

Hiring quality workers

Many golf course superintendents are in the midst of preparing for a new season. They're undoubtedly enjoying their time studying and pricing new equipment and turf supplies. But most of them find much less joy recruiting and selecting the people who will use the equipment and supplies to create a magnificent golf course.

The choices they make will go a long way to help determine the level of stress they will face this year and the success of their courses. Good procedures for choosing equipment and supplies and hiring employees have more similarities than one might think.

Consider the purchase of a new fairway mower. Superintendents begin by specifying what they need – width, power, cut, features – given the mowers they already have and the characteristics of their course. Then they collect information and compile – formally or informally – a list of possible makes and models they might purchase. Finally, they collect detailed information, including cost, and select a mower to purchase.

When hiring the best people, a similar procedure is used, albeit with two considerable differences. First, the choices are more important because there are greater productivity differences among people compared with brands and models of equipment. Second, each superintendent is practically on his own when hiring employees.

Unfortunately, most hiring procedures are less detailed and less reliable than those generally used to purchase new equipment.

So what's included in a reliable hiring procedure? Begin by specifying what's needed. In the human resources field, this means defining the competencies one seeks that will enable the person in a certain position to succeed. A formal definition of competencies is the combination of observable and measurable skills, knowledge, performance behaviors and personal attributes that contribute to enhanced employee performance and personal success. One should select three to five competencies that are most critical to success in a position, given the existing staff and the task to be completed. Employee competencies might include experience operating equipment, positive work attitude, reliability and being a team player. Recruiting without first specifying the desired competencies is like wandering

around a trade show without knowing what you are looking for.

Recruitment is defined as the process of attracting individuals on a timely basis, in sufficient numbers and with appropriate qualifications to apply for a job. The focus of this definition is on attracting a pool of applicants – not just one qualified applicant. This focus is the most common mistake made by managers, including golf course superintendents. The goal of recruiting is to attract a quality pool from which there's a high probability of hiring a great candidate. Without a pool of candidates, the probability of hiring a great candidate is low.

So how is a great pool of candidates achieved? Recruitment is a process of marketing a club or course and the position available. One must develop a recruitment plan that reaches great candidates and entices them to apply for a position. The plan can include informal word of mouth, want ads, job announcements in the newspaper or on the Internet and formal job services. What-

ever the method to reach potential applicants, the recruitment material must provide a picture of the course or club and the position that stimulates qualified candidates to apply.

The following provides the information needed to write great recruitment material:

- List words and phrases that describe positive attributes of the club or course;
- List words and phrases that describe positive attributes of the position;
- Describe the position;
- List the qualifications required for success in the position;
- Find out what great candidates for this position are doing now (be creative); and
- Know how candidates should apply.

Selection involves choosing from the pool of candidates who best match the competencies needed to succeed in the position. The interview is the most important part of that.

The following are some ideas to consider when planning your interviews.

- Determine the fit of the candidate for the position, and promote the position and the course or club so the candidate is likely to accept should he be offered the position. Hiring is like dating – either party can end the process at any time.

- An interview is a formal, high-tension situation. While working to make both parties feel at ease, it should be treated as a formal interaction, not as a bull session. Careful planning and preparation is crucial.

- Prepare questions in advance that are built to measure the candidate on the selected competencies. Each candidate must then be asked these same questions. The box to the left contains some questions that correspond to the example competencies described above. Note that several of these are behavioral questions asking candidates to describe how they have handled a specific situation previously. This type of question has been found to be effective.

- Be careful, but not paranoid, about illegal questions. The easiest rule is a simple one: Ask only questions that relate to or measure the candidate's likelihood to succeed in the position.

Although it seems difficult and time consuming, hiring outstanding candidates produces rewards far greater than the cost.

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Interview questions

Introductory

- How did you hear about our job opening?
- Had you heard of our golf course or club before seeing the position announcement? (Let the person expand if answer is "yes" but do not pressure him.)

Experience operating equipment

- Describe your job experiences, especially those related to operating equipment. (Ask follow-up questions as needed so you completely understand his job experiences.)
- Tell me about the last time you learned or improved your skills in operating equipment.
- Where do you feel your greatest training needs would be to excel in this position?

Team player

- Give me an example of when you worked effectively as part of a team.
- Do you prefer to work alone or with others? Why?
- Give me a recent example in which you had a fellow employee with a poor attitude. What did you do?

Reliable

- Give me an example of a time when you were late for work. How did you handle the situation?