

**W**ithout proper qualifications you will not get the job you want'. How often have you heard that statement? Usually the words come from one's father or a careers officer at school – in most cases the proclamation is true. At very least, a qualification will open doors to the obtaining of a job.

In my view however, to do that job properly; effectively and therefore successfully, what is required above all else is practical training – on site; on course; down to earth, common sense training in the place where you work.

Too many golf course managers fail to take the time to ensure that such in-house training is given top priority. As managers we undoubtedly suffer because of it. We do not communicate enough with our staff. We do not delegate enough and because of this we do our staff an injustice by not allowing them to learn and thus better themselves. In this article I am expressing my own views on the subject – the importance of which cannot be overstated.

Without the proper in-house training and management of staff, greenkeeping and golf course management as a profession (I firmly believe it is a profession) will not grow in the way in which every concerned greenkeeper would wish.

Some five years ago Letchworth Golf Club employed me as their course manager and gave me the opportunity to manage totally (something which I believe we should all do). Given that remit I knew from past experience that if I was to be in any way successful, training (particularly in-house) would have to be my number one priority.

The old saying 'you are only as good as your staff' is particularly true in golf course management. For those who have the opportunity to manage, I hope the following common sense approach to training may be of some assistance.

#### Communication

To begin, you must communicate with your employers as well as your staff. This may seem all too elementary, but in making sure they know what you are trying to achieve they will (or should) give you full backing. In most golf clubs the people you talk to will be successful businessmen and will therefore understand the importance of training.

You must also communicate with your staff – if you do not you will not succeed. Listed here are a few simple systems we use at Letchworth.

Notice board in mess room/work-

# DUNCAN'S LAW



How in-house training is handled at Letchworth, by their course manager DUNCAN MCGILVRAY

shop – A listing (for all staff to see and check on a daily basis)

- visiting golf society dates and tee-off times
- all matches
- overtime sheet
- safety policy statement
- winter programme (when applicable)
- articles of interest
- insurance liability
- weekly updates on visiting societies.

Yearly planner number one

- Competition dates
- other important dates
- Bank holidays
- all matches as a cross check (even our club secretaries get it wrong sometimes).

Yearly planner number two

- All staff summer and winter holidays (decided in early January of each year)
- spring and autumn renovation dates
- educational conferences, eg. BTME at Harrogate and IoG show.

#### Annual staff assessments

This is where you sit down with each member of staff individually and discuss their progress as you see it. You can relate what is expected of them in the future and, of equal importance, allow them to voice their opinion of you. This may not be something we will necessarily enjoy but we must remember that we are learn-

ing as well. The staff assessment is a splendid opportunity to declare salary increases and benefits that have been earned, for in the small staff set-up that is typical of most golf club's there will invariably be some occasional friction. I have found this assessment system to be invaluable in clearing up misunderstandings. The staff welcome such a system – they gain a clear understanding on where they stand and equally are given an opportunity to question your management techniques, which I feel is important.

A major part of any training is making sure that your staff learn about themselves; their workmates; colleagues, and other golf courses. I firmly advocate outside visits to venues such as the IoG show (all staff), BIGGA golf outings and lectures (selected staff), management courses at Aldwark and the BTME at Harrogate (selected staff). It is important that my staff have a much wider view of life than an 18 hole parkland course in North Hertfordshire. On that point, even our annual Christmas luncheon is held away from the clubhouse, thus allowing for a modest letting down of hair! All these visits are financed by the golf club. They know as well as I that the benefits gained on the golf course, in terms of working as a team and carrying out tasks with more thought and understanding, far

outweigh the modest outlay required.

Although 'in-house' is the part of training I feel most strongly about, I cannot overlook the importance the college (BIGGA approved, I hasten to add) plays in my overall thinking and strategy. I am particularly pleased to sit on a liaison committee at Oaklands College, St Albans, where greenkeeper training is discussed. This college has now recruited an ex-course manager as a full-time lecturer. Not satisfied with that progression alone, they are also attracting local practicing golf course managers to attend the college and speak to student greenkeepers. Thus, at least at Oaklands, the days are gone when a lecturer might teach students opposite views and working strategies to those held by the head greenkeeper. All this adds up to excellent training and bodes extremely well for the future.

Apart from myself, there are six staff at Letchworth, all of whom play an important part in our overall success. It is important to point out that there have been no staff changes over the past five years save for one retirement (and even he came back again!). The following thumb-nail sketches will serve to colour the picture:

Brian Allonby is my deputy course manager and has 23 years service. Brian worked under the capable direction of his father – until I came and turned everything upside down! He responded admirably and I really do not know what I would do without him.

Barney Wright is first assistant and has six years service. Barney has completed all his college studies – including fourth year management courses – mostly with distinctions. He is an ex-pro golfer and his father is a golf club secretary at another club. Barney is itching for the right golf course to come along and unfortunately we will not be able to hold him for much longer.

Paul Hufner is an assistant greenkeeper/trainee mechanic with five years service. Taken on originally as an extra pair of hands in the short term, Paul is now an extremely important member of staff. He is taking Horticultural Mechanics at Oaklands College and will be an even greater asset to the club in future years.

Gary Hyde is a tractor driver/greenkeeper with three years service. He is a great find – worked on a farm all his early life – and will work day and night if asked. He thinks life is great at Letchworth because he actually gets paid for working overtime! He can drive anything from an



Meet the team: the green staff at Letchworth

18" Paladin to a 40' Hi-Mac.

Tom Thrussell, with 15 years service (part-time/part-season), is our greenkeeper cum gardener cum stand-in tractor driver. Tom drove a tractor until his retirement in 1989 and we are pleased he chose not to retire completely. He is a mine of information on wild life, conservation and the weather. In short, he's a wonderful person to have in any team – we couldn't let him go!

Jonathan Haley is a seasonal worker with two years service. If it wasn't for Jonathan and his predecessors, none of the staff would be able to have summer holidays. He starts college in September on a full-time greenkeeping and golf course management course, also at Oaklands, and I know he will go far.

We also work closely with local schools and encourage work experience programmes as part of Education 2000 – we've seen four students through this programme and three, including Jonathan Haley, have expressed a wish to follow a career in golf course management. It proves to us that we must be doing something right.

The benefits of good in-house training are many and varied but the following are the most obvious. We have a product just like any other business: the golf course and how it is presented. If the staff are well-trained and above all happy, the course will show it.

Good in-house training encourages even the youngest and most inexperienced members of staff to speak up and gain confidence in thought, word and deed. We can learn from sixteen year olds – I know I have on more than one occasion. Confident, effective staff will ensure the efficient functioning of the course – even on those occasions when you are absent.

This reflects well on you as a manager, though unfortunately it is still not fully understood by many people.

In closing, here are some points which I believe we should all think about seriously.

- A member of staff will not work to his full potential if he is not trusted – we must explain fully the whys as well as the hows and trust them to get on with it.
- Spying on staff when they are carrying out their allotted tasks breeds contempt – you will soon find out if work is not being carried out to your satisfaction and can then take the necessary action. Watching over staff is time wasting and counter-productive.
- Your staff make the golf course what it is – 90% of your problems will come from those staff – it therefore seems to me common sense to devote at the very least 90% of your time to your staff.

It makes me smile when I see advertisements for head greenkeepers/course managers with the following demand: 'must be capable of controlling and motivating staff'. The practicalities are that staff cannot simply be controlled or motivated at the wave of a wand – we as managers can only create an environment in which staff wish to motivate themselves. The stick or carrot technique only works for a very short time – and golf course management is long term.

One last point. When you last moved to take up a position as course manager, especially at a course which was in need of considerable attention, did you hear something along the lines of 'you will need to sort out the staff first'? My own experiences have suggested no fault with staff – rather a fault that could easily be traced to the (lack of) in-house training and therefore management of staff.

# How you could be an 'industry assessor'

There is so much that goes on behind the scenes in greenkeeper training and education that I am sometimes staggered by the depth and intensity of it all. The Greenkeepers Training Committee beavers away with quiet efficiency and it is to the great credit of our Association, always and quite naturally at the forefront of the GTC and always looking to the main goal, that achievements in greenkeeper training are moving at such a fine pace.

Whilst the Association cannot lay claim to the nationwide introduction of NVQs and SVQs, it seems clear to me that as a body we have generated, cajoled and agitated in this sphere to an extent that bodes extremely well for our industry – we are leaving nothing to chance and the future could not be more exciting.

Already we have seen the commissioning of a new Training Manual, and this has been widely acclaimed by all sectors of the greenkeeping industry as a huge step in the right direction – there is still work to be done, however, and we will not rest on our laurels – we plan to move ever forward and upward.

One such plan which gives cause for rejoicing is the proposal to form a network of assessors and assessment centres throughout the country. Such assessors will be recruited from our own membership and give us the unique opportunity, subject to approval by the GTC, to police our own activities.

## You just need to indicate your willingness to take part

What this means in reality is that course managers and head greenkeepers who would like to be considered for training as 'Industry Assessors' and 'Regional Verifiers' need do no more than indicate their willingness. What qualifications will they need? Well, for a start, assessors will need credibility within their area or county, so candidates must be well established, front runners in their industry. Verifiers must be keenly interested in greenkeeper training and be aware of the principles of NVQs or SVQs. Of course, both assessors and verifiers must have sufficient spare time to work within the proposed structure and assessors must have the support of their own club, which would be used as a location to carry out assessments. Above all, they must be willing to receive appropriate training to become assessors or verifiers.

How much time will be necessary? Estimates suggest that the rewarding task of verifier would command roughly the same amount of time as that of a section secretary, perhaps less if more people join in the good work. For assessors, perhaps somewhat less time is necessary, though this again will be dependent upon how many head greenkeepers or course managers are recruited.

Industry assessors will become very important people, working in unison with training colleges and linked and working in liaison with regional verifiers, who in turn will liaise with the GTC. Assessors and verifiers will have their out of pocket expenses paid by the GTC.

Why is this so important for the Association? Simply that NVQs are about industries setting their own standards in accordance with the lead body for their industry, which for greenkeeping is Amenity Horticulture. By having our own trained people monitoring our own standards, we can control our own destiny, and thus raise our own already high standards.

Will you give some thought to becoming an assessor or verifier? Start by asking at regional or section level for more information, or talk to our own education expert, David Golding. His GTC number, lest it is not already indelibly printed on your mind, is 03473-640. Ring him now!