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Excuses, Excuses

This superintendent has heard it all when it comes to employees calling off work

BY RON FURLONG, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

We've all the heard the excuse, "The dog ate my homework." A friend of mine actually tried using this old standby in a high-school English class. Unfortunately for him, he forgot what a small town we lived in and his parents were friends with the English teacher, who happened to know he did not in fact own a dog.

Recently, as I was submitting an advertisement to the local paper for some seasonal help, I started thinking of the old dog-ate-my-homework saying in a bit of a different light. I started thinking about all the excuses I've been given over the years by employees trying to explain or justify an absence. Somehow, the dog-eating-my-homework line seemed quite fitting.

But let me point out that I'm very lucky in that I have a terrific group of full-time employees on my staff — eight hard-working and dedicated individuals. With this core group, along with the assistant superinten-

dent, the mechanic and myself, we have to add only five or six seasonal people every spring. Sounds easy, right?

Easy, however, it has never been. Filling out the crew every spring is one of the hardest things I do in the course of a year. Well, actually, the initial filling out of the crew is not usually that hard. An ad in the local paper in March usually elicits a good response and I'm able to hire five or six people from the field. However, those five or six — as good as they seem each year when I hire them — rarely work out.

On average, I'd say one or two may make it through the summer — and that's a generous forecast. Ultimately, I end up running another ad in June once the last of this initial group fizzles out. The second ad doesn't garner as much response, and usually I'm forced to hire the two or three stragglers who come in.

This second group, again, has a low batting average — below the Mendoza line for all you baseball fans. Sometimes, a third ad is needed in August, just to get through to October and



past aerification. If this third ad brings in more than one or two, it is deemed a success. In fact, I'm downright giddy if the person I hire from this third ad makes it six weeks.

Why the employees don't tend to last is the stuff of another article altogether. But what I wanted to address here in this article was the incredible array of excuses I get each year from these people who try to explain missing work.

Now, I'm not saying all of these excuses have not been legitimate (excuse me why I clear my throat), but one tends to develop a certain intuition, if you will, regarding when someone is being truthful and when your chain is getting yanked. The pattern is almost always the same. The employee places a sick call about three or four days into the job. Then he makes another sick call a few days later. A third sick call, about a week later, gets a little more creative. And then there's the infamous fourth call, when an employee knows he has to come up with something good. The fourth call is usually an incredibly detailed tale of misfortune and bad luck. It is ultimately this fourth call

that tends to lead certain superintendents to contemplate the state of today's youth and where this country is headed.

So, without further adieu, let me list some of all-time favorite calls (almost all of these were messages left on the answering machine the night before a morning of work). Most of these are actual calls. And a few, although they were never made, are calls you feel like could have been made anyway.

I've categorized the calls into the following four subject heads: sickness, transportation, family member illness or death, and miscellaneous (for those calls that just defy categorization).

Sickness

- "Went out for sushi last night. I think I got food poisoning. A lot of the food wasn't even cooked! Don't think I can make it in."
- "Sorry I'm calling late. My alarm didn't go off. But then when I did finally wake up, I realized I was sick. I won't make it in today."

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More Excuses

According to CareerBuilder, about one-third of U.S. employees called in sick last year even though they weren't sick. Some of the excuses they left were doozies. Here are three of our favorites:

- An employee said his dog wasn't feeling well, so the employee tasted the dog's food, got sick and called off.
- One employee said he was calling off because he was upset his favorite "American Idol" contestant was voted off the show.
- An employee said he didn't feel well and wanted to stay home to rest up for the company's holiday party that night.



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- "My colon hurts. I think I need a colonoscopy. Gonna try and get one this morning."
- "A bee stung me, and I ate some shellfish. I don't know which one caused it but I'm pretty swollen today." (Might as well cover all bases.)
- "My teeth hurt for some reason. Better stay home today."
- "I'm having some kind of weird reaction to the mushrooms I ate last night. Maybe I should stay home?"

Transportation

- "My car broke down on the way to work."
- "My car broke down on the way to work, and I didn't have cell phone reception."
- "My car broke down on the way to work, my cell phone had no reception, and I had to walk 12 miles to the gas station."
- "My car broke down on the way to work, my cell phone had no reception, I had to walk 12 miles to the gas station and their phone was out of service."
- "My car broke down on the way to work, my cell phone had no reception, I had to walk 12 miles to the gas station, their phone was out of service — and I've got some swamp land in Florida if you're still listening to this message."

Family illness and deaths

- "My grandma died." (Now, I wouldn't list this if I didn't find out later that the reports of grandma's death had been greatly

exaggerated.)

- "My dad died." (Again, not something I would normally list here, except for the fact that, amazingly, dad had died for the second time that summer.)
- "My dog has rabies."
- "Our family cat died. She was very special."

Miscellaneous

- "I have a court appearance in the morning at 8. My lawyer never told me about it. I think it's going to last all day."
- "Just found out I've got jury duty tomorrow. Can't get out of it."
- "I went to see the special midnight preview screening of the "Matrix Revolutions," and I'm really tired. I won't make it in."
- "I was up all night reading the new "Star Wars" novelization that just came out today. I'm really tired and won't make it in." (If you couldn't guess, same guy as above.)
- "My neighbor beat me up, and I'm pretty sore."
- "I beat up my neighbor, and I'm pretty sore."
- "I won't be coming to work in the morning. It's my birthday!"

Now, a drum roll please. ... Here's my all-time favorite excuse left on the answering machine:

- "Ron, this is Jack. I've been up really late with my girlfriend, and I'm so tired. I'm going to go to bed right now, and I'm going to sleep in. Please don't call and wake me. See you on Friday. Thanks."

Here's to honesty, if nothing else. ■

Furlong, superintendent of Avalon Golf Club, can be reached at rfurlong5@gmail.com. He will not provide an excuse for not answering your e-mail.

What reasons have you been given for employees to miss work?

We want you to add to golf course superintendent Ron Furlong's list of employee reasons for missing work. What's the best of the worst excuses you've heard someone give to take the day off?

Please e-mail them to Larry Aylward at larryward@questex.com.

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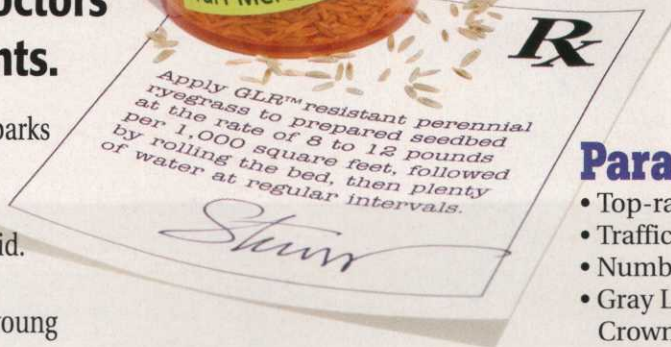
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The Joy of St. Jude

Floratine aims to raise millions for Memphis children's hospital

BY LARRY AYLWARD, EDITOR IN CHIEF

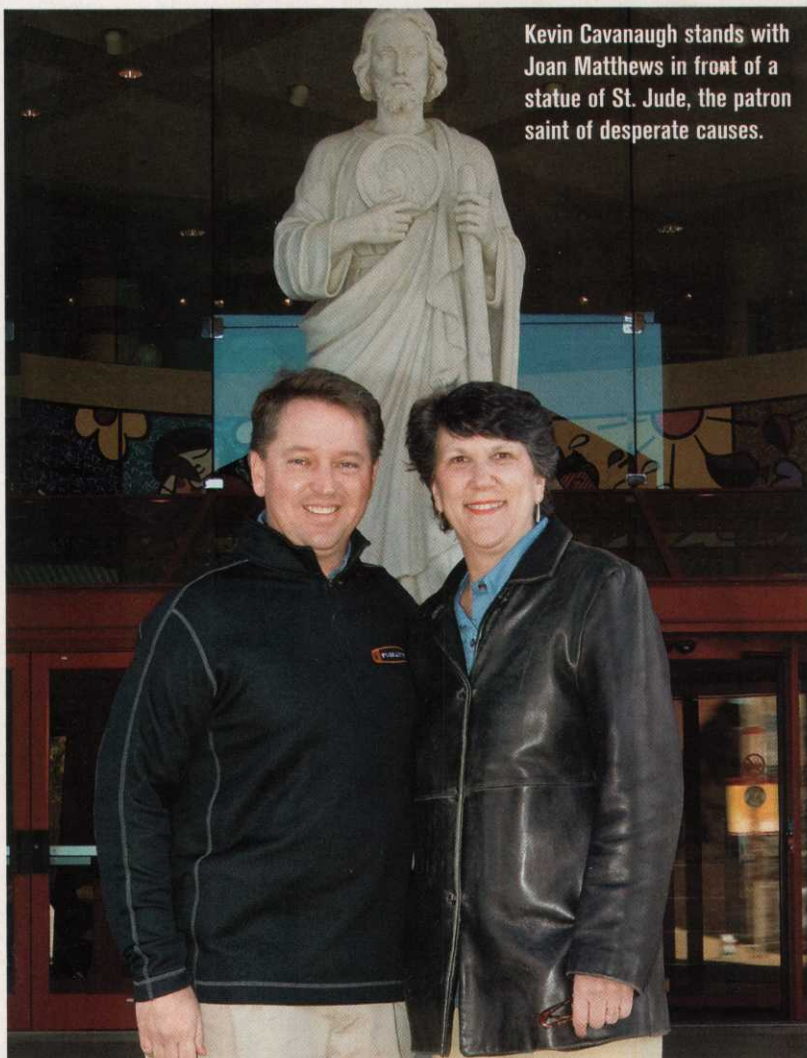
It was a steel-gray winter day in Memphis. It was one of those dreary days that just makes you feel somber, Kevin Cavanaugh thought as he pulled his car into the parking lot at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, where kids with pediatric cancer and catastrophic diseases go for treatment.

Cavanaugh, vice president of Floratine Products Group at the time, was one of several Floratine employees touring the hospital on this January day in 2007. The bleak weather wasn't lost on Cavanaugh as he prepared to enter the hospital, sure of the sadness he was about to witness. "I didn't know what I was walking into," he says.

But Cavanaugh felt it was his calling to be at St. Jude on this day. He and Brian Goodwin, Floratine's president and CEO at the time, were drawn to St. Jude and what it had to offer. As businessmen who wanted to give something back to the community, Cavanaugh and Goodwin decided that St. Jude was the charity they wanted their nearby Collierville, Tenn.-based business to support. So they organized a tour of St. Jude for employees to see the facility and its patients up close.

Cavanaugh's normal jovialness was in check as he entered St. Jude for the first time. He was speechless and nervous — bracing himself for the melancholy. But when he got inside, he couldn't believe his eyes.

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Kevin Cavanaugh stands with Joan Matthews in front of a statue of St. Jude, the patron saint of desperate causes.



6:40 AM...

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