

**I** heard another one of those rotten “superintendent gets fired unfairly” stories the other day during a visit to a Northern Ohio GCSA chapter meeting. The facts may appall you, but you certainly won’t be surprised by them.

A veteran superintendent was at the same Cleveland-area club for 30 years. He was adored by his members and respected by his local colleagues. But dues and revenues at his place started to slip, and the remaining members decided to sell to another club owner in the area.

The sale of the club was essentially contingent on keeping the superintendent and a few other key employees. The superintendent, who planned to retire within a few years, thought it was a decent deal.

You probably won’t be shocked to learn that the new owner quickly found a reason to terminate the veteran superintendent’s employment. It was claimed that some tree trimming done by a worker was “botched” while the superintendent was on vacation. Hmmm ... now there’s a great reason to pink-slip someone who’s been doing a great job in the same position for three decades.

At any rate, the thing has now turned into a tangled mess of allegations, suits and enough animosity to keep the lawyers busy for a couple of years. I honestly hope the superintendent wins or gets a decent settlement. Employers, particularly private club operators, need to know there are repercussions for unfair terminations.

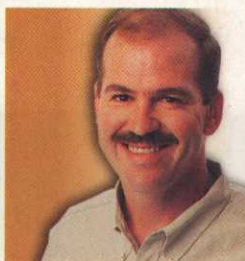
All that said, it was a comment made by another veteran after hearing this all-too-common tale of woe that spurred me to start banging away at the keyboard.

After another superintendent at the meeting wondered aloud whether employment contracts would prevent problems like this, a highly respected area leader stood up and said he’s not a big fan of contracts. But, he added, he does have an agreement in place that spells out clearly what would happen if he and the club part ways for any reason.

It’s called a severance package, and any tenured superintendent, general manager, golf professional or other management employee

## A Refined Plan For a Raw Deal

BY PAT JONES



IT’S CALLED A  
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should consider asking for it as a condition of employment. In fact, it’s not a bad idea to consider for anyone starting a big, new job. That’s actually the best time to do it — when everything’s fresh and the nasty trail of problems that lead to a parting of the ways hasn’t started yet.

It’s almost like a prenuptial agreement for your next job. If you can’t set it up at the outset, then try for it after three to five years of successful employment. There’s really never a bad time to anticipate the worst.

In a nutshell, here’s what you should consider:

- Set up an understanding about what you and your employer will do if your employment ends for *any* reason. Have it reviewed by your lawyer and club’s lawyer.
- Spell out clearly how much compensation you’ll get if you’re terminated. One month of salary per each year worked is a good starting point.
- Nail down extras and benefits, such as health and life coverage, and a lump-sum 401(k) contribution.
- Agree that the termination will be announced in positive terms. Avoid the famed “pursuing other opportunities” or “we decided to go a different direction” clichés.
- If you have a bonus structure or other performance-based compensation, agree how that will be prorated or paid depending on how far into the performance period you’ve worked.

Let’s face it: Bad things happen to good superintendents. It’s a volatile and unpredictable business and, like the Cleveland-area veteran, you too could find yourself on the wrong end of a raw deal.

Plan for it, and you’ll be better the next time you leave a job.

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