

The Back Nine

A new column for writers and members to air and share their views on golf greenkeeping topics

This month, BIGGA Past Chairman, Paul Worster talks about empowering the team...

A well-qualified staff team is an obvious asset to any company. But is this enough? Does simply “sending your guys to college” to gain NVQ-type qualifications, completely meet the needs of the modern workplace?

Sure, the College system plays an important role in every greenkeepers personal development. The pathway of his or her evolution from raw apprentice into fully-fledged Assistant Greenkeeper is greatly smoothed by the type of qualifications which impart the skills, the task-specific knowledge, the introduction to Health & Safety at Work and various underpinning Acts, which are all part of today's workplace. But can we do more?

I believe we can, and with a little time and planning, can really set out along a path of empowerment for our staff.

As an example – a while ago one of our Assistant Greenkeepers wrote in appraisal about feeling stale and stifled. He had realised, as I suspect greenkeepers up and down the country do at times, that career progression can be slow with opportunities sometimes being limited. I can still remember feeling exactly the same in my mid-twenties – feeling as though I'd hit the wall in terms of personal development, because vacancies and opportunities for advancement were difficult to come by.

In the case of my excellent Assistant I was able to say that I didn't think he was stifled at all and that there was plenty of development work that we could do for him which would help his self-confidence, and eventually his career. This included:

- His participation in an Autumn evening presentation to club members about recent work on the course – so he will need to work on a PowerPoint and as a result improve presentation skills.
- The annual update of our Health & Safety System – we agreed that he would carry this out, and then make a presentation to the whole staff.

- Attendance at Green Committee Meetings – to help him appreciate the complexities of committee, and how the Chairman and the agenda are crucial to running a good meeting and making progress.

- Assisting other senior staff in the delegation of daily duties throughout the greenkeeping team – to help his appreciation of the importance of teamwork and the difficulties often faced in delegation to a staff team, each member of which has his own aims and expectations.

- Most importantly my Assistant worked with other members of the team to design and deliver a number of “toolbox” talks and demonstrations for the staff team. These are little basic refresher techniques – e.g. best practice in hole changing, bunker raking, tee marker positioning, greens mowing – all those little things out on the course where attention to detail makes all the difference. He and other colleagues presented these to the whole team out on the course, e.g. in real life workplace situations, and with the proper equipment.

As they were doing this I realised they were actually taking responsibility for the standards at which those tasks should be carried out – not just at that specific time, but in general from that moment onwards. Having taken the time and trouble to design the talks, and then to have stood up in front of the others meant they had invested in the work and these tasks were now their babies.

This is about empowerment. These guys are now empowered to confidently watch over others in various elements of routine golf course presentation. These are the points we need to get across to our people – the building of self-confidence and awareness is crucial to personal development. Developed greenkeepers make a larger contribution to the team, and also to an overall professional culture within the golf club.

Most importantly the Assistant and I are both in agreement that he has developed as a team member



and is also better equipped for promotion within the team or if he pursues career progression elsewhere.

It is also about engagement. As managers and greenkeepers – we need to be engaged with the objectives of our business. We need to understand how our actions and output impact upon the success of the business and the objectives of Committee and members. Golf Clubs are no longer minor institutions, but are serious businesses and need to operate as such at all levels.

Greenkeeping itself as a profession has developed rapidly in recent times, and the signs are that it will continue to do so in the years to come. Now, with the recession and

With planning, we can set out along a path of empowerment

about the author



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the spectre of economic downturn never far away, a greater pressure is brought to bear upon the manager, which requires the delivery of far better products and services than ever before.

Against this background, it is empowered and engaged greenkeepers who will spread a Culture of Professionalism throughout their whole organisation, and deliver course conditions which align perfectly with the expectations and aspirations of committees and members alike.

The views expressed within this column are not necessarily those of Greenkeeper International