

A golf superintendent

Unions and you

The subject of unions and their ingress into golf courses — and course maintenance in particular — has been on my mind for quite awhile, and now there are rumblings in our area of further course unionizations. A majority of courses cannot afford unions and I would like to give you my thoughts, from a point of view of a course that is unionized, on how to prevent or forestall union takeover of your operation.

Employees will generally seek unionization for the following reasons — though not necessarily in this order:

1. Job security
2. Wages and overtime
3. Benefits
4. Supervisory treatment
5. Lack of job description or guidance
6. Poor working conditions
7. Lack of communication or employee policy manual
8. Dispute resolution

Job security is probably the biggest factor — look at your employees. Are they guaranteed a job tomorrow or next week? Can you fire them at will? If you do fire them, do they have any recourse? Do you give an employee more than one chance before he's fired? Does the employee think he was fired because of a personality clash? You didn't like his face? You thought it was easier to fire than train?

Think about it. What can your employee expect to happen the next second/minute/day/week. Praise maybe — criticism and lack of a job possibly. How much work is he going to provide for you if he continually worries about having work and making the payments on a car, house, boat, etc.

You say, "If he has to worry about all that he is going to be with me because he cannot afford not to be." Fine if you're treating him well — but if that goes sour he is going to find some way of insuring that he resolves his problem — contact the union and you are on your way.

Following close and tying in with job security is lack of communication. Do your employees know where they stand in terms of promotion? Is it seniority, working skill, or a combination of the two? Do you have two different people doing the same job but at different wage rates? Does your employee have a grievance procedure — does he have any recourse to your final statements? Does he know that certain types of behavior are taboo and does that change from year to year or person to person? Again, if these condi-

tions exist and the working environment is not good, you're on your way to unionization.

Wages are an important consideration. How do you rate in your community — in comparison to the green industry? Have you checked your fellow courses or landscapers? Does your employee know when he can expect an increase, or is it by your whim? Does he know that different jobs are worth differing rates on the course, is he sure the turf student you hire will not be paid the same as he and maybe work more hours? Does he know when overtime begins and know how it's computed? Does he have a recourse if his pay (according to him) is figured wrong? Do you have a time clock? Can you go back a month quickly on time records? If he is late, does he know that he loses time to the closest 1/10 of an hour? These are questions again that you should ask yourself or your employees and if too many answers are negative — you are in trouble.

Benefits figure importantly. Especially to those people who are yearly workers, this is extremely important. Your best employees, those who are really your strength, are these people. If you want them to be around you had better ask yourself a few questions. A good number of people live hand to mouth. Their paycheck barely covers expenses, and loss of time plus drug and hospital expenses will put them under and they never will recover. If the employee is perfectly healthy after hospitalization, he will still be a nervous wreck with the payments and his work will suffer. Do your employees know what coverage they have, if any? Has anyone ever explained the policy to them? Do they know that if they miss time for sickness or hospital treatment, they will be paid? Or do they know only certain people receive that and they seem to have been picked at your discretion? Do they know the policy on prescription drugs, or do you take the money out of petty cash for some?

With hospital rooms running over \$200 a day, do they know whether an anaesthesiologist be paid more than \$100? Is a physical covered?

What about retirement? Where do they stand each year? Do they know the amounts they put in and the amount the club contributes? Do they know their retirement dates and what the computed benefit will be per year at that date?

Do they know when they can play golf? Can all play if they want to, including minority workers?

There are many other questions concerning benefits, but the most important for them is

"Where do I stand?" Do your employees feel as though everyone is being treated fairly? Do you have a favorite — who has the good jobs and maybe gets paid more, golfs with the boss, eats lunch with the boss, but is not a supervisor? Are all of your employees offered the same amount of straight time: 8 hours a day, 40 hours a week, time and a half (over 8 hours and 40 hours and Saturday) with double time on Sunday and triple time on holidays?

Have you made an effort to train all members of your crew to do all jobs so that you can spread the 1, 1½, 2, 3 times around and the good as well as the bad jobs? Remember, unless you give a person every chance possible to prove himself you're assuming something about them — and that is not fair.

Do you have job descriptions? Does your cup setter know he is to change the tee markers by quarters depending on pin location? Or does he only know that through the grapevine or when you explode and call him a dummy for not doing the job? Do you have classifications—temporary (less than 6 months), grounds, semi-skilled, and mechanic? If you do, does the employee know what's expected of him in a certain classification? Does he know that the start of work is just that, mowers and machines will be gassed before starting time so come 6 a.m. the machine will be leaving the yard? Or is this something you inform him of periodically and only do so when you have a headache?

What about working conditions, do you have an employee area? Is it clean? Are the bathrooms private and clean? Do you have confectionary machines? Do you provide rain gear and boots or do you expect them to work in mud and rain without? Is your work area safe? (OSHA notwithstanding.) Do you provide the tools for people to do the job properly? Is the lighting correct? Are your machines dependable? Can your employees have a peaceful lunch or do you instruct them during their lunch hour?

These are all questions, many more of which can be asked, that given enough time and the right situation will lead to unionization very predictably and soon.

What is the cure? Simple: copy what the unions have been doing. Take parts of contracts, weld them all together, start on a gradual basis with the good graces of your club and employees and establish an employee policy manual. With thoughtful work, a very good manual can be developed for your particular situation that will provide a very healthy working environment and take all the steam away from any attempted union takeover.

The above was written by a golf superintendent at a course where the maintenance workers are unionized. Because of his delicate situation with regard to union negotiations, he has asked to remain anonymous.