



Don't Forget the Staff

Hopefully, everyone made it back safe and sound from Dallas. I know there were all sorts of adventures getting there (Czerkies/Savage) and it goes without saying that a few mis-steps always occur during the wee hours of the conference (you don't want to see your name in this set of parentheses). The hospitality room was again a huge success and couldn't have been pulled off without the behind-the-scenes efforts of Paul Yerkes with an assist from Kevin DeRoo. We heard only positive comments from those in attendance; thanks, guys! The staff at the Adam's Mark did a great job too, but our contributing vendors deserve the largest applause. Their level of financial support was larger than ever and provided the funds for first-class food-and-beverage service over the course of two evenings. The entire roster of supporters appears on page 6 of this issue; please remember to thank them throughout the year by supporting them while making purchasing decisions. The room was 75% supported through their generosity and our bang was had on their buck.

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Also, before diving into this month's main topic, I would like to congratulate Tommy Witt and Bob Maibusch on their victories in the GCSAA election in Dallas. We're fortunate to have such dedicated and top-notch men leading our national association. I can't believe I just said that about you, Bob, but I really do mean it. A big thank you to Don Cross and Don Ferreri for serving as chapter delegates; your voice made sure our chapter was well-represented. Lastly, a big thank you to Cathy Miles Ralston, John Gurke and the Editorial Committee for the articles commemorating our 75th anniversary. What an enjoyable tribute; great job!

Well, winter is officially behind us. I'm looking out the window on March 6 (several days late for the *On Course* deadline), it's 65 degrees, I can see the sun-filled valley below, the wild mustard and magnolia are in full bloom and a hummingbird is hovering near the feeder. Of course, I'm in northern California, but hey, winter is over. How did you spend yours? There doesn't seem to be much of an off-season anymore. Of course, we had our typical routine of snow-plowing, tree-trimming, equipment repair and ordering of supplies. However, we spent a great deal of time at Bryn Mawr completely reassessing our employee policies/compensation structure. It would seem logical to do that, but our own employee manual hadn't been updated in six years and some of my thinking was at least that old.

I should start by saying that this exercise was another perfect
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example of how superintendents work together. Several of us took an extensive look at this very issue in the off-season, and I appreciate the fact that this industry openly shares information that other businesses would not. At Bryn Mawr, we also used a consultant to assess our situation and would highly recommend the gentleman to anyone interested. With his help, we were able to take a complete look at how we manage, treat and pay our staff and more importantly, review how our staff perceives the way we do these things. As we finish our work with him, I can also say that his help saved us money. These economic times have everyone a bit more interested in the bottom line. In the end, interesting observations came to light and so did the need for some changes:

- Focus groups with employees, conducted in English and Spanish, revealed that feelings of underappreciation and perhaps even a lack of respect outweighed the few feelings of undercompensation that existed. Aligning yourself with the staff requires more than a better-than-average wage increase.
- While the employees looked at management as fair, favoritism was something that nearly half of the staff perceived. These feelings were more prevalent within our clubhouse walls; consistent policies in writing and strict enforcement of those policies promise to iron out this difficulty.
- Employees definitely appreciated the opportunity to have their feelings heard and Spanish translation from an outside third party during the focus groups was key. The absence of management during these focus groups was also important; employees were encouraged to speak their mind. Our complete 50-page employee policy manual will be translated and an outside translator will help me go through this manual with our staff, page by page, this spring.
- The rising cost of healthcare makes that insurance benefit a key and you should investigate obtaining this for all employees. I think seasonal employees would appreciate at least being offered the group rate, if covering them completely isn't an option.
- This whole exercise is a great management exercise in which to include your assistants. Moreover, I was reminded how important it is to stand behind your young assistants. Due to their age and potential lack of experience, they may experience resentment from a veteran crew that comes under their supervision.

These are just a few thoughts on the matter. Hopefully, as you read this in early April, you'll be surrounded again by that reliable staff who make your life run so much more smoothly. If such isn't the case, don't be afraid to point a finger back at yourself. I take a great deal of pride in the low turnover among our staff; however, we asked some tough questions of our employees this winter and I knew I wasn't going to like all the answers. Let's hope the time spent in the off-season has us better prepared for the season ahead and best of luck to you in the challenges the year will no doubt provide. 

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