

Managing a Golf Course

The **fourth** of a series of five articles by Duncan McGilvray detailing duties of the modern day Course Manager

Managing Staff

Managing staff - easily said - easily written about - extremely difficult to carry out successfully and effectively.

In every advertisement for the position of Course Manager you will read the words "must be capable of managing/motivating/leading staff". Without doubt your employer views this aspect of a Course Manager's work to be by far the most important - so we have to get it right. It has often been relayed to a yet-to-be-appointed Course Manager that the staff which he/she is about to inherit are lazy/untrainable/stupid or even worse!

In my experience I have found little fault with the staff but lots of faults within their management.

Managing staff is about understanding people and there are no two people the same, although strangely some (probably most) believe that they should be treated equally - in practice, and under closer analysis, people prefer to be treated individually but tell you they want to be treated equally! Strange, but that is what we are like and as soon as we accept that as Managers then we realise that a great deal of understanding and effort has to be put into managing staff-recruiting, training, assessing, appraising, listening, and simply keeping them happy, which will ensure you get the best from them.

When I analyse my workload as a Manager a large proportion of my time is taken up thinking and acting on ways to keep staff happy because I know that I will get much more effort in return. This in turn ensures standards on the golf course continually improve - it therefore makes good sense.

I do not believe there are any hard and fast rules in managing staff but what I hope to convey within this month's article is what I have learned, so far, through personal experiences, advice from colleagues, management trainers and even psychologists.

SUPERVISING AND ASSISTING IN THE TRAINING/DEVELOPMENT AND RECRUITMENT OF STAFF

SUPERVISING

The "supervision" of staff is so often mistaken for watching over staff which I have already stated in a previous article to be a total waste of the Course Manager's time and therefore the golf club's resources. Supervision is about ensuring staff carry out tasks successfully, safely, and within the limits/restrictions the Course Manager sets.

It is important to remember that the course staff are under the supervision of the Course Manager at all times, including times when the Course Manager is not there for whatever reason - that is why it is vital that staff are managed in a way which encourages self motivation.

TRAINING

The training and development of the course staff is the responsibility of the Course Manager.

It is his/her duty to ensure that there exists sufficient funding and provision for on course practical training as well as arranging for external training providers to supply any area of training which may not be possible on the golf course so that each member of staff can advance to his/her maximum potential and capabilities.

It is not fair to the staff or to the golf club not to do so.

The favourite excuse not to train staff is "why train them - they will only leave for a better position?"

This is an extremely narrow minded view which at last is being said much less often than in the past.

The advantages of good training and support are numerous in terms of staff commitment, self motivation, enthusiasm, good working atmosphere and work output, which all combine to give us a better maintained golf course - it is therefore very cost effective!

The support now given to Course Managers from both the GTC and BIGGA is exceptional - if you are in any doubt whatsoever regarding the training that is available for both yourself and your staff, contact them - it could not be easier.

RECRUITMENT

I have now had considerable experience from both sides in an interview situation and I am not surprised when I hear that mistakes are made when hiring staff.

The experiences range from unbelievable intimidation of candidates to inappropriate questioning linked to failure to check on previous references.

The costs of failure in employing the right people are high - I therefore spend considerable time in preparation for interviews to minimise the chance of taking on the wrong people.

When recruiting course staff from Deputy Course Manager down to Apprentice the Course Manager is the most important interviewer - the Course Manager will after all be the successful candidate's future Head of Department.

My experience tells me however that the Course Manager needs assistance in making decisions, particularly when selecting prospective candidates for employment.

Following the short list selection process, which would include a personal profile as well as a task based assessment of possible candidates, three interviewers should be involved (fewer than three is thought to be too few for accurate assessment and more than three is thought to be too intimidating).

The interviewers would ideally be:

- Course Manager (Department Head) - technical detail/education and candidate capabilities.
- Club Manager (Head of all staff) - employer conditions, club structure and relevant information.
- A.N. Other (Course Liaison Officer/Chairman of Course Committee/Committee Member) - general questions of a more personal nature to put the candidate at ease.

In this way the right person for the position offered is more likely to be selected and when the successful candidate takes up the position they will have a clear understanding of how the club is managed and who they will be responsible to.

If there is any difference of opinion on selection, the final decision must rest with the Course Manager - if the course suffers because of a bad decision it is the Course Manager who takes full responsibility.

ENDEAVOURING AT ALL TIMES TO IMPROVE SUPERVISOR AND STAFF RELATIONS

For some reason small groups of staff (2/3 to 7/8) which is common on golf courses seem to give more problems than large groups.

The Course Manager must not only be aware of this but endeavour to set systems in place to lessen the chance of staff friction/tension becoming a serious threat to the efficiency of the course staff as a whole.

Appraisal systems work extremely well in situations such as these and should be an important part of the staff structure within the club.

In short and simple terms an appraisal is time set aside for staff and managers to communicate in a positive way in an atmosphere such that both parties can air their respective views in a calm and non intimidatory way.

Following appraisals I have always found staff to be more focussed and enthusiastic which ultimately improves golf course conditions - I have also learned a lot about myself which is difficult, but necessary!

Appraisals should not however be used to delay any discussion on poor staff performance on the course.

More and more over the years I have made time available for staff to be more involved in the decision making process and have certainly not regretted it.

Open staff discussion forums on standards, work schedules/programmes, major projects, health and safety matters, better ways of working etc. should be allowed for at appropriate times of the year.

It gives any member of staff the opportunity to discuss any problem area and solutions are found collectively.

I am continually and pleasantly surprised at just how much staff are prepared to contribute to the running of the golf course.

At this stage I cannot over emphasise the importance of appropriate training in handling both staff appraisals and group discussions - I will cover this under the sub heading of "personal presentation" in my last article entitled "Communication".

DELEGATING EFFECTIVELY

How successful you are as a Course Manager will be dependant on many factors and the art of delegation is a key area.

Delegation releases you to manage - which is what you are employed for.

When I speak to young Course Managers they have a tendency to do extremely important tasks themselves eg. changing pin positions, application of fertilisers/weedkillers etc.

This ties the Course Manager down at those times and does not allow reaction to anything which may crop up - as it invariably does at the most inconvenient time!

It also has the effect of staff feeling that they cannot be trusted to do important tasks and therefore demotivates - which is the opposite of what you want.

Delegating is not passing on a duty which the course manager cannot



From left to right: Dean Seare, Tony Hawes, James Morriss, Adam Smale, Colin Adamson and John Dennis

be bothered to do, but is about entrusting a duty or responsibility to a member of staff who is suitably qualified - it is not easy to get right but when you do the results from all aspects of course management are exceptional.

Delegation is a management tool, which if handled properly has a profound effect on the staff and the way they view their position, which helps to create a good positive working environment.

To conclude I have accumulated the following various truisms which I believe are particularly relevant to the management of golf courses.

- Always lead by example.
- Respect has to be earned.
- Never ask anyone to do what you would not do yourself.
- People are not machines - they should therefore not be treated as such.
- Involve all staff in decision making and problem solving.
- You cannot motivate staff - you can only create an atmosphere in which staff choose to motivate themselves.
- The stick or carrot method only works in the short term.
- You are only as good as your staff allow you to be.
- Take time to listen.
- Never blame staff for any deficiencies - you are after all the one who is responsible for their management and training - it is therefore your fault, not theirs!