

**NEW SERIES: Breakout Stories****DREAM IT, THEN DO IT — ONE INSTRUCTOR'S CAREER REBOOT**

by John Torsiello, Staff Writer

In August of 2015, following many years as a master instructor for the Jim McLean Junior Academy at Dallas/Fort Worth—and many nights devising (unsuccessful) ways to relocate to Southern California—Devan Bonebrake decided to quit hoping and start acting. Having played his collegiate golf at College of the Desert in Palm Desert, Calif., and completed undergraduate studies at San Diego State, the Oregon native considered Southern California his adopted home. He even got his start in the McLean organization at PGA West in La Quinta. Finding his way back west was no easy task, as Bonebrake discovered.

“I rarely saw jobs posted there,” recalls Bonebrake, who grew up in Portland, “and whenever I spoke with fellow professionals about my career path, the opportunities seemed to be everywhere but California.”

It became clear that he would have to make his own luck, as the saying goes. Approaching the challenge decisively, Devan began scheduling monthly trips of three to five days to his target market. Before each foray he would set up meetings with people who could provide guidance—or better yet an opening for negotiations. His contacts were generally with directors of golf, general managers and facility owners.

“I booked several weeks in advance,” he

explains. “I would call and tell them who I was and what I was looking for. I explained that I was in a terrific career position, but in the next year or two was planning on moving to Southern California and wanted to find out more about their facility to help with my decision.” To his surprise, most of the people Bonebrake contacted agreed to meet with him.

In those meetings it was vital to establish mutually valuable communications. For Bonebrake the way to do that was to prepare a list of specific questions addressing the facility's operation, its challenges and its strengths. His advice to any who would follow his initiative is to “prepare questions that show you have been educated on where this facility stands and what they may or may not need.” There is a natural logic and plenty of potential in this approach, he has found. “If you ask the right questions and get the right answers,” Devan says, “it is almost impossible for a facility to ignore their need for you.”



**Proponent Group Associate Member Devan Bonebrake executed on his plan to create an academy in Southern California and is now running the Southern California Golf Academy in Carlsbad.**

Bonebrake honed his questionnaire over time, trying to dig as deeply as possible into a facility's operation and thereby uncover a gap on the teach-coach side that would indicate a true need for what he could bring. "I also brought my financials from the prior year, which validated what I could potentially do for them," he says. "I talked to anyone and everyone I thought may be beneficial." Doing this, he said, not only gave him an introduction to dozens of decision-makers in Southern California, it also enriched his knowledge of how the market worked and what level of sophistication it had reached in the area of golfer performance training.

Eventually Devan winnowed his research down to a short list of potential facilities, making a pros-and-cons sheet for each of them. "I was looking for someplace where the ceiling was high and the attitude was such that the facility and I could grow together." In February of 2016, Devan worked out "a terrific agreement," in his words, with the Carlsbad Golf Center. His current career slot: Owner of the Southern California Golf Academy, housed at the ultra-busy Carlsbad Golf Center.

He is happy to offer pointers to any fellow Proponent Group member with similar ideas about parachuting into a promising golf facility. For starters, get solid information about a facility's demographics before arriving for the sit-down. "If you meet with a private club, for example, and explain how you could implement an outstanding junior program, the conversation could go two ways. If the club has been in need of just such a program, you are going to be a hero. However, if the children of these club members are all grown up, your proposal will not be of interest." In general



Bonebrake did his homework, polished his networking skills and climbed the next rung on his career ladder.

you will need to show a basic understanding of what makes the particular facility tick, and then hone your knowledge further as the discussion unfolds.

Fact: Instruction is among the most dynamic and game-changing facets of today's golf industry—do the facilities you are targeting have even an inkling of that? If not, you are on the hook to explain this reality in convincing fashion. "For me one of the biggest factors was whether the people I was talking to already valued instruction as a driver of business," says Bonebrake. "The places that value what you do will be much easier to negotiate with and much more likely to help you than the places that do not." He says it is helpful to have pro forma pricing in your presentation, knowing that once you have a better feel for the market you may adapt in certain ways to hit every demographic.

Most important, have a marketing plan that demonstrates specifically how you can help grow a facility's business."I noticed many facilities were worried that their current demand for business did

not warrant additional teachers," recalls Devan. "However, once they were presented with my array of marketing ideas they came to realize the current staff was missing out on numerous opportunities." **PG**

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