Understanding Our Newest Employees...

The Hispanic Workforce

Editors Note: We all know that the Hispanic workforce is already playing a big role in golf course maintenance in Florida. Superintendents are taking Spanish classes and workers are taking English classes. But how well do we understand the work ethic, culture and dynamics of this ever-expanding source of labor? If managing a non-English-speaking workforce is new to you, this article may give you some insights on improving communications and performance in your operation.

BY STEVE VALDEZ

The Hispanic population in the United States is growing every year, and Hispanic labor is beginning to play a big role in the American workforce.

More and more businesses are hiring non-English-speaking Hispanics, but there are still many employers who are afraid to hire them because of the communication gap.

There are some interesting facts that need to be taken into account in determining if hiring Hispanics is the right step for your business.

As many employers have found, Hispanics consistently have great work ethics. The majority of Hispanics who come to the United States from Mexico and places in Central and South America like El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras are here to try to make a better life for themselves and their families. They are not necessarily planning to live here forever.

They want to come to the U.S. to work hard and earn good money to send back to their families.

As we all know, the U.S. dollar is worth from seven to twelve times more in their countries. An Hispanic working here and sending $1,000 U.S. to Mexico is sending 7,000–12,000 pesos to their families.

Depending on the exchange rate. This kind of money goes a long way in Latin American countries.

These Hispanics generally come from small towns and farm areas where jobs are scarce, the economy is bad, and farming isn’t profitable.

Most Hispanics coming to work here...
in the U.S. will stay here anywhere from eight months to two years. Some go through hardships getting to the U.S. Therefore, they will stay long enough to make the trip worthwhile. Others will come and go every year, working in seasonal jobs from spring to fall and then go back home for the winter.

During their stay in the U.S., they will take advantage of the time and work from dawn to sundown seven days per week to make as much money as they can within that time period.

Some of these Hispanics possess skills such brick laying, carpentry, plumbing, electrical and equipment operator, which can be extremely useful in the golf course industry.

Although I was born and raised in the United States, as were my parents and grandparents, I grew up speaking both English and Spanish. I have worked with non-English-speaking Hispanics for many years.

For the last seven years, I have had the opportunity and privilege to work with, manage, interpret and train Hispanics at premier golf courses in Tennessee. With a background in counseling and minor in psychology, I found myself focusing on getting to know them and better understand their situations so that I could improve working relationships. Through this process, I learned a great deal about non-English-speaking Hispanics and developed a great respect for their work ethics.

Many businesses that have not hired non-English speaking Hispanics, but would like to hire them, are apprehensive to do so because of the obvious potential communication gaps.

There are ways to bridge those gaps and make it possible for a smooth flow of business.

First, videotapes in Spanish on operating and servicing their equipment are available from your equipment retailer. You can also obtain Spanish-translated videotapes explaining golf course maintenance by contacting the GCSAA. Also, there are consultants now available that can give hands-on training on equipment operation, golf course maintenance methods, and interpreting, along with seminars on working with a multicultural workforce.

The American workforce is going through a change and we in the golf course and lawn care industries need to appreciate and take advantage of the resources available to us.

If you employ non-English speaking Hispanics or would like to employ them and have any questions, please send your questions to me in care of this magazine or telephone me.

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