

Measuring Success

ESTABLISHING AN EMPLOYEE EVALUATION SYSTEM HELPS SUPERINTENDENTS MANAGE STAFF AND IDENTIFY LEADERS

by
PETER
BLAIS

Pinehurst grounds and golf course manager Bob Farren, CGCS, oversees eight courses and 800 acres of turf—everything that “grows or flows”—at the fabled North Carolina resort. Farren also is responsible for a staff of 230 people, and like the other department managers at Pinehurst, which employs about 1,200 workers, he reviews the job performance of his staff at regular, prescribed intervals.

“Employee reviews are very important, whether

you are a small organization of 12 people or, as in our case, a staff of 1,200,” he says. “It is a formality to make sure people are treated consistently and fairly throughout the organization.”

Fair and consistent treatment, coupled with appropriate feedback generated during employee reviews, helps employers attract and retain their most talented workers.

“It is either part of your culture or it isn’t,” says David Hayslette, senior vice president of human

resources for ClubCorp’s Pinehurst Resort Co.

Hayslette is responsible for personnel functions at Pinehurst, The Homestead in Hot Springs, Va.; Barton Creek in Austin, Texas; and Firestone Country Club in Akron, Ohio.

“Great employees have the option of being able to take their skills elsewhere,” he says. “If you want to attract and retain those top-quality employees, you need to develop an environment where they get feedback. Then, you need to make sure they know where they stand. Top-quality employees won’t be satisfied with going through the motions.”

Overseeing it all

Farren has been at Pinehurst since 1983. He was the superintendent at courses No. 2 and No. 4 before becoming assistant to Brad Kocher, CGCS, vice president of golf course management for Pinehurst Resort Co., in 1986. In the fall of 2000, Pinehurst promoted Farren from assistant director of golf course management to his current position. Farren also serves as vice chairman of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America’s career development committee.

The task for Farren and his staff is a monumental one. Among the eight courses is Pinehurst No. 2, the Donald Ross-designed course that successfully hosted the 1999 U.S. Open, which was won by Payne Stewart, and which is the site of the 2005 U.S. Open. There are 230 acres of fairways, 144 greens, 432 tees and more than 500 bunkers to be maintained throughout the eight courses. Farren’s staff also is responsible for 22 acres of hotel and clubhouse grounds, a park, eight putting greens, three croquet courts, marina grounds, a lawn bowling area, a 10,000-square-foot bentgrass nursery and a 17,000-square-foot greenhouse.

Farren’s overall \$6.1-million budget includes about \$4 million of payroll. Among the full- and part-time staff, 155 of them are for course maintenance, 25 are for grounds, 30 are for the maintenance center and two are for administration. In addition, there are a number of part-timers performing various duties.



Photo: Pinehurst, Inc.

Pinehurst grounds and golf course manager Bob Farren, CGCS, oversees eight courses and 800 acres of turf. Farren also is responsible for a staff of 230 people.

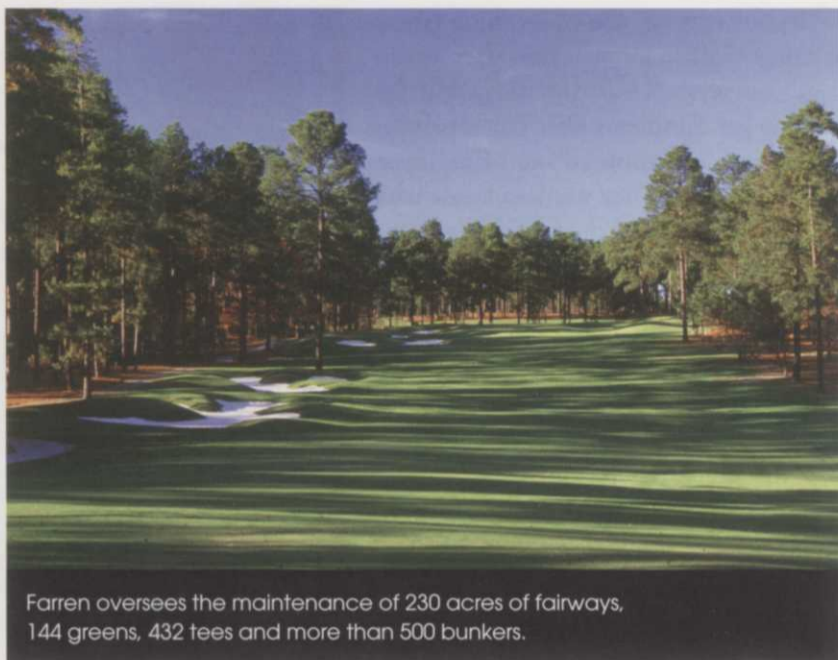


Photo: Pinehurst, Inc.

Farren oversees the maintenance of 230 acres of fairways, 144 greens, 432 tees and more than 500 bunkers.

Reviews for new, hourly staff

Course superintendents conduct formal, in-office evaluations of their assistants and all hourly employees 90 days after they're hired. Annual reviews are required after that. Both evaluation forms note: "An honest and accurate appraisal of performance is vital to self-esteem, motivation, efficiency and improvement within the individual's current position." It directs managers to devote enough time for the review—usually about 30 minutes, according to Farren—to ensure useful feedback is given.

The 90-day evaluation directs superintendents to use a scale of one (the lowest) through five (the highest) to rate the individual's general performance level in many areas. The first section addresses six skills and behaviors, including safety, compliance of policies, attendance/punctuality, quality of work, cooperation/adaptability and job knowledge. The six ratings are totaled and divided by six to yield an average rating. The second section of the 90-day report asks supervisors and employees to list specific goals to be attained by the annual review date.

Although not guaranteed, the evaluation usually results in a slight increase of the hourly rate for new hires. The average rating, which might be something like a 3.8 or a 4.2, is compared to a matrix to determine what pay-increase percentage an employee receives. If someone hasn't performed well enough to merit an increase at that point, that might be the time to say, "This job isn't really for you," and then part ways, Farren says.

ClubCorp is careful not to label the initial three months as a probationary period. "We don't want people to feel they are



Photo: Pinehurst, Inc.

Farren

under the gun those first 90 days," Farren says. "The evaluation enables us to develop a score sheet of their success to that point. For example, we can see what equipment they have been trained on and obtain an update of where they are in terms of job skills."

Regular annual review use ratings to describe the individual's general performance level in many of the same areas as the 90-day review. The highest rating ("world class") is overachieved expectation, which is described as performance unquestionably above established expectations. For an employee to receive this rating it must be documented with detailed explanations by the reviewer. The next rating ("role model") notes that the employee achieved 100-percent of expectations, described as "performance sometimes exceeding but consistently meeting established expectations." Next is "meeting minimum expectations," which acknowledges the potential for greater contributions. The bottom two ratings are "needs significant improvement" and "did not meet expectations."

During an annual review, the reviewer also can document specific observations, such as the number of accidents in the safety area, or certificates earned, seminars attended and education attained under job knowledge. The employee's success of meeting goals set during previous reviews are discussed and recorded, while new goals and objectives for the coming year are set.

To make administering the review process as easy as possible for superintendents, who typically evaluate 16 to 25 individuals per course, the human resources department schedules reviews on each employee's anniversary date rather than all at once. The human resources department also distributes monthly e-mail reminders to superintendents listing which employees will soon be due for reviews.

"There's no doubt it is an intense administrative responsibility," Hayslette says. "But in the end it pays dividends to inform people how they are doing and the status of their progress."

Reviewing salaried staff

Salaried staff are assessed on several levels. They're evaluated 120 days after taking over a position and annually thereafter. They're also reviewed every six months as part of the Blue Chip Goals program. The Blue Chip review involves project-oriented and quality-oriented items that are measurable.

For Farren, this means evaluating eight salaried individuals—golf course superintendents (some of whom over-

see more than one course), an irrigation manager, an equipment manager and a grounds manager—on goals tied to each individual.

"We talk in very specific terms about progress in certain areas, whether it be a renovation project or weed control," Farren says. "Generally, Blue Chip reviews are held in January and July and in detail—where we are, where we want to go and how close we are to getting there."

Blue Chip reviews are a combination of leadership competencies and discreet projects or activities the person would be responsible for during that time frame Hayslette says.

The company identified eight leadership competencies to determine how well managers are doing. The eight competencies are: drive for results; operating excellence; problem-solving and decision-making; customer focus, both internal and external customers; teamwork; adaptability; impact and influence; and grow-in talent.

As for specific projects, they rarely fall within neat six-month blocks of time, meaning aspects of evaluations often carry over from one period to the next. For example, a golf course superintendent who is responsible for a major reconstruction, might be evaluated on a planning and design phase for the first six-months of his or her Blue Chip review. That would blend into a construction phase for the second six months. Typically, individuals will be evaluated on three or four discreet competencies during a six-month period.

The Blue Chip program extends to other operations, as well. An accountant, for example, might be evaluated on the implementation of a new payroll system.

"We use a one-to-five point scoring system," Hayslette says. "The grades are then

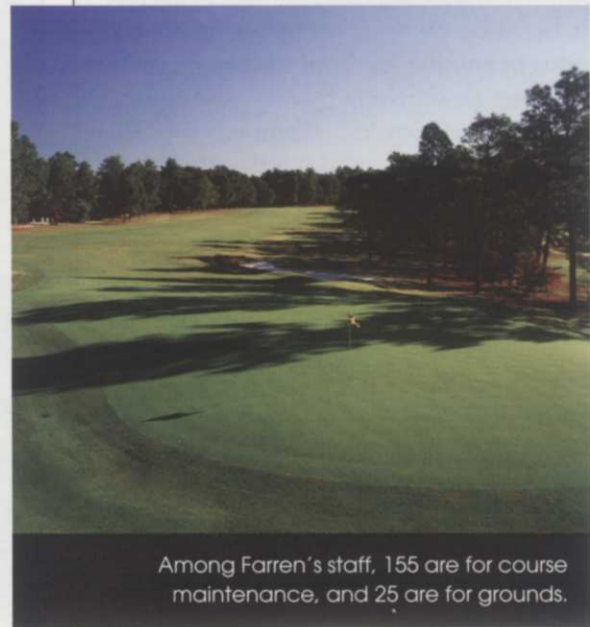


Photo: Pinehurst, Inc.

Among Farren's staff, 155 are for course maintenance, and 25 are for grounds.

weighted: 60 percent for Blue Chip projects and 40 percent for leadership competencies. Those scores are weighted and evaluated.”

Hayslette says the Blue Chip process forces managers to take a big-picture view of performance management.

“It isn’t simply holding out an expectation and doing a review once a year,” he says. “It should be a cumulative review of the feedback that has gone on throughout the year. If someone is a month into a project and behind the eight-ball, missing deadlines and having some struggles, and if the supervisor intervenes early on and encourages the person to regroup and try to save the project, that’s better than waiting until the end of the year and yelling ‘gotcha.’ That’s what we are trying to teach with our performance-management process. It is an ongoing dialogue during the six months that culminates with a review that shouldn’t be a surprise for anyone.”

As part of the yearly salaried reviews, managers document if individuals earned certified golf course superintendent status and continuing education units, attended leadership seminars or obtained training internally. This year, ClubCorp is offering a 1 1/2-day Leadership 101 seminar that all Pinehurst salaried managers must attend. Participation in the seminar will be documented in their reviews.

Hayslette and Kocher don’t sit in on the actual evaluations of salaried employees conducted by Farren or other Pinehurst supervisors. But they do review each evaluation from a big-picture perspective.

“What we are looking for is a consistency in the application of the process across the property,” Hayslette says. “The food-and-beverage department’s definition of what a 4-rating is shouldn’t be out of sync with what the course maintenance department says a 4-star rating is. If one area looks like it has been overly generous in its evaluations or another has been too tough, that’s what we are watching for.

“What we try to do is train our supervisors to be objective and use the Blue Chip process as a way to lay out specific expectations and provide feedback. The review should not be a monumental event, but rather the culmination of a dialogue that has been happening over the entire six months. What happens in too many corporations is that supervisors tell someone to work on something and then walk in a year later and say, ‘I don’t think you did a very good job.’ The employee wonders why the supervisor didn’t say something earlier. With our approach, there is an established, ongoing dialogue. Management people, like

Bob Farren, think it is a useful tool and helps them in the long run.”

Making it a priority

Pinehurst keeps all written reviews on-site in its human resources office, and a human resources person is assigned to the course maintenance department.

Farren says his department has always been diligent with doing employee reviews on time.

“The departments that come up short in doing reviews on time also rank worst in our employee-satisfaction surveys,” he says. “We have been pretty good about doing reviews on time and have generally come up well in those surveys.”

Farren believes a properly executed employee review provides a good score sheet of an employee’s performance. It’s a chance to give and take feedback, whether it’s constructive criticism, praise or a combination of the two. More than 90 percent of the reviews are a positive experience for supervisor and employee.

“It is an opportunity with poor performance to hopefully counsel the person on how to improve, or at the very least document their performance,” he says.

“In our surveys, the main thing people say they want to know is how they are doing,” he says. “Unfortunately, you frequently get comments like, ‘My supervisor never pays attention to me.’ Employees want attention. They want to know what is going on and how they are doing.”

A well-designed evaluation-management system should highlight those people who are exceeding expectations clearly and consistently, Hayslette says. “That helps you identify the leaders of tomorrow. The star performers are the ones you need to reward and give more responsibility.”

Farren says he doesn’t know of any other company that conducts employee reviews as extensively.

“But I would encourage other courses to consider the value of reviews,” he says. “Some people think it is too much of a burden. But if you put it on your calendar and make it happen, it really pays off over time in terms of discrete employee satisfaction.” GCN

Peter Blais is a contributing editor based in North Yarmouth, Maine. He can be reached at pblais@maine.rr.com.

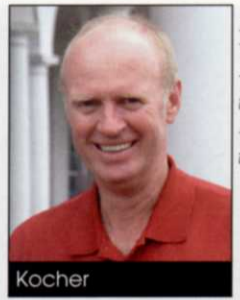


Photo: Pinehurst, Inc.

Kocher

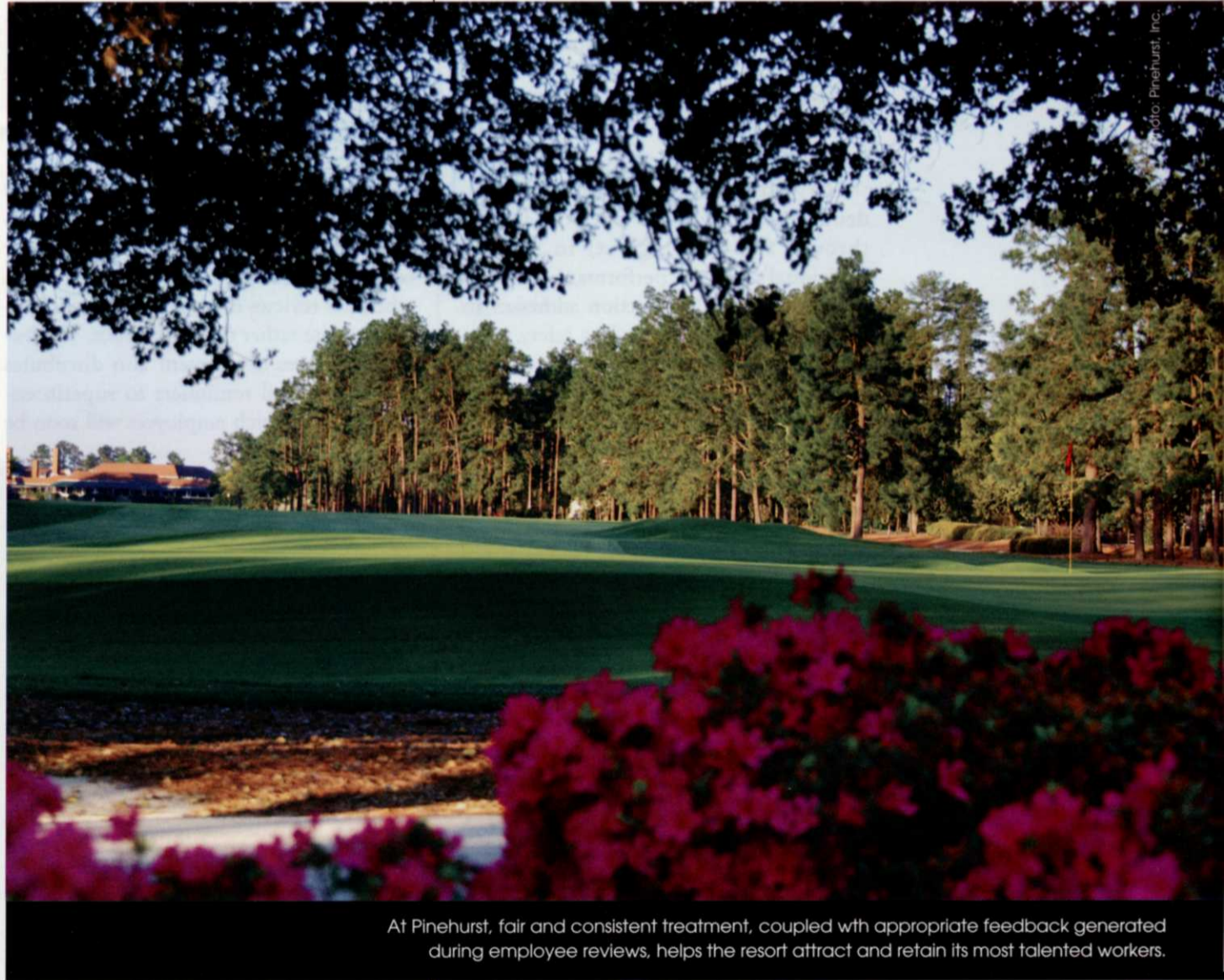


Photo: Pinehurst, Inc.

At Pinehurst, fair and consistent treatment, coupled with appropriate feedback generated during employee reviews, helps the resort attract and retain its most talented workers.