Empowerment proves effective on grounds crews

By MARK LESLIE

LINCOLNSHIRE, Ill. — Autonomy and empowerment are the operative words in assembling the most effective employees, according to Pebble Beach Co. Vice President Ted Horton.

Horton was one of several national figures offering succinct and deliberate advice to superintendents and other golf course managers at Public Golf Forum here in October.

Pebble Beach received a federal grant to develop a training program for its 1,000-plus employees. Drawing from that stady, Horton has implemented a plan encompassing partially to fully empowered teams of workers, "town meetings," comprehensive training for managers and crews alike, and using managers as trainers, among other measures. All of this to "master peak performance."

"We're talking about autonomy and empowerment," he said. "I have several teams that are fully empowered. It frees me to work with teams not yet fully empowered and to concentrate more on day-to-day business."

Horton urged managers to create a standard, then lean on or improve upon that standard. He recommended that the superintendent, after hours, walk his crew to training on the course — for instance, to a putting green where he can discuss what he wants and how to accomplish it.

"Give freedom to your best employees to do the job right," he said. "Coach and direct, but give them freedom and get out of the way."

The heart of the Pebble Beach system?

"Feedback: The Breakfast of Communities," he said.

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BRIEFS

STEVINSON RANCH A SIGNATURE TRACK

STEVINSON, Calif. — Stevinson Ranch's Savannah course has achieved Audubon Signature status, as bestowed by Audubon International, and was presented this honor at a ceremony held Nov. 3. Stevinson Ranch was the first golf course outside of Florida and one of only four golf courses in the nation to receive Audubon Signature status. During the building of the Savannah Course, 100 acres of wetlands were restored and an unprecedented 120 new acres of wetlands were created.

FTGA ELECTS BATES

TAMPA, Fla. — The Florida Turfgrass Association (FTGA) has elected Roy Bates president of its more than 1,200-member organization. Bates is superintendent at Imperial Golf Club in Naples, where he supervises 32 people at the 36-hole facility. In the past few years, six of his assistants have become superintendents.

A member of the FTGA since 1981, Bates has held a position on the FTGA's board of directors since 1988, serving as vice president in 1995-96.

HAHN SUCCEEDS FEINDT

ROCHESTER, N.Y. — The retirement of Bob Feindt from Country Club of Rochester (see story page 16) has brought a shakeup at other clubs as well. Joe Hahn, a staple for 14 years at Oak Hill Country Club in Fairport, succeeded Feindt when Feindt retired on Dec. 31, and John Gasper of Ridgewood Country Club in Paramus, N.J., is replacing him.

Hahn, who served as a director of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America for a term beginning in 1992 and has served on several of its committees...

IGM CITES MARSHALL

MERIDIAN ISLAND, Fla. — Bob Marshall, superintendent at The Savannahs golf course here, has earned a Total Quality Management (TQM) award from International Golf Management (IGM) for the overall quality of the Brevard County-owned golf course. Before coming to the county-owned golf course a year ago, Marshall served four months as superintendent at Palm-Aire Spa & Racquet Resort in Pompano Beach.

Dr. Terry Riordan

Riordan: Buffalograsses more accepted, making greater contributions

Q&A

Terry Riordan: A little slower than I thought it would. Total annual sales from turf farms and seed producers are running between $1.5 to $1.7 million. That's not insignificant, but not quite what I expected.

Q: Who has been the major supplier?

T. Crenshaw & Doguet Turfgrass [of Austin, Texas] by far. I thought sales by other suppliers in Arizona, California and Colorado would have been stronger. But they haven't.

G: Why not?

T: The industry just isn't ready for it. The water crisis hasn't gotten severe enough, except in places like Austin and San Antonio. Homeowners in Austin can get a $250 rebate from the city for every $1,000 they spend on water-efficient landscaping. That's a big deal for them. But in places like Phoenix and Las Vegas, it's not even an issue.
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cators," said Horton, borrowing from the theme from Wheaties. Correctly practiced, feedback results in:

- More accurate communication and understanding between management and employees.
- A friendly, more open, fulfilling relationship.
- Discovery of the issues that are most important to employees — usually not pay and benefits, but the working environment.

"Encourage feedback," he said. "Ask for and use it. Listen to what is said without rationalizing or justifying... Paraphrase to test for understanding... Think about the feedback you received and decide how you want to use it."

Horton suggested that superintendents hold "town meetings" with employees.

"It's all positive. No tearing down is allowed," he said. "It's absolutely amazing what employees will say. And you'll say, 'I never knew that bothered them. I can fix that easily.'"

He also recommended a chart for each employee, depicting a continuum of where they stand in their training. "It shows if they are improving, or if they may be due a promotion," he said.

Enhancing job roles, he said, develops people in areas that interest them; motivates the empowered employees; reduces turnover; and increases human resource productivity and effectiveness.


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Speaking of using computers for remote sensing and disease forecasting, Dr. Randy Kane of the Chicago District Golf Association said: "With micro-comput-erization, we will be able monitor on a much more precise basis.

Inputting information from soil and weather into the computer can help predict the occurrence of some diseases. If we get these [prediction models] dialed up properly, we may be able to accurately predict to within a couple of days the disease you have to deal with," he said.

Meanwhile, U.S. Golf Association Green Section Mid-Con-tinent Director Paul Vermeulen spoke out about green speed.

Deciding how fast the greens should be should be predicated on more than one criteria, Vermeulen said. That criteria? His answer is in the acronym SPEED. SPEED stands for: Status of turf. Principle resources available. Environmental conditions (at certain times of the year you can get away with more). Expertise of the golfer (how good the club's golfers are). Design of the greens.

As you increase green speed, you decrease the area available for setting the cup," he said.

Green Section's North-Central Region Director Bob Brame suggested removing rollers from greens mowers during the summer. "They sink the cut down another 1/4 inch and that can make a big difference," he said.

Brame added: "If you've got the roots, the tops will follow, and that's where we play golf."