

Snyder was out of work for 10 months but says he never lost patience, which he attributes to his faith. “Through that faith comes perseverance in dealing with these types of things,” he adds.

Woehrle also gained courage by attending church and consulting his pastor. He didn't pray for a new job, but he did pray for peace and strength. “It helped,” he says.

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Lessons learned

When he was out of work, Snyder spent more time with his family than he had in a long time. Before he was fired, Snyder's life was his work. He admits that his family came second.

"But spending all that time unemployed made me realize that what was important was right around me," Snyder says. "Our family became very tight."

Snyder enjoyed playing with his kids, even though the uncertainty of his professional life hung like a dark cloud over his head. Snyder was also there when his infant daughter took her first steps. If he had been working 12-hour days, he might have missed the event.

"That kind of stuff made me realize what's really important," he says. "It was an eye-opener."

Snyder also knew that other people had more serious problems. "Who was I to complain about my problems when others have worse problems?" he says.

The experience also enabled Snyder to find his faith in God, which helped him endure the turbulent time. When he interviewed for the job at Rio Verde, he told the green committee that his No. 1 priority was his relationship with God and his No. 2 priority was his family. "No 3, if I'm hired, will be this golf club," he told the committee.

Woehrl's unemployment experience helped him remember that there are others who are less fortunate. To stay busy and not dwell on the firing, Woehrl delivered food baskets to and provided transportation for the needy. "You can always find someone who has it worse than you do," he says.

Wood's firing made him humble, and he says he'll never take any job for granted. Wood and his crew are often praised by golfers for their work on the course, but Wood doesn't let the acclaim go to his head.

"Nobody is so secure in anything that they can't lose it any-

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Should I Sue or Should I Go?

Unless you have a suit that the American Civil Liberties Union will take on pro bono, most superintendents would be wise not to sue a former employer, even if they feel they were unjustly fired, suggests James P. Kell, an Austin, Texas-based career consultant.

Lawsuits are about spending money, so you had better have a lot of cash if you're tak-

ing on a golf course with deep pockets. "The course will keep the case in court longer than you can afford to pay your lawyer," Kell says.

The course and its lawyer will try to break you financially. "An ordinary person, regardless of a firing's unfairness, lacks the funds to pursue a case to its natural end," Kell says.

— L.A., Editor

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time," Wood says. "That's always in the back of my mind."

Although he's appreciative that joblessness enlightened him about a few things, Snyder will never forget the humility he experienced while being unemployed. He remembers when he felt so distraught that he was in a daze. His advice to other superintendents who might experience

the unpleasantness of losing their jobs is to grasp reality and know that they will suffer depression, frustration and anger. But they must confine those emotions and maintain patience, hope and faith, he says.

"You reap what you sow," Snyder says. "If you keep sowing anger, frustration and negativity, that's what you'll get back.

"You need to stay positive." ■

Here Today, Gone Tomorrow — But Don't Forget Your Severance Agreement

More superintendents are starting to realize their profession is comparable to musical chairs. They get hired and fired and transferred. It can be a nomadic lifestyle.

So to ensure financial security, more superintendents are demanding employment contracts before taking jobs. About 25 percent of superintendents currently work

under contracts. A key benefit of an employment contract is a severance agreement.


Under a severance agreement, a superintendent receives compensation from his employer if he is fired. In exchange, the superintendent agrees not to sue his employer, which can be costly for both sides.

A superintendent with a severance

agreement is a superintendent not left in a financial pickle if he's fired.

If you're offered a severance agreement, whether it's part of an employment contract or not, experts say you should negotiate the agreement's amount. Always ask for more than your employer is offering.

— L.A., Editor



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