

## JON KOHLER *The Plantation Broker*



### IdeaMensch

**J**on Kohler is a prominent real estate broker and attorney recognized as the leading authority on quail plantations, sporting ranches, and high-quality recreational land in the American Southeast. Dubbed “The Plantation Broker” by Garden & Gun and the “Plantation King” by Deep South Magazine, he has built a career centered on the intersection of high-end real estate and environmental conservation. Operating across Georgia, Florida, Alabama, and South Carolina, Jon and his team have redefined what it means to be a land broker in the modern era.

### **What is your typical day, and how do you make it productive?**

Aside from taking my kids to school, there is no typical day — not even close. Jon Kohler & Associates covers four states: Georgia, Florida, Alabama, and South Carolina. On any given day I could be walking timberland in the Florida Panhandle, standing on the bank of a Flint River shoal in Georgia, or evaluating a trophy whitetail deer property in Alabama. That geographic range is part of what makes this brokerage different — and it requires a different kind of infrastructure.

I travel with two iPads, a phone, and a team of drivers. When you cover the territory we cover, the truck becomes your office. A driver means I can be on calls, reviewing due diligence materials, or working on a client presentation while we move between properties. Technology made us productive once. Today, the volume and complexity of what we do — texts, emails, AI tools, mapping platforms, client communications — requires that I stay fully engaged every mile of the drive. The discipline isn’t in the schedule. It’s in the motion.

### **How do you bring ideas to life?**

I have an extraordinarily talented and loyal staff — some of my marketing team members have been with Jon Kohler & Associates for over 20 years. That kind of institutional knowledge is irreplaceable. They understand our brand, our clients, our properties, and our voice better than anyone. I will say this: my ideas still scare the heck out of them — and I say that with affection.

When you’re constantly pushing the frontier of what a land brokerage can be — pioneering Social Storm® marketing, deploying AI-driven property analysis, building content

ecosystems that educate the entire market rather than just converting leads — the pace can feel relentless. But the team has never let me down. They take the vision and make it real. That's the only way any of it gets done.

The best ideas we've ever had at JKA started as something that sounded impossible.

### **What's one trend that excites you?**

The continued rise in the value of recreational and conservation land — and the broader cultural recognition of what great land stewardship actually means.

When I started Jon Kohler & Associates more than 35 years ago, recreational land was considered the least valuable land on the market. Today it is the most valuable — often surpassing even irrigated farmland. Trophy whitetail hunting properties are now trading above wild quail plantations. That shift is remarkable and deeply satisfying to have witnessed and, in some small way, helped to drive.

What excites me is that this isn't speculation. It reflects something real: people are hungry for wild, private, alive places. They want land the way God made it, not land "improved" beyond recognition. The market has finally caught up with what great land stewards have known for generations. At JKA, we've spent 35 years helping buyers and sellers recognize and protect that value. It pays — financially and spiritually — to be a great steward of the land.

### **What is one habit that helps you be productive?**

I don't think of my job as selling real estate. I think of it as helping landowners and buyers recognize value — value that is often invisible until someone with the right knowledge and framework helps them see it.

Over my career I developed a proprietary approach to valuing recreational land — one that accounts for ecological integrity, wildlife habitat quality, water features, timber, history, and the intangible elements that make a piece of ground irreplaceable. Every property I touch, I run through that mental model. I refine it. I test it. And I find that process genuinely fascinating.

When your work is intellectually alive — when every property is a new puzzle — productivity follows naturally. You don't need to force it.

### **What advice would you give your younger self?**

Invest in a marketing staff — early, aggressively, and without hesitation. Early in my career I operated like most brokers: lean, solo, doing everything myself. That works for a while. But the ceiling is low and the limitation is always you. The moment I committed to building a real marketing team, everything changed. Today, Jon Kohler & Associates has one of the largest and most sophisticated marketing operations in the land brokerage business. We're deploying AI, Social Storm® digital strategy, high-production video, drone mapping, and editorial content at a scale most boutique brokerages can't approach.

That infrastructure is what lets us sell properties others can't. Take the risk. Build the team.

### **Tell us something you believe almost nobody agrees with you on.**

For most of my career, appraisers, bankers, and even experienced real estate professionals fought me on recreational land values. The idea that land closer to the way God created it — wild, managed for wildlife, rich in timber and water — could be worth more than "improved" agricultural ground was genuinely controversial. It frustrated people. Some found it offensive.

We were consistently selling deer hunting and quail properties for more than irrigated farmland. Today that's accepted. But for

years it was a fight. And recently, the market has moved even further: trophy whitetail deer hunting properties are now commanding premiums over wild quail plantations — a shift that still surprises people who aren't living inside this niche every day.

Jon Kohler & Associates has led this market for three decades. We didn't follow the valuation consensus — we've helped create it.

### **What is the one thing you repeatedly do and recommend everyone else do?**

Non-stop education. Never stop. Never slow down.

I hold a Bachelor's degree in Real Estate and Appraisal and a Juris Doctorate. I study land management, ecology, timber, wildlife biology, tax strategy, and conservation law nearly every single day. I surround myself with the best biologists, foresters, and land managers in the business — and then I bring that knowledge directly to clients.

This is the foundation of the JKA model. We don't just list properties — we understand them at a level most brokers can't reach. When a buyer or seller works with Jon Kohler & Associates, they're getting decades of accumulated, actively updated expertise. That knowledge is the product. The transaction is just the delivery mechanism.

Be smarter than anyone else in the room. Always.

### **When you feel overwhelmed or unfocused, what do you do?**

This year I made a conscious decision to run my company as if Jesus were the Chairman of the Board looking over my executive decisions...looking at what's really important. That shift in perspective changes everything.

I've done this long enough to know that what looks like a small moment — a chance meeting, a property that seems too complicated, a client relationship that feels strained — can become something transformational. God has a plan. My job is to show up as a servant leader in this niche: to introduce people to places, ideas, and opportunities that genuinely change their lives.

When I'm overwhelmed, I return to that frame. We are all seeking an adventure. My role is to be the person who makes that adventure possible.

### **What is one strategy that has helped you grow your business or advance in your career?**

Total niche dominance through radical generosity.

I focused entirely on one niche — recreational and conservation land — and committed to becoming the most educated, most knowledgeable, most connected expert in that niche in the Southeast. But the second part is equally important: I chose to operate as an ambassador, not just a broker. I share more information, more freely, than most of my competitors would ever consider.

Our website, our video content, our market commentary — it's designed to educate the entire market, not just generate leads for JKA. We help people whether or not they ever do business with us. That generosity comes back. The standard brokerage model is to hold information close. We go the other direction entirely, and it has made all the difference.

When you share knowledge freely, the market trusts you. When the market trusts you, the right clients find you.

### **What is one failure in your career, how did you overcome it, and what lessons did you take away from it?**

In 2004, I took my focus away from brokerage to save a 975-acre shooting plantation outside Tallahassee from development. I

bought the property with a wealthy partner and turned it into what became the first conservation community in North Florida — 200 home sites with 70 percent of the land placed under permanent conservation easement with prescribed fire management. Centerville Conservation Community is essentially living on a wildlife preserve. It won awards. I met my wife Erica there. I live there today.

The problem: we launched in 2008. Our bank was one of the first to collapse in the financial crisis. We couldn't move lots the way we'd planned. My partner went broke and I was left holding a \$30 million personal guarantee. I was not worth \$30 million.

I stayed at my post. I worked for years with no salary. I worked through it, and it all worked out in the end. The project delayed and constrained the growth of my brokerage for years — but it also clarified everything. Once I returned to 100 percent focus on JKA, which now included Erica, there was no ambiguity about what I was built to do. The crisis made me a better broker, and today my wife Erica is my only business partner.

Stay at your post. The storm does not disqualify you from your purpose.

### **What is one business idea you're willing to give away to our readers?**

Get a driver.

I cover four states. The windshield time alone could swallow your week if you let it. I have drivers. In fact, right now I'm working from a truck with a driver behind the wheel. What looks like transit time is actually high-output work time — client calls, email, AI-assisted research, document review.

There was a moment when a phone call in the car felt productive. We are well past that. The complexity of what a modern high-performing land broker does — the tools, the data, the communication volume — demands your full attention. Offload the wheel and keep your hands on the business.

### **What is one piece of software that helps you be productive? How do you use it?**

Two things: AI and LandID.

LandID gives us extraordinary mapping, overlay, and data capabilities that transform the way we analyze and present properties. Soil types, timber stand data, hydrology, flood zones, deed history — it's all integrated and accessible in the field. For a brokerage that sells land based on deep knowledge of what that land actually is, this tool is foundational.

AI has changed how we research, write, and market. It accelerates the delivery of the expertise we've always had. It also opens new possibilities in how buyers and sellers find us — through AI search, through content, through the information ecosystem we've built. Jon Kohler & Associates was early to embrace both, and it shows in our results.

### **What is the best \$100 you recently spent? What and why?**

At my farm we raise trophy whitetail deer inside a high fence — part of the research and understanding that makes JKA's expertise in trophy deer properties genuinely first-hand. One of our largest bucks recently shed his antlers and we haven't been able to find them. I offered my managers a \$100 bonus per shed.

My son and I hunted that buck together ten times this season. Couldn't get a shot. He scores around 170 Boone and Crockett — exceptional! I'd love nothing more than to hand my 14-year-old son those sheds and let him hold what we chased together. Some things money can't buy outright, but \$100 is a pretty good motivator to go look.

### **Do you have a favorite book or podcast you've gotten a ton of value from and why?**

Michael Snyder's Substack. He provides a Biblical perspective on current events and the deeper forces shaping what we see in the news — the backstory on why things are happening and what they might mean. In a world where the surface narrative changes constantly, having a framework rooted in something larger and more permanent is genuinely clarifying.

I also encourage everyone in this business to read everything they can about land stewardship, conservation biology, and the ecological systems that underlie the properties we sell. Tall Timbers and Quail Forever are hard to beat. The broker who understands prescribed fire, mast production, and watershed hydrology is a fundamentally different advisor than one who only understands square footage and comparable sales.

### **What's a movie or series you recently enjoyed and why?**

The Chosen. It's a series that gives a remarkably human and textured perspective on Jesus and the disciples — the backstory on how they thought, the tensions they navigated, the fear and faith that coexisted in the same people at the same time. It's not reverential in a static way. It's alive.

There's something relevant in that for business, too: the people who change things are almost never the ones anyone expected. They're the ones who simply showed up with conviction and kept going.

### **Key Learnings**

- A land broker's true job is to introduce people, places, and ideas that enrich their lives — not to "sell" them something. The moment you make that distinction, everything about the way you work changes.
- The records you work so hard to set will be broken. The only thing that truly lasts — the only metric that genuinely matters over a 35-year career — are the relationships formed and the meaningful changes a broker helps people make in their lives.
- If you are still working from the job description of a land broker from five years ago, you are already failing to do the job of today's land broker. The role has changed more in the last decade than in the previous fifty years combined.
- One would think that by 2026, communication technology would have made brokers obsolete. The opposite is true. The complexity and volume of information available to buyers and sellers has made great brokers more necessary than ever. The job description changed. The need did not.
- Land closest to the way God created it is often the most valuable land on earth. It took decades for the broader market to believe that. Jon Kohler & Associates never stopped believing it.



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