

Superintendent skills

By Ronald C. Frame



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two years. He has consulted directly for a wide variety of firms and was with the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center, Director of Human Resource Management and lecturer in health administration. He has authored a management manual for GCSAA, and has authored or co-authored various professional journals in the hospital and banking field.

Management: Teamwork and tools, part 1

In doing the job for which he was hired, the superintendent requires the services of an assortment of rather diverse team members, members which may wear wheels and chew up grass, may come in bags, jugs or cans and raise havoc with critters and weeds, or may suck water out of the ground and spit it out through a pipe, or may turn the fairways white in the winter and green in the spring.

At times, recalcitrant but mostly cooperative, these particular team members are generally not much of a problem. With careful selection, proper maintenance and an awareness of what might be, these mechanical, chemical and natural members can and do contribute, as physical resources, to the expanding effectiveness of the human resources without whom member tools of the trade are totally ineffective.

To benefit the golf course through the use of highly complex chemicals, hardware and environmental systems, the superintendent has a demanding technological role where pure knowledge and good judgement has a significant impact on the bottom line of the balance sheet, thus the continued existence of the course.

But team membership extends beyond these important physical resources and the technical criteria important to selecting a superinten-

dent extends past their use and application. The superintendent must also master the trade of people management in addition to thing management, and this discipline opens the mind to the most formidable members of the team; the crew.

We know about the importance of equipment maintenance, both preventive and reactive systems, and of the necessity of the application of a high degree of technical ability necessary to keep things running well. But too seldom does an equal awareness and understanding of the need for systems of crew people - maintenance, both preventive and reactive, match the need. Here, in the people - team members - aspects of the job, the superintendent must become the MANAGEMENT TECHNICIAN, wielding MANAGEMENT tools to assure the proper maintenance of the course's most costly resource - people.

The requirements of the management process in achieving the goals of the golf course truly requires a team effort. These goals, whether generated from the superintendent's own standards or passed down from on high, must be shared goals shared with the team - and certain tools must be used to keep the team working together. We know the role of tools in keeping equipment and supplies in working order; this and a following article will deal with tools and concepts necessary to keeping the crew in working order. And a discussion of goals is a good place to start.

Associated with any human approach to a task, there are two immediate, important and obvious questions that need answering. First, what is the job - what needs to be done? Second, how best to do it? As a superintendent, these questions are answered in the process of first assigning the task. It's natural; if one wants it done, one tells them what and how.

In a third question, perhaps not so obvious, but probably more critical to human performance in the long run, is WHY the task needs to be done. Our children, too young to know better, will ask "why, why, why." As adults they won't ask "why" so readily, but the need to know "why" is still there and is very strong. Any directive to "do" is incomplete without a "why do" explanation. And "just because" makes no more sense among adult

crew members than among the innocent questioning faces of our too-young-to-know-better children.

"Why" is at the root of one of the most significant principles of human resource management; every job must have an objective (goal) and that objective must be communicated to the person doing the job. The most basic, most menial task in golf course maintenance must have an objective, a reason for existing, and the objective of that most menial task must contribute in some real way to a larger objective, which in turn plays a part in a yet larger objective which in turn ultimately explains why the course exists, why people play it and, to bring the role of "why" of objectives and goals - home to a personal level, why there is such a thing as a golf course superintendent. That role exists only because of a pyramic of increasingly important tasks and objectives that need directing and controlling within an organization of things and people. Without objectives, tasks are meaningless and the human spirit reacts badly to meaningless tasks, the superintendents included.

How To? Communication, Mr. Superintendent; you demand it of your superiors, you must provide it to your subordinates. First, this is what you will do; second, this is how you will do it; third, this is why it must be done, in terms of today's short-range goals, next month's mid-range goals and next year's long range goals. If it's important for you to get the job done, then it must be important enough to satisfy the doer's need to know why. Knowing why may even result in discovered means of doing it better.

A fifteen minute session twice a week for open discussion about what, how and why should open the door to understanding. Occasional informal one-on-one reinforcement of what-how-why information should lead to even better communication-based acceptance of whats-going-on-and-why-am-I-part-of-it unasked questions.

We start with recognition of the team, being aware of the human member's need to know objectives (whys) and responding to that need, and move then naturally to the development of feelings of identification, of loyalty, of having contributed in a meaningful way, of satisfaction in accomplishment, of a true, class A membership in the team.