

# LABOUR RELATIONS

by T. FRANCIS

IT was my privilege some time ago to attend a Supervisors Course run by the East Midlands Provincial Council at Buxton in Derbyshire and along with my practical experiences at different levels of work the following remarks are my thoughts and ideas of labour relations.

I will call all men in supervisory positions supervisors to simplify matters and men in lower positions workers or staff.

Much has been written and said about labour relations in industry but much less on our type of work. However, the same applies wherever you work, and the relationship between supervisor and staff in groundwork or turf culture is just as important and if you happen to be supervisor or staff in question they are of major importance.

I think if we look back over the years we can see a complete change in methods of approach between supervisor and staff. Men will not be bullied these days and supervisors must be a lot more tolerant than they used to be or else they will have no staff to supervise.

Some people might prefer the older way but times change and we must try to adapt ourselves to the modern way.

I think throughout all problems associated with labour relations let us all remember that we are all human and we can all make mistakes. I am sure many times the supervisors think they are the only ones with problems. This applies to the staff also. Let us try to understand each others' problems and, if we do, life will be a lot easier. I am sure we all agree that the relationship between supervisor and staff is of the utmost importance and if a good relationship can be built up, any obstacle can be overcome, difficult problems become easy, life is much happier for all and, above all, much more work is done.

It is accepted that the role of the supervisor is the most difficult of tasks. Men look to him to be the go-between

between them and the management (presenting their problems to the Boss), and likewise the management look to the supervisors to bring the best out of the men and get the work done, and produce the goods. This is not impossible but can be very difficult, to say the least.

What are the major assets of a first-class supervisor apart from being super-human? He must be tolerant, patient, fairminded, honest, good organiser, a psychologist, and a man that the men can trust and lean on. He must set a good example and, above all, know his job. How many have failed in a supervisory position because they did not know the job? A man soon knows if you know what you are talking about. If he knows you know the job, this can be a tremendous asset; but if he knows you don't know your job, he can make your life very difficult and some of the other good points you thought you had can easily go by the board. If a supervisor is respected by the men this helps tremendously.

On the course that I attended, a lecturer noted the following as the skills and knowledge of the supervisor. Skill in leading, communication, instructing and improving methods. He must also have a good knowledge of the work which includes plant and materials and different methods of work. Another important factor is knowledge of responsibilities which include rules, agreements, authority, delegation, superiors, safety, discipline, costs and quality. One other major factor the supervisor needed was the full backing of the management.

I think most of us would agree that these things are needed to become an efficient supervisor and, when all is said and done, a supervisor gets results through people and I always say a supervisor rises and falls on the strength of his men. He can't do all the work himself.

I have just said supervisors get results through people. As supervisors we are concerned with achieving results.

It is therefore worthwhile to look at some of the factors involved in motivating fellow men, that is to say getting them to be keen, energetic and enthusiastic about their work.

In a research made recently, out of a sample of 1,685 persons, 81 per cent were shown (by incidents recalled giving rise to job satisfaction) to have been motivated by those aspects of their work which involved the following: sense of achievement and recognition for achievement, responsibility, advancement, satisfaction derived from the nature of the work itself and possibility of growth within the job. When asked about incidents which caused dissatisfaction, 67 per cent related occasions involving the lack of the following: sound policy and administration, technical supervision, satisfactory relationships with other people, adequate status, good salary, adequate physical safety arrangements, and good job security.

We have looked at the role of the supervisor and also mentioned the things that matter to the worker. Shall we look now and see what the supervisor should expect of the men: honesty, willingness to be shown and willingness to do a good day's work, but above all to be trusted. A supervisor must be able to trust the men as the worker should be able to trust the supervisor. What is the good if once you turn your back the person ceases to work. Yes, a man you can trust, knowing he will be working while you are away, is invaluable.

I think that all these things go to make a good groundsman. (I didn't mention good timekeeping because if he has most of the qualities that I have mentioned he would be a good time-keeper.)

If we can combine all the qualities of what a good supervisor should be with all the good things a worker should be I am sure all our lives would be much easier. We all know this is impossible but let us try to do our jobs a little bit better and if we can all achieve a slight improvement this would be a good start. I think it is a fact that when we talk about the supervisor or worker not doing his job properly we never think of ourselves. It is always the other fellow, never us. If we are honest with ourselves, we know that it is us they are getting at, but our pride will not let us accept it. But let us all take a closer look at ourselves before we start putting other people right. Once we can put ourselves right I am sure other people will not seem so bad after all. My final remark is some advice given to me some years ago by a Parks Superintendent. At the time I could not see eye to eye with my immediate superior and I was sure I was in the right. The remark was, "Always remember, the devil you know is better than the one you don't know". The longer you live, meet and work with people the more you will realise how true this is.

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