

How's the Weather Inside?

Every golf course superintendent has a few scars from the weather. "Remember back in '95 when . . ." "I was halfway done and we got three inches of rain in 12 hours . . ." "We lost 35 trees in that wind and had to spend a week cleaning up . . ."

No two golf courses are the same when it comes to budgets, but all golf courses spend the largest share of their dollar on labor. The best grass-grower in the business will fail if he is unable to assemble a well-trained, reliable and conscientious team.

A lot of time is spent planning for, and worrying about, the weather. It drives everything that goes on at a golf course. The maintenance staff is trained to react to change. All 120 daily man-hours (average) need to be unleashed in the proper direction—depending on the weather. Maintenance techniques depend on conditions in the field. Lots of mistakes can happen out there, especially in wet conditions. You rely on your staff to work safely and productively in all conditions because you can't be everywhere, and everyone knows you can't do anything about the weather.

So how's the weather inside?

Much has been made of personnel issues lately, and rightly so. No two golf courses are the same when it comes to budgets, but all golf courses spend the largest share of their dollar on labor. The best grass-grower in the business will fail if he is unable to assemble a well-trained, reliable and conscientious team. What is it that keeps you coming in every day to face the uncertainty and doubt? Well, it sure isn't the money, right? Seriously, I'm sure it is not just the money; words like challenge, sense of accomplishment, recognition and respect are what drive motivation. Is it any different for your subordinates? The answer should be no.

Is it?

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Back in the 1950s, psychologists proposed a hierarchy of needs that drive human motivation. Abraham Maslow identified five human needs that impact an individual's desire to achieve.

- 1) Physical Needs—The most basic order of needs, including food, clothing, shelter and comfort.
- 2) Safety Needs—Avoidance of risk, harm and pain. Security for oneself and one's position.
- 3) Social Needs—Companionship, acceptance by others, love and affection and the feeling of group membership.
- 4) Esteem Needs—Responsibility, self-respect, recognition by others and a sense of accomplishment.
- 5) Self-Actualization Needs—The highest order of needs, including reaching your potential as an individual, independence, creativity and self-expression.

(continued on page 18)

The first order of needs must be satisfied before moving up the list, each level building on the next. An individual stuck on the first level of needs is more concerned with self than the group, and rightly so for that individual is battling every day to survive. Where do the individuals that make up the team upon which your success depends reside in this hierarchy of needs?

Storm clouds on the horizon in the break room can result in problems that don't pass as quickly as a summer storm and can result in damage that can take longer than a week to clean up.

Inside Weather Warning Signs

- The nature of employee complaints and frequency increases.
- You experience a large number of policy inquiries, particularly on pay, benefits and discipline.
- Employees form in groups that do not normally associate with each other.
- You notice employees in work areas they do not normally visit.
- Conversation stops when you enter the area.
- Employees avoid you.

If the majority of your team is stuck on the first or second level of needs, you can be sure that issues like wages and benefits and working conditions will attract more attention than issues of recognition or a sense of accomplishment. The individuals affected will be more inclined to look outward for help in satisfying their needs. Cost-of-living issues are more pertinent now than in the days of a larger migrant labor market. If the wages paid for a full-time employee are equal to or less than the definition of "working poor" (\$16,000/year or \$7.75 per hour), you will be dealing with first- and second-level motivation issues—one of the greatest challenges a manager can face.

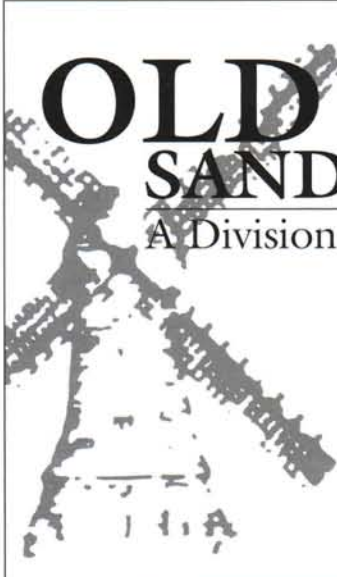
Going back to Maslow, physical and safety needs in the workplace are affected by wages and benefits, safe working conditions, work environment, labor-saving devices, job security and proper (fair) supervision. While we owe our staff every effort in securing fair wages and benefits, we are dealing with limits. These limits should be, at least, reviewed fairly and adjusted according to the market. Whether you allow the market to be the sole force in setting your limits is directly attributed to value received. The perception of fairness is best achieved by being honest and fair in assessing value and even-handed in distributing it.

"Everyone talks about the weather, but nobody does anything about it." Mark Twain

We do, however, have some influence on the "inside weather." We must deal with limits that are not totally under our control, but the proper environment necessary to allow individuals to meet their needs can be nurtured through effective leadership. The single most effective way of fostering a comfortable work environment is by practicing good communication

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skills. Hundreds of books have been written on the subject. It's that important to success. It's even more important in establishing trust with individuals seeking to satisfy first- and second-level needs.



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- 1) Take time to get to know the employees.
- 2) Employees grow restless if long periods lapse without communication.
- 3) Ask them for their input.
- 4) Accentuate the positive.
- 5) Give meaningful praise. Be a good listener.

Do:

- When approached, avoid expectations.
- Ask questions in a low-key tone of voice.
- Restate what the person has said. This shows your interest and allows for any clarification.
- Ask for the speaker's views after he or she has recited the basic facts: "What do you think?"
- Recognize and deal with your personal feelings about the individual. Be especially attentive to people you may dislike.

Don't:


- Expect to hear the "same old thing."
- Think about your response while the other party is trying to communicate with you.
- Avoid being the "Devil's advocate." This is a challenge and often ends up confrontational.
- Don't change the subject.
- Avoid distractions; go someplace where you won't be disturbed, if possible. Distraction can be perceived as a lack of interest on your part.


By being a good listener, you reinforce the speaker's confidence in you even if ultimately you are forced to reject his concept. By reinforcing the other party's contribution to the conversation, you, in turn, will receive better cooperation from him. If you are a good listener, you increase substantially the chances that he or she will listen to

you when it is your turn to take an active role in a future conversation.

Remember that if you aren't listening, he or she will look anywhere for someone who will, and that's bad for the weather inside.







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