

POINTERS ON CREW MANAGEMENT

Here are some time-tested ways for the superintendent to get maximum performance from the men he supervises

by JOHN B. PETERSEN

In preparing this article, John B. Petersen consulted a number of golf course superintendents to learn of their experiences with maintenance crews. This material supplements the general information on good management with which Mr Petersen has become familiar as vice-president, United States Temporary Help Services, Manpower, Inc., the international temporary help and business service firm.

KEEPING a golf course in top-notch condition is a responsibility of such magnitude that a golf course superintendent cannot fulfill it without the help of a willing and conscientious crew. And it takes skilful leadership and wise delegation of responsibilities on the part of the superintendent to get maximum results from his men.

A golf course crew is usually made up of men and boys with varying levels of education, skills, experience and capabilities. How does one shape up such a crew to make each member an efficient, producing part of a team that must put the course in the excellent condition expected by club members?

Ego-Involvement

Inspiring the will to work comes first. Any task becomes more important when a person wants to do it and feels he is accomplishing something. This concept of management is called *ego-involvement*.

The successful superintendent must know how to get his people to work willingly and efficiently. While each will have his own methods of motivating employees, all superintendents will have a common goal: to get quality work on the golf course accomplished with as little personal involvement in the actual work as possible.

The Key: Delegation of Duties

Because some superintendents have come up through the ranks as assistants or workers on the course, often there is

a tendency for them to do jobs the workers should be doing. Though it may sometimes be necessary for the superintendent to help out when there is a lot to be done in a short time or there is a shortage of workers, he should certainly limit his activity.

Delegation of responsibilities is the key to successful management. How the delegating is done is most important. The superintendent needs to "know the man" with whom he is working. Information about his personal background, family interests and goals is helpful. What does he do well or poorly, based on his past performances?

Matching a man with a job might require some experimentation to find out what he does best and what he most likes to do. Perhaps he has some gardening background and takes pride in producing well-manicured shrubs and attractive flower beds. This person is certainly a good bet for landscaping chores. If he is a man who likes to tinker with motors, he may be best suited to operate a tractor. Ex-farmers are "naturals" for seeding, planting, fertilizing and any other important tasks involving turf and plant management.

Stimulate Golf Interest

Some superintendents feel that interest in golf is desirable in a crew member, helping him to appreciate why greens have to be cut so precisely, sand traps raked smooth and the cup placed correctly. For those employees who wish to play the game, the superintendent should give them every opportunity to do so after hours or on days off. Some superintendents have found staff golf tournaments, discussed later, to be great morale boosters.

When a job assignment is made, the extent of explanation depends on the worker's previous experience. Close supervision, including demonstrations, may be needed in getting some workers

started. But the superintendent should never do the job himself.

An explanation of why the job is being done and why it is important is also in order. It is wise to check periodically to see that all work is being done correctly.

Superintendents have more to gain than lose by creating a friendly work atmosphere. Why bark out orders that create hostility in a worker when instructions can be given patiently and intelligently?

Praise and Criticism

Telling a worker when he's doing a good job accomplishes two things. First, it gives the individual a feeling that his efforts are not going to waste and that he has made an important contribution. Secondly, almost everyone wants to know that his superior knows he is progressing on the job. It is not necessary, of course, for the superintendent to hand out compliments for every routine job. On new jobs, however, where there can be a degree of uncertainty, a pat on the back can be just the tonic needed to increase the worker's confidence and better his performance.

By the same token, pointing out mistakes is also necessary, and how this is handled can affect future relations with the employee. Whether the feedback to the employee is praise or criticism, both serve to indicate to the worker what he should or should not do differently. In this sense, credit and blame are motivational guideposts of equal importance.

If a mistake on the job or just generally poor performance has to be called to the attention of the worker, it should be done privately. Reprimanding an employee in the presence of his co-workers is bad practice and a needless embarrassment to everyone.

Using the Right Approach

There are numerous ways to let a worker know he is not doing his fair share of work or performing up to standards. He should be told exactly where he has erred. One approach is to tell him that he is hurting the crew's effectiveness as well as his own. Many

different approaches can be used, depending usually on the age of the worker. Whereas a half-joking tone might be effective with a youngster, a matter-of-fact, single mention may suffice for an older, more experienced worker who "just goofed".

If the superintendent finds himself reprimanding the same individual on repeated occasions the communications breakdown may be at the heart of the matter. This may not always be the case but it is worth examining.

Rallying the Team

Managing a crew does not simply involve deciding what has to be done and then telling workers how and when to do it. The superintendent must retain control but still allow his workers to come up with their own solutions to problems. By sharing his problems with his workers the superintendent shows that he respects their opinions, and thereby he builds a sturdy bridge between himself and them.

Keeping his crew happy should be of paramount importance to the superintendent. He may find that interest in the work starts to wane somewhat around midseason. In building up morale, there are any number of things that can be done to rally the team for the final months ahead. Some superintendents have gotten great results by arranging golf tournaments between the workers of two neighbouring golf clubs. A picnic could serve a similar purpose. Anything that a superintendent can do to show his men that all the members of his team are important and appreciated will help to build up the total co-operation essential to a smooth-running maintenance program.

Migrant Workers

In geographical areas where golf is a seasonal activity, golf courses necessarily hire some members of the maintenance crew on a seasonal basis. Many superintendents have worked successfully with migrant workers from Mexico, Puerto Rico and Texas. On the whole, these workers have been found to take great pride in their work and to have an affinity to working with nature.

The difference in language has posed no real barrier. Although it is helpful for the superintendent to know a few words of Spanish, an interpreter can usually be found among the workers who speak English well enough to relay messages between them.

Supervise Progress

In working with migrant workers, one superintendent trains the younger ones in the presence of their more experienced elders. The youngsters can be assigned minor tasks such as raking traps, cleaning, painting, sodding or mowing. An older migrant worker can be assigned to watch his juniors and report on their progress.

In the hiring of migrant workers, superintendents have found that the older and more experienced ones are better employees. This is especially true of family men, who have turned out to be steady, conscientious workers. Migrant workers can be used as mechanics, mower or tractor operators, for seeding and fertilizing, and for landscaping. They work readily alongside local workers and get along with them surprisingly well without even speaking the same language.

Retirees and the Handicapped

Some superintendents hire retired or handicapped persons for either part-time or full-time work. Retired city employees who were formerly with park and forest districts, or were farmers, nurserymen or did some other work out-of-doors usually are very suitable for golf course maintenance work.

Jobs such as landscaping, trimming, flower growing, mowing and watering are especially well handled by retirees and the handicapped. Because of their need to feel useful, these workers usually strive to be conscientious and reliable employees. Off-duty policemen, firemen and post office employees have also proven to be reliable part-time workers.

The Young Employee

Many superintendents like to hire young workers — high school or college students — for their team because of

the challenge they offer. Young people, however, require a special kind of handling. While they need to be respected as individuals, they also need someone around to respect.

Tedious and heavy jobs such as mowing the rough or raking sand traps are not good assignments for the young. Repairing machines or mowing the plush greens are jobs that most youngsters appreciate. Unused to working eight-hour shifts day after day, a young worker often tends to lose interest in his work around midafternoon, if not earlier. Some youngsters rebel against both early morning and late evening working hours.

Some superintendents have found that an older college boy makes a good supervisor for younger workers, as the former becomes a "hero" in the eyes of his juniors and serves as a model for them to follow. If there is already one young worker on the team and another is needed, the first could be asked to recommend a friend. It has also paid off to hire boys who like to play golf.

Communicating on the Course

With a wide acreage of grounds to maintain and a crew usually spread all over the landscape, the superintendent cannot physically supervise all his workers all the time. It therefore becomes necessary for the superintendent to delegate authority to one man in each working group. There is usually one man on the crew who has sufficient experience to supervise at the same time he is working alongside his fellow crewmen. If the staff includes a man who was formerly an assistant or foreman, he can be put in charge.

If the crew is large — 10 to 25 men — and a number of jobs have to be accomplished during the day, the superintendent will want to maintain control of every situation. A two-way radio or "walkie talkie" communication setup will keep him in touch with his crew. When a radio communication system. The centre of communication of trucks or equipment should be equipped with receiving and sending units to justify the expenditure for the system. The center of communication

is usually located in the superintendent's office, his course vehicle or wherever contact can most likely be made with him. A few golf courses are reported to be using closed-circuit television for communication purposes, but the cost of such installations is still relatively high.

Working with an Assistant

In selecting and training an assistant the superintendent should consider first his own peace of mind, then the happiness of his crew and the total efficiency of the maintenance operation.

As the morale of the crew is of utmost importance, the man who is being trained to be an assistant — whether he is a young trainee just out of college or an experienced "right-hand man" — should work alongside the other crew members and learn by doing. With the right attitude toward his work and his fellow workers, the assistant should soon become "one of the boys" even though it may take some of the old-timers longer to accept him.

In training an assistant, the superintendent should explain his own job thoroughly and stress its importance. It is important to break the young man in gradually, allowing him to prove his capabilities before additional responsibilities are entrusted to him. The young man should, however, be given every opportunity to show what he can do. It is important for the superintendent to display the utmost faith in his protégé.

If the new assistant is given authority over any members of the crew, they should be *fully* informed about this in advance. There should never be any need for them to doublecheck with the superintendent before doing work the assistant has assigned to them.

In the event that the old-timers give the new assistant a hard time, it is essential for the supervisor to back up the man to whom he has given authority. It should be made clear to the crew that the assistant is the man in charge in the absence of the superintendent. The assistant, in turn, should be clearly informed as to what is expected of him. He should fully understand that he will be held accountable for any job he supervises. In the event

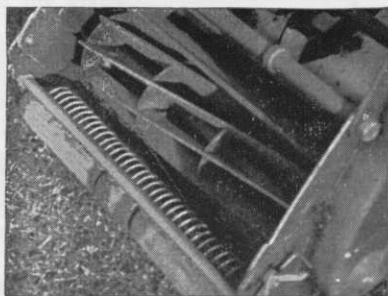
that someone under the assistant's supervision should not follow orders, any discipline meted out should come from the superintendent and not the assistant.

Periodic reviews of the assistant's performance is recommended and the assistant should, in turn, be apprised of his progress or lack of progress. Close scrutiny of the assistant's work is a must, for here is the man who will be left in charge when the superintendent is away. Whatever he does, therefore, will be a *direct* reflection on the superintendent. The assistant can, moreover, be of tremendous help to his superior by taking some of the burdens off his shoulders. This allows the boss to concentrate on other areas that need his attention.

Training an assistant well will pay handsome dividends to the superintendent. It will not only relieve him of a lot of work and worry, but it will very possibly improve his standing with his club and his profession.

With grateful acknowledgement to the "Golf Superintendent".

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