

Put Away All Papers and Reading Materials and Take Out Your #2 Pencils . . .



All of us as superintendents, at one time or the other, have had the same need to address our assistants and/or staff collectively concerning problems or incidents that arise during the course of the season. Some situations require monthly, weekly or even daily attention, while others merit attention only annually. The most expedient method

generally involves direct, immediate oral communication where we dictate policy and state that compliance is non-negotiable. Other variations of this oral communication may include a question-and-answer session or an open forum. I may have one extra tool that you can add to your task bar in pursuit of sharpening your staff and attaining that cutting-edge performance that we all expect and demand. If for nothing else, use for comic relief!

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After years of quarterly staff meetings, which are generally received with sometimes expressionless faces or the “Why am I here?” attitude, I decided to move in what I considered a somewhat radical direction. Given the fact that some people just do not express themselves verbally very well, I decided to conduct my first-ever staff-wide written examination. (It should be noted that along with my duties as golf course superintendent, I also serve as director of golf operations, so this exam also included pro shop personnel.)

Composed mainly of multiple-choice, my low-intensity, 35-question test also included true/false and one essay. The questions were designed to address reinforcement of existing safety issues, protocol and daily procedure, and incident-specific items—not intended as a learning tool for new trainees, although that presents another option. With this in mind, I created questions that were obvious, such as ‘what is the normal color of grass in spring?’ (green), but did not delve into the more difficult aspects of how that same grass becomes yellow or brown during summer stress. I had hoped to gain some personal insights with my one essay question, which asked: Why are you here? After all, I was trying to build an awareness or even a confidence in each staff member

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rather than creating a demoralizing or humbling sense of self. I had hoped to create a fun, introspective challenge.

As the rain splashed against the window, I wondered how I was going to add 'proctor' to the ever-expanding job description on my resume. I decided that some incentive should be added to this experimental undertaking: something that would discourage the playful mocking and ridicule of future endeavors of this sort. A Cross pen/pencil set, a plaque or trophy, paid time off, or playing privileges at an amenable facility are all plausible rewards. I remain undecided.

Another thought: since language barriers are not uncommon in our industry, the extra effort to provide multilingual editions of a test, or to have a translator available, could pay dividends in the

long run. Who knows from whom, and when, the next great idea is going to come?

As the last student submitted his exam, I wondered how this measure of knowledge (or luck) could be applied toward staff recommendations for promotion and pay grade changes, but reserved judgment. At the very least, creating and administering this evaluation had prompted me to do some self-examination into what kind of manager I am and what kind of manager I can be at any given moment. It also prompted me to create my first published work. I am a better person for the experience.

"And now, class, time is up. Please exchange papers with the student in front of you . . ."



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