



## Dealing With A Weak Labor Market

*Finding and retaining labor is becoming one of the greatest challenges to golf course superintendents.*

Finding and retaining labor continues to be a recurring problem for golf course superintendents across the country. With the U.S. economy slowly improving in some sectors, other industries are competing with the golf market for labor resources by offering less strenuous, higher-paying jobs that are more enticing to potential employees. To accommodate rising labor costs, many golf courses have had to increase operating budgets. However, many golf courses still are unable to compete with higher wages being offered by industries like lawn care, construction, gas and oil, etc. The typical U.S. golf course pays an hourly employee approximately \$10.64<sup>i</sup> per hour, which is hardly competitive with other industries (Graph 1). Additionally, new home construction is on the rise, further depleting the applicant pool for golf courses.

The factors that are making it difficult for golf course superintendents to locate, hire and retain a strong team of employees are complex. In addition to an improving economy that is luring potential applicants away from golf to higher-paying positions in other industries, factors like work visas, health care legislation, a younger demographic and high employee turnover also contribute to labor issues. While H-2B visas allow more nonimmigrant laborers to work in the U.S. and E-Verify allows employers to quickly and easily check an applicant's employment eligibility, employees carrying these legal documents often demand higher wages than some golf courses are able to pay. Additionally, while the Affordable Care Act has provided many Americans access to health care, some golf courses that employ seasonal employees are struggling with the financial impact of the new law.

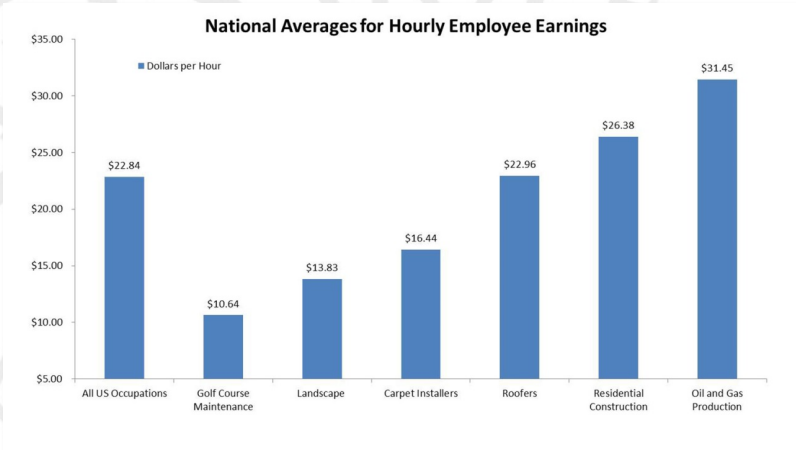


***This golf course superintendent hosts a yearly employee bar-b-que in appreciation for their hard work.***



The golf course maintenance industry also could be in the middle of one of the largest social workforce shifts it has ever seen and must adapt to a younger workforce with different values and beliefs. Millennials are a group that question business and operational protocol not out of

disrespect to their managers but out of curiosity and a desire to completely understand the process. This change in philosophy often is unfamiliar to superintendents of the baby boomer or “X” generations and has made it difficult to fully accept a young, new workforce. Furthermore, younger generations are dialed into technology which some perceive as lazy and distractive. This misunderstanding could be because the golf maintenance industry generally has been relatively slow to embrace new technology.



Sources: 2011 GCSAA Compensation and Benefits Report, Bureau of Labor Statistics 2014 & 2015

Often not discussed in an industry riddled with decades of high employee turnover is the hidden cost of hiring new employees. The article, [Employee Turnover: Are They Really a Dime a Dozen?](#) describes these costs in greater detail. Paperwork, training, lost productivity, and other unforeseen costs can make hiring a new employee cost an employer 20 percent or more of the employee’s annual salary. This cost could increase to over 30 percent for hiring a new manager<sup>i</sup>. For instance, at the typical \$10.64 per hour rate – i.e., \$22,131 annually – an employer could easily spend an additional \$4,426 for every new hire, if not more.

Golf course superintendents that connect with the young workforce and provide higher pay and benefits are better able retain a team of employees. To cultivate the full potential of young employees, superintendents include them in all aspects of course maintenance, provide continuous education, utilize their knowledge of new technology and recognize the ability of millennials. Golf facilities may need to reassess their hourly wages, benefits, and approach to working with a younger workforce in order to improve employee retention and attract new employees. Doing this may make a job in golf more attractive than other enticing industries.



***Golfcourse maintenance work can be tough and dirty work, making other, less labor-intensive jobs more inviting.***

<sup>i</sup> [2011 GCSAA Compensation and Benefits Report](#)

<sup>ii</sup> [SHRM Foundation’s Effective Practice Guidelines Series, Retaining Talent: A Guide to Analyzing and Managing Employee Turnover](#)