



How Am I Doin', Boss?

BY PRENTISS C. KNOTTS

This is a story of an employee in Golf Course Maintenance. We'll call him "Norbert."

When Norbert came aboard, he was thoroughly indoctrinated in "our way" of doing things. We took great pains to demonstrate methods and to lecture unendingly on the importance of doing things "our way." Norbert was told that he would be on probation for a period of 90 days, after which he would receive a review and, possibly, a raise.

The 90 days passed uneventfully and Norbert's official probation period ended. This happened without fanfare and went largely unnoticed by everyone (except Norbert). As the days turned to weeks and the weeks to months, Norbert began to suspect that the long-awaited review (and pay increase) was another broken promise; a situa-

slip, and eventually the quality of his work became unacceptable. The superintendent, after much urging from his assistant and the foreman, decided that something must be done about Norbert. He would be called in and talked to about his poor performance and advised of the possible alternatives concerning his continued employment.

The interview went something like this:

"Norbert, I wanted to talk to you about your performance of late. Your attendance and punctuality are not what they should be and the quality of your work has significantly declined in recent weeks. Can you shed any light on this problem for me?" asked the superintendent.

"Gosh, I thought I was doin' O.K.," responded Norbert, looking genuinely perplexed.

"Well, you're not doin' O.K.," retorted the Superintendent, "and unless you can show me some definite improvement very soon, I'm not going to be able to use you around here!"

At this point Norbert is showing visible signs of confusion and dismay. He now realizes that his job is in jeopardy and wants to understand the causes for this so he may effect a cure.

The superintendent stands and in dismissal says, "Norbert, when I hired you, you were told what you needed to do to keep your job here, so, I expect to see you get after it."

Norbert walked away wondering just what he needed to do to ensure his continued employment, but he had no idea where to start. At that point he decided to talk to the assistant superintendent.

That conversation went something like this:

"The Boss just called me in and chewed me out," said Norbert. "I really didn't understand what he was getting at. Has he said anything to you?"

"He sure has, Norbert. My tail has been a crack for weeks, thanks to you. You really need to tighten up!" said the assistant superintendent.

"But he didn't tell me what I was doin' wrong," pleaded Norbert.

"Look," said the assistant superintendent, "If we don't get goin', we're both gonna be in for it."

Again, Norbert was sent on his way with only his thoughts about the sequence of events. He

A way to rate the work of your workers



tion that he had become accustomed to during his all-too-frequently-changing career. He continued to report to work on time and to produce at acceptable levels even though he was becoming more and more disenchanted with his job, and in particular, that branch of management that he had to deal with daily.

After some period of time, which will vary with your own particular "Norbert," Norbert stopped reporting to work on time. His diligence began to

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spent the remainder of the day in a dilemma and went home knowing it's just a matter of time until he'll be back on the street looking for a job again.

The truth of the matter is that Norbert will lose his job and will be looking for a job very soon. Unfortunately, his next place of employment may be just as predictable as the previous and for many of the same reasons.

Norbert can't understand what happened. He started out really liking the work and being outside in a beautiful environment and the other employees seemed to be good people. He had really hoped that this would be a job that he could stay with for a long time and get himself back on track with his life.

Where was the failure? Was the problem really Norbert's or was it a combination of failures and problems on both sides that resulted in Norbert's termination? What could he have done to prevent this sad turn of events?

All of these questions are valid, but complex. To understand the problems associated with this story, we need to go back to the very beginning of our training in supervision. A good place to start is kindergarten. The assignments are simple with clear-cut objectives. The feedback and corrections are instantaneous and the learning experience is a positive one. As the years pass, we receive more complex assignments, but the feedback comes quickly and the learning experience is not compromised. This continues for some of us throughout college. For the rest, it ends wherever education stops.

Changes in the way we view our roles as supervisors and managers will allow us to return to the "comfort zone" we all

enjoyed in grade school and thereafter. An approach that gives rapid feedback and correction with learning as the objective will create competent, trustworthy employees and drastically reduce the turnover that is historically associated with our industry.

Here is one approach:

This superintendent developed a system of rating each employee for each task, each and every day. Using a 10-



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point scale (10.0), the quality and efficiency of each employee is recorded daily on each job assignment. As the supervisor, assistant superintendent or superintendent follows the crew to check the work, a note is made referring to the quality of the work performed. This can be a comment, or a numerical notation using 10.0 as perfection. Notations made in the margin of the page would allow for a more detailed review of the deficiency.

For example, if the assistant superintendent is checking the quality of the mowing job done on greens, he may say, "too much overlap," or "lines not straight," or maybe even, "clippings not scattered enough."

The obvious result of these comments would be a deduction from the perfect score of 10.0. If this procedure is carried out on all employees and on all tasks, there will be an accumulation of scores at the end of the day, week, month, and so on. Scores can be averaged and a rating that reflects the performance of the individual employee can be derived. Posting those ratings weekly or monthly would serve the purpose of informing the employee of his/her current status with the Boss.

In practice, the employee eagerly awaits the weekly posting of the ratings so that he/she may gauge his/her performance against the rest of the crew, and also, so that he/she may keep track of what to expect the next time raises come around. Anyone whose rating goes down will ask, "Why?". If they don't ask any questions, something is learned about that person and the degree of pride taken in the performance of their jobs.

The rating system can be custom-designed to fit any type of operation. Every golf course maintenance operation has standards of quality and performance that are acceptable, even if those standards exist only in the superintendent's mind. If an employee's performance is substandard, the employee could not expect to retain his/her job. Similarly, every superintendent knows how long each job should take. This is true even if it has never been written down.

With today's new computer programs designed to help us manage our operations, the task of establishing time targets becomes much easier. Combining a value for quality and a value

‘Some will seek tasks and initiate work...

for efficiency (time), an overall performance rating can be established for each task. Using these suppositions, here is an example of how a typical employee could be rated on a typical day:

NAME: Norbert

1st assignment Mow grns-fri 9 **Rating** 9.0

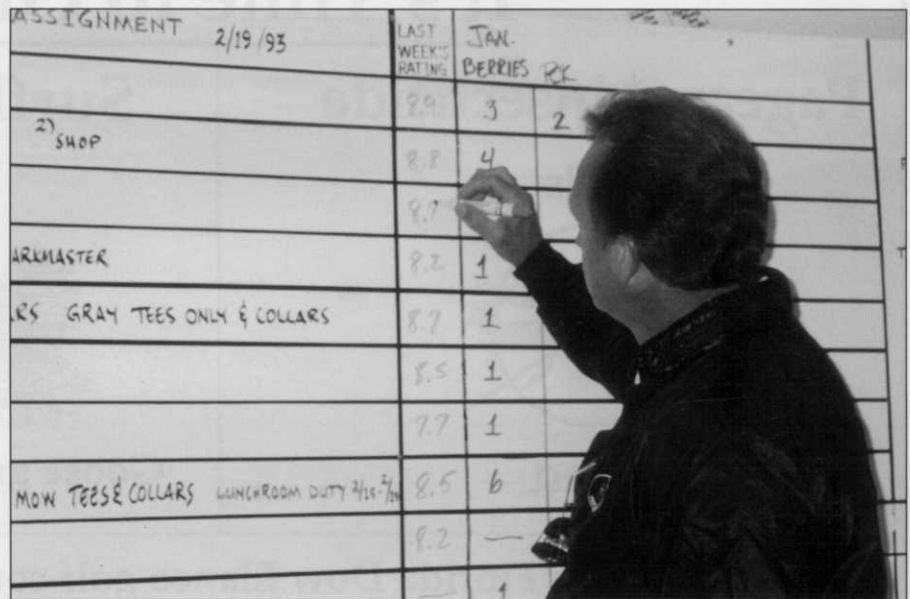
2nd assignment edge bunkers **Rating** 4.5

The daily log would reflect the reasons for the scores above. For example, Norbert's work on the greens may have been perfect, but he may have spent longer than normal to finish the work. Also, it may be possible that Norbert finished in record time, but the quality of his work was poor. If a minimum acceptable standard of 7.0 is established, Norbert will understand that his daily average of 6.75 isn't even marginally acceptable. He will want to know why his work didn't measure up.

At this point, the supervisor will be able to point to the bunker work as his downfall. Upon further examination, Norbert will be told that he failed to maintain pace with previous man hours on the same job, or that the quality of his work was unacceptable, i.e., poor definition, excessive cutback, or sloppy cleanup. Whatever the reason, Norbert will be made aware that a problem exists and with a little explanation, he will be able to make corrections that will prevent losing points next time.

Experimentation with the rating system will allow ratings for group projects, equipment maintenance, deductions for rules violations, and bonus points for exceptional performance. This superintendent deducts .5 points off the weekly average for one tardiness. Other deductions are made (some substantially) for safety violations, appearance, etc. Bonus points are awarded for perfect attendance and punctuality, care of equipment, following safety procedures, leading in a group effort, volunteering for overtime, and many other positive factors.

The rating system can be an effective tool for team building when each employee's rating is dependent upon the performance of every other employee as well as his/her own. For example, a major tournament is scheduled for the coming week. All employees know that additional



ASSIGNMENT	2/19/93	LAST WEEK'S RATING	JAN. BERRIES PK
		8.9	3 2
2) SHOP		8.8	4
		8.7	
ARMMASTER		8.2	1
RS GRAY TEES ONLY & COLLARS		8.7	1
		8.5	1
		7.7	1
MOW TEES & COLLARS LUNCHROOM DUTY 2:15-2:45		8.5	6
		8.2	—
			1

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effort will be required to prepare the course for the event. Some will seek tasks and initiate work, while others will wait for instructions and prodding. If an overall rating for the task of "Tournament Preparation" is given to the entire staff based on the lowest level of performance, the message is clear that not everyone contributed equally to the job. On the other hand, exceptional performance should be rewarded equally.

To make any system work, the application must be fair and consistent. If an employee feels that he/she is being singled out for criticism, the rating system will be perceived negatively. To insure equal distribution of ratings, each employee, including supervisors, mechanics, and secretaries, are listed for the purpose of posting the weekly ratings.

When evaluation time comes around, it is easy to concentrate on the individual performance and problems of the employee. Daily notes gathered by supervisors and the superintendent can be reviewed with the employee to substantiate the ratings and the overall evaluation of the employee. The employee should be encouraged to question the daily reports and remember the exact reason for any point deduction.

Norbert was a victim of his inability to evaluate his own work. He was also the

victim of a superintendent who takes much for granted in that Norbert was expected to know (without being told) exactly what the "Boss" was thinking. In the end, Norbert has little chance for longevity.

The other employees somehow discovered how to survive in that environment and cared little to share that knowledge with Norbert. The superintendent and his mirror image (the assistant superintendent) were thinking about science, nature, and the unpredictables in our business. In many cases the attitude is, "He'll either get it, or he won't." In any case, Norbert, the superintendent, his supervisory staff, the club, the corporation, and the industry will share in the loss. Norbert once again is unemployed; the superintendent is shorthanded; the supervisory staff has an increased workload; the club corporation has more expense to face in the cycle of hiring/firing; and the industry has a reputation that few regular employees can expect a career opportunity.

Some may criticize such a system with comments like, "It will take too much time to inspect each employee's work and grade it... It's too much paperwork. I already have enough of that... The employees won't like having their scores posted for everyone to see."

...while others will wait for instructions and prodding.'

The hard truth is that if we are not following up on each and every employee each and every day, we are not doing our jobs. We must get quality work from each employee. Whether we put it on paper or not, we are rating and evaluating the work done by our crews constantly. This system takes it one step further by putting those impressions of performance on paper with a numerical value.

Norbert is like anyone else. He wants to know when he is doing well and needs to know when he is not. He feels good when he is complimented and is ashamed when he fails. Norbert, like most people, has a certain amount of pride in himself. Building on that pride may be the most powerful tool that a superintendent can have. Using self-esteem, pride and the adventure of learning as tools, the superintendent can create career-minded employees that understand their jobs and look forward to the daily challenges that face them.



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There may not be a happy ending in the story of Norbert and his search for meaningful employment, but there can

be happy endings and happy days for employees if we accept the responsibility of teaching and correcting.

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