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A story about exodus

This is my first installment in a series that will periodically appear throughout the year on Old Testament theology. ¶ *Just kidding!* Don't turn the page. Not that there's anything wrong with the Old Testament, but you know, the whole "time and place" thing.

The exodus I'm referring to is the one that seems to be currently occurring in this business. Looking at the industry job boards the past few months (which I have done pretty much every day for years), I'm struck by the number of available assistant, AIT and spray tech positions. In all my years in this business, I don't ever recall seeing this many open positions and I'm sure I'm not the only one who has noticed. Even some high profile clubs that normally fill these types of positions from their stable of turf school grads on the crew seem to be feeling the effects.

More glaring to me is the number of these positions that are re-posted. While it's likely that some of these re-posts may simply be an attempt to keep the job announcement near the top of the page, it's just as likely that some are re-posted due to

lack of interest and/or suitable candidates. Clearly, the demand to fill these positions is now outpacing the supply of candidates.

As we are all fully aware of by this point — and if you need a reminder, just pick up literally any golf publication and I'll bet you lunch there will be some mention of it — course closures have outpaced openings for the umpteenth consecutive year. The consequence of these closures, as it relates to the labor pool, is a reduction in available jobs.

The most obvious cause for the number of available jobs is long-time assistants getting fed up with the lack of advancement opportunities and deciding to leave the business. Who can blame them? Six to eight years as an assistant is now the norm. As the average assistant is now likely approaching or in their 30s and probably has a mortgage

and a family, the combination of the hours and the salary make it an untenable situation for some.

Where are the younger guys waiting to move up? On the surface, the lack of available candidates could be blamed on the reduced enrollment in many university turf programs, but that still doesn't completely explain it. Given the relative stagnation of the job market in this business over the last six to eight years, there should presumably still be a logjam of talent waiting to move up. However, that doesn't appear to be the case, at least to the extent it has been in the past.

Much has been said about the differing mentality and work ethic of younger employees, commonly referred to as Millennials or Generation Y. There are those who feel that Millennials have an especially infuriating combination of

entitlement and questionable work ethic that is generally considered to be incompatible with success in this industry. Likewise, others point to a lack of industry work experience prior to an internship, that would've allowed the individual to realize this was not the career for them.

While there is some truth to these points, I think it's just as likely that many of them, having observed the struggles of those above them to advance, have decided to get out while they're still young enough to build a career in another segment of the turf industry or in a different industry entirely.

It should also be noted that every generation has endured the hand-wringing of the previous generation in regards to their attitudes and work ethic, yet the world keeps turning when they're eventually in charge. In other words, every preceding generation has figured it out and these guys will too.

Whatever the cause of this exodus, it's tough to deny that it's happening. It further highlights the role of employee retention in running a successful operation. Obviously, you're not going to retain someone who flat-out doesn't want to be there, but for those who have the talent and desire to stay in the business, finding ways to keep them engaged, be it occupationally or financially, will certainly pay off in the long run.

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