

When you're in the business of putting your opinions in print for 30,000 people every month, it's a given that not

everyone will like what you have to say. Last month, my old friend Steve Cadenelli, certified superintendent of Cape Cod National GC, *really* didn't like what I said about GCSAA and its relations with the industry in our August issue.

His e-mail (see "Going Postal") was so hot, it charred my inbox. He basically accused me of being obsessed with GCSAA because of my personal history with the association and suggests that I've wrongly appointed myself to be the "conscience" of the organization. Yikes! It was troubling, to say the least.

What troubled me most about Steve's note was that I didn't entirely disagree with it. After all, I worked for the association for nine years in a variety of communication capacities, including director of communications.

The fact is that five years later and 800 miles from Lawrence, Kan., I'm still too close to GCSAA's people, politics and programs to be 100 percent objective about things. Obsessed? Probably not. Mildly fixated? Guilty as charged, your honor.

Curiously, my condition is not unusual. I keep in touch with many former staff members who are still a bit consumed with the association. All I can say is there is something insular and intense about working at GCSAA headquarters that seems to keep a hold on people long after they move on to the "real world."

And, by way of disclosure, I'm certainly the only one of those former staff members who has access to a big-ass printing press that I use to compete against the association for advertising dollars. And trust me, there are only so many of those dollars around, so the competition can be tough.

So, you ask, what's the point of this rambling catharsis? Well, Steve's note reminded me that I could also use my fixation with GCSAA for good rather than evil. Thus, from my "insider" perspective, here are a couple of things about GCSAA that you might never appreciate unless you've been there.

Am I Obsessed With the GCSAA?

BY PAT JONES



I'M STILL TOO CLOSE TO GCSAA'S PEOPLE, POLITICS AND PROGRAMS TO BE 100 PERCENT OBJECTIVE ABOUT THESE THINGS

First, too few members understand how hard staff members work or how passionate they are about you. You'd be surprised at how many cars are still in the parking lot at 9 p.m. each night or on a sunny Sunday afternoon when employees could be with their families. It ain't for the money, which was not exactly generous when I was there.

Instead, it's because of a culture of hard work, an emphasis on quality and a firm belief that they do make a difference in the lives of those they serve.

Second, I don't know of another association that offers a better combination of basic programs and services than GCSAA. You can pick nits about the educational seminars, but the scope and quality of the overall program is outstanding by comparison to any other organization I've ever seen.

The trade show, which is a humongous undertaking, usually comes off with only a few minor hitches. That magazine they put out is OK, too, I guess.

Finally, when, in my biased opinion, the association's leaders get off course, it's usually for the right reasons. They try to lead, and that irritates those who don't wish to be led. They try to innovate, and that carries the risk of failure. They try to think big, but some would prefer they kept their focus on the little stuff.

In short, it's like my son's tee-ball games: It's hard to blame them for errors when they're trying hard and their hearts are in the right place.

With all that said and my fixation laid bare before you, will I step away from my self-appointed role as the "conscience" of the association? Let's just say that I prefer the term "watchdog." Stay tuned ...

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