EMPLOYEES: ASSETS NOT COSTS

For at least two decades, we’ve heard the phrase “employees are assets not costs.” The phrase represents a significant shift in how employees are led, supervised and managed by world-class businesses, including golf courses.

For costs (fertilizer, pesticides, etc.), superintendents seek to determine the optimal quantity, always keeping in mind cost control. For assets (land, greens, machinery), which are investments, superintendents determine how to use them to get the greatest return. A mower, for example, does no good until it’s used. It must be maintained and repaired to maximize the return on the investment.

Employees are quite different from other assets because they can think and feel, possess multiple talents and have other employment options. Superintendents must consider what it takes to get the greatest return from this asset.

How superintendents maintain a fleet of mowers has a considerable impact on the return on the club’s investment. Similarly, how superintendents lead, supervise and manage employees has a significant impact on employee productivity and job satisfaction. Gaining significant return on employee productivity and satisfaction starts with superintendents’ attitudes toward employees and permeates how they manage employees.

Here’s a story relating to the idea of employees as assets. Several years ago, after a presentation at a nursery and greenhouse conference, a gentleman named George approached me and asked to tell his story. He had worked for a small landscape business for 23 years. That day, looking back at the 23 years, he determined he was a terrible employee. He took all of his vacation and sick leave whether he was sick or not. He did the minimum. His justification at the time was that everyone did the same because the owner/manager provided no clarity or feedback. Then he found a job with another small landscape business.

Owner/Manager provided clear expectations, feedback, encouragement and support. This was the second time George had been encouraged to attend the conference. At the time, George said he worked hard, enjoyed what he was doing and believed he was an excellent employee.

George’s productivity and job satisfaction were dramatically different when working for the two similar businesses. What’s the difference? Obviously, George was older; however, few workers change their values, personality, motivation, etc., sufficiently to explain the difference, which, in this case, was the owner/manager. The first owner/manager provided clear expectations, feedback, encouragement and support. This was the second time George had been encouraged to attend the conference. At the time, George said he worked hard, enjoyed what he was doing and believed he was an excellent employee.

The following are the three pillars of world-class, quality-focused human resource program:

- An organizational culture and a clearly articulated and continuously communicated business direction (vision, mission, core values) that’s completely consistent with a quality-focused approach to employee management.
- A recruitment, selection and hiring program that attracts employees who have the competencies — knowledge, skills, abilities, experience, attitudes, behaviors — to succeed.
- A work environment in which the values) that’s completely consistent with a quality-focused approach to employee management.