



Labor Issues

By Todd Lowe, agronomist, Southeast Region

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It takes a lot of work to keep a golf course looking good and playing well. This is especially true during summer months when turfgrass and weeds grow at an accelerated pace. In the Southeast, mowing, edging, trimming and cultivations like verticutting and core aeration take place more frequently during summer than any other season.

Recruiting and retaining skilled employees to perform these tasks has become increasingly difficult for golf courses. Staff retention is challenging when other entry-level positions at restaurants and grocery stores pay as much or more than golf courses. Working outside in tough summer weather can make it even more difficult to compete with indoor positions. In markets with competition from other industries like construction, skilled laborers are difficult to retain.

At one time, robotic mowers seemed like a futuristic idea, but they might become a reality at many courses if labor issues continue. Until that time, it is important to improve staff retention. Here are some helpful tips to consider:

- **Competitive Wages**—Learn what other facilities in the area pay their staff and try to provide similar compensation. Few things are more frustrating than having trained staff leave for a slight increase in pay.



Maintaining good standards with decreasing staff size requires some creative thinking, like combining mowing and blowing into a single operation.

- **Temporary Staff**—Temporary staff might be needed to help keep up with maintenance or perform certain projects. Dependability and motivation varies greatly among temporary laborers, but some golf courses have hired full-time staff from temp agencies.
- **Part-Time Crews**—Certain regular maintenance tasks, like mowing, lend themselves to part-time crews. Retired individuals are often dependable, have a great work ethic and might even possess specialized skills like carpentry or stonework. These workers are generally used most often for operating riding mowers.
- **Outsourcing Maintenance**—Some facilities perform most, if not all tasks in-house. Others hire independent contractors for tasks like tree and landscape trimming, core aeration of fairways and roughs, verticutting, fairway topdressing and even pesticide spraying. With a limited staff, it may be necessary to outsource some important practices to keep up with daily turf maintenance.
- **Be Creative**—Some clubs offer recruitment bonuses to new employees and bonuses at milestones such as 30 days, 90 days and 180 days. There are also ways to creatively improve staff efficiency by combining daily jobs, [multi-task mowing](#) is a good example. Think outside the box and get creative to help improve your operations.

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