



No Comprende

By NATE USELDING

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These two words are changing our everyday means of communication with our employees. *No comprende* means you don't understand and more explanation is needed. Hispanic employees are becoming a big part of the golf course community and we, as managers, need to be able to communicate with them. Speaking their language and understanding their culture are two necessities to effectively manage a successful team. Getting your message across and having them fully understand it is important because too many times I've struggled with Hispanic employees misunderstanding our daily tasks.

In my quest to communicate the Spanish language to our team, I have come a long way from high school where I began learning it. Two years is all that was required of a foreign language to enroll in college. That is all I took too! I had no need to learn anymore for I wasn't interested in going abroad. My degree also didn't require any foreign language either, and I wasn't going to waste my money on a class I would struggle in. Where does that leave me now, as I search for help with the language? Who knew the impact it would have on my career? Fifteen years ago, I would have never guessed our industry would rely so heavily on Spanish speaking employees like we do. There are beginner classes offered through many community programs for speaking Spanish that prove to be helpful. Three years ago, I took advantage of one of these classes and it helped me get started.

My personal struggle with managing Hispanics is correctly relaying their daily tasks to them. Telling them is one thing, having them understand it is another. Getting your message across is difficult when your vocabulary is limited. I constantly rely on an English/Spanish dictionary to help with communicating. What you say and what they hear may be

two completely different things. A couple years ago we instructed a Hispanic employee to rotary mow the *pasto alto*, tall grass, on hole 14. What we meant was to mow the area in the rough where it was too wet for the large mowers to go. What he understood was to mow the tall grass on 14 and proceeded to mow an area we designate as no-mow. By the time we realized what happened, half of the no-mow area was mowed at three inches. It was a simple misunderstanding, and we were to blame because we didn't make sure he completely understood. This lesson taught me to follow up in a timely manner and to ask them to repeat their



Nate Uselding, bottom right, with his Dellwood Hills amigos.

task back to me. I will now go out and check up on them by driving by with a big smile and a wave. This way if they do have questions or if I see something not going smoothly, I can stop and try to have a conversation. The big smile lets them know they are doing a nice job and everything is going well.

Wouldn't it be great to have an interpreter on staff to help train your employees? Everything would be so easy. We don't have an interpreter at Dellwood Hills, but we do have a couple Hispanics who can speak English fairly well. When training an employee, I like to bring along an experienced Hispanic operator who

can also speak English. This allows me to explain all components of the task without worrying about anything being missed. Many times what I say in Spanish isn't accurate, and I am corrected by the other amigo. I like to follow the new guy around for the first couple of holes to ensure things are running smoothly before I let him off on his own and checking in once in a while. I also like sending another experienced operator over to see how things are going and then report back to me if they have any questions.

What can we do as managers? Here are some ideas on how we can alleviate the communication gaps between us and our workforce. Submerge yourself in their language, speak Spanish as much as you can even though you may fumble with your words. Ask questions all the time. Having your Hispanic crew teach you Spanish as you teach them English provides great trade-offs. You both learn something new and you get to know each other better. I personally learn more by writing daily jobs on the board in Spanish because I have to know the word and

know how to spell it. Not only do the community centers provide classes for Spanish but they also offer English classes. This would be a great way to teach and retain employees over the years and provide incentives at a real low cost. When I took my class through the community, it was less than \$50. There are books and CD's out there for us to try out; check your local public library for help. Also, at the national conference there are always classes on speaking and managing a Spanish workforce.

One day I will be a superintendent and manage my own Hispanic crew. I am preparing myself now for the issues that may arise tomorrow and learning how to provide a great workplace environment for my future employees. I've learned more in the last three years at Dellwood Hills than I did in my two years of high school because I am involved with it for over eight hours a day, five days a week. *No comprende* is still part of my vocabulary, however, it is not used as much as it was three years ago! These techniques explained above have proved to be successful in my journey to communicating and understanding the Spanish language.