

The fact that the golf industry is in trouble from a growth perspective, given the declining participation numbers and annual course closures, is nothing new. But the fallout from that trend often isn't discussed.

I wonder what's happening at the turf schools that used to graduate a steady stream of aspiring golf course superintendents. The numbers of potential positions and career opportunities have declined because of golf course attrition, so are students considering alternative majors and professions?

If ever there was a golf course industry safety net for terminated or displaced superintendents, it, too, has shrunk because opportunities to go to the dark side have become scarcer as sales of equipment, fertilizer and chemical companies have declined. And we've all heard stories about former superintendents getting hired by a course as an assistant, a spray tech or an irrigation tech so they can earn a paycheck. Those positions also are less abundant because of the cuts to labor budgets.

Individual terminations can be absorbed by the overall industry, but when a course closes its doors and an entire crew becomes unemployed, not everyone will find a safety net in the golf industry. Superintendents — whether terminated by job performance, ownership change, management or member conflicts — have a more difficult time finding another home in golf. Several superintendents I've talked to during the past few years are transitioning into lawn, landscape or nursery businesses to keep their green thumbs green. Other superintendents have burned out with the business and have opted to go into completely different lines of work depending on their skill sets, interests and educational backgrounds.

During the past few years, a few superintendents transitioned into turf or superintendent association management positions — folks such as Jack Mackenzie in Minnesota, Bob LaChance in Ohio and Monroe Miller in Wisconsin. I made my conversion about 15 years ago. Thankfully, it was my choice, not someone else's. Those opportunities and others

Career Detours and Roadblocks

BY JOEL JACKSON



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unrelated to the golf industry are enhanced by an individual's willingness to join, volunteer, participate, network and engage in continuing education — and learn skills that will make them better leaders and communicators.

Another side to the job loss dilemma, with its loss of income, is the state of one's emergency “rainy day” fund. A superintendent friend recently lost his job and wrote an article about learning to cope with the anger and frustration of the situation. One section of the article explores the need to have sufficient funds to meet his family's needs and obligations. He talks about having to change his spending habits and make sacrifices in the wake of the termination, but more importantly, he urges superintendents to adopt a budget that embraces more moderation, one that includes reserves for emergencies during economically flush times.

That same advice applies to retirement planning. Setting aside regular monthly contributions to a mutual fund or an IRA when one is younger will yield a comfortable retirement when the time comes. The same advice applies if one is beginning to save later in life. The monthly amount just needs to be larger. I've become more conservative with my investments since the 2008-2009 crash. Recently, I put some of the money back into a mutual fund for diversity, since CDs are yielding squat right now.

If you lose your job, don't hunker down. Continue to attend chapter meetings and network. Be strong for your family. Keep the faith and your sense of humor. You'll find another road to your future.

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