

An Adventure in Life

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People, the constant in life unless you are a recluse. In our lives, be it at home or at work, or out and about, we are in contact with and deal with people. People have a tremendous affect on our lives.

One of the more interesting parts of my adventure has been meeting and dealing with people of different backgrounds and cultures. A large part of the successes we all enjoy as superintendents has been and is due in large part to the people on our golf course maintenance staffs. We may have the best equipment and products that money can buy, but people still are the key to a successful operation

I have found the Asian people to be very hard workers, but largely lacking in many skills that are important to maintaining a golf course. One source of this lack of skill is the lack of knowledge that the middle class Chinese population has for the game of golf. Soccer is king. The World Cup is a major happening for many in the Asian world. In Wisconsin, some people spend their vacation days attending the Green Bay Packers summer training camp. In Hong Kong, there are no public golf courses because land is so valuable and controlled by the government. Hence, an individual must come from wealth to have been involved with golf at a young age, or even as they have become older. You must be a member of a private club to be able to play golf. Memberships are extremely expensive and hard to come by as the clubs have extensive waiting lists. Other than myself, only two other people on my staff really play golf. Television is not popular in Asia, so very few people have the opportunity or take the time to watch golf on television. Thus, the exposure to the game for the general population is minimal. This presents challenges when trying to explain various aspects of maintaining a golf course when the staff basically does not understand the game of golf. As an example, trying to teach basic golf course set-up is a challenge in itself. The staff member needs to understand what a fairway and tee is before we can progress to the importance of tee markers to spacing,

alignment to the fairway, etc. Now we must progress to doing this process for 18 holes correctly, and understanding why set-up is important. So what if the tee blocks may point towards the left or right



rough. Mow the tee, put the tee markers back and on to the next tee, that's assuming the tee markers are placed back onto the tee. This lack of familiarity carries over into all aspects of maintaining the golf course. It's important to explain the game of golf and how a particular maintenance task relates to and affects the game of golf. This type of education is a daily, ongoing process. Reinforcement of ideas and concepts is constant.

Teaching the Chinese people to operate golf course equipment can be a difficult and frustrating experience. Very few middle class people are able to own vehicles; most travel by bicycles or walk. For many, getting onto a gas or diesel powered piece of equipment is a very frightening experience. Most have never been around power equipment until they started working on the golf courses. Once on the equipment, they don't have the coordination or judgment skills for operating equipment. Patience and a lot of practice are essential, especially on larger pieces of equipment. A clutch and standard shift - watch out!!

The standard work week in Asia is based on 48 hours per week. Overtime begins after 48 hours. All permanent employees work on a 2-year contract, which is renewable, if the employee has

done a good job. The pay scale begins at \$5,000 HK per month and increases yearly based on the employee's job performance. The monetary exchange rate is \$1 US is equal to \$7.8 HK, so the monthly beginning

rate is about \$640 US. After 60 days of employment, the employee is entitled to 12 days of Holiday pay and two weeks of Annual Leave. All full-time employees receive benefits such as health insurance, clothing, transportation reimbursement and noon meals.

Forty percent of the maintenance staff is comprised of females. These ladies are hard working, strong, and many can perform hard physical labor equally well as the male members of the staff. The Special Projects or Construction staff has 12 members of which eight are females. In the Asian world, it is considered undesirable and unattractive for a female to have a dark tan.

The accompanying photo shows the typical dress of a female staff member. No matter the weather, this is the standard dress. Many times all that is visible is the ladies eyes.

It is extremely important to understand the Chinese culture when dealing with the staff members.

When reprimanding or disciplining any staff member, it must be done in private, and never raise your voice. Reprimanding someone in public causes that person to loose face in front of their peers and is a definite no. Also, speaking to an Asian in a raised voice is a sign of extreme disrespect and a good way to create an enemy and disgruntled employee forever. The Chinese are hard workers, diligent and will work in any type of weather. They seem to be immune to rain. I believe that is due to the fact that the summer is the rainy season and people are used to rain. They go about work as if it is 80 degrees and sunny. The only time they are taken off the golf course is for a Black Rain or Typhoon warning, or lightning. Otherwise, work just continues.

People's day-to-day living is much different than in the United States. The family is the center of the Chinese people's

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life. You are expected to live with and care for your parents until they pass away. At 18 years of age you do not leave home, you live at home until your parents pass away. I believe this tight family structure is a major reason why few gangs are evident in Hong Kong. Children all are required to attend schools in a school uniform. To cut down on the number of schools needed, schools operate under the two-shift program. The school day starts at 6 am, and ends at noon, or starts at 1 pm and ends at 7 pm. Twice as many students are able to attend a school under this program. Which program the student attends is determined by the school administration, and not subject to change. Students are required to learn and study the English language; most university classes are taught in English. Being able to speak the English language is very important to the Chinese, especially the young Chinese population.

Most middle class people live in flats; we would call them apartments.

Most apartments average less than 700 square feet in size. Appliances are small to accommodate the small room sizes. Without a lot of storage, little food is kept or stored in the home. Thus, most Asians shop at a local market or fresh food market on a daily basis. The standard procedure is for someone in the household to shop at the local market on the way home from work. Local grocery stores stock very few frozen and pre-packaged food products. You decide on the meal based on what looks good in the marketplace. The Chinese use going out to eat as a form of entertainment. Eating out is very inexpensive, and with the long workdays, eating out is very popular. For many, a social event for the evening is eating at a small local eatery or restaurant. Most small eateries have less than 12 tables total. The food is fresh, very good, and very inexpensive. Two people eating out at a small restaurant can have an entire meal including drinks for less than \$10 US.

Televisions and computers are not widely used by the Chinese as a source of entertainment, so eating out is the social event in most of their lives. Most Chinese people are unhappy and seldom smile due to

their work situations. The Chinese are very serious; most must work at least 10 to 12 hours a day, 6 days a week. Humor and any type of teasing is in short supply. One of the first days on the job I was touring on the courses with one of my assistants, and after two hours of conversation, his comment was I don't understand your American humor. It takes quite a long period of time for the people to warm up to any type of teasing and humor. They take the spoken word very, very seriously. The only time I have witnessed much laughter was when our shop dog, Rambo, a Black Lab, was seen chasing a small brown monkey across the 18th fairway on the New Course. The monkey had decided to visit a dumpster at our maintenance area until encountering Rambo. Seeing a Black Labrador at full speed chasing this brown monkey across the fairway was funny indeed. Never knew monkeys could move so fast!

Meeting, working with and learning about the Chinese people has been pleasurable, interesting, sad and at times frustrating. But a very important and critical part of managing golf courses in Hong Kong.

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