

FEATURE II

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Employee Training is the Key to Efficiency

Before my child was born this spring I had always been the one to work twelve-hour days without thinking twice about it. I was always getting involved in everything because I had the attitude that if I did not do it, it would not get done correctly. Now, I do not have time to work those long shifts each day as I once did. The funny thing is, everything still gets completed. The reason tasks get accomplished without me being involved every step of the way is due to the fact that I have learned both how to train and trust my colleagues. Even in this outrageous summer that we have had, I have worked fewer hours because my superior and I have trained key staff members on hand syringing and hand watering.

When training employees on new and more technical tasks the one thing I can tell you is patience is a virtue. It took years and a few tough summers for me to learn how to be precise at such things as hand watering, course set up, and irrigation diagnostics. No one can expect even a seasoned crewmember to be a specialist at a task that is new to them. When you are training someone, I have found that it is best to show and not just tell them what to do. Have them go out to the job site with you and demonstrate exactly what you want done. Be as detail oriented as possible and expound on how critical the job is. Also, when you go out to the job site make sure that you come prepared with all the tools required to accomplish the job. It just looks bad and unprofessional when you show a crew member how to cut cups and you bring the cup cutter but forget all the other necessities back at the shop. Additionally, demonstrating the proper way to do something the first time gives the employee confidence in you.

After you have shown someone a particular job, now it is his or her time to give it a try. Let them do it on their own with you watching and answering questions. Expect them to make mistakes. Don't get mad when this happens. Follow up is imperative. Just because they are trained on something as fixing a broken swing joint, does not mean that they are going to do it right all the time without slipping up. When they make a mistake let them know that it is all right and assist them in fixing it. Continue to watch and critique and always give them a vote of confidence. Just remember never to get worked up. Remember someone took the time to teach

you and the feeling you had of not knowing how to do something.

One of the more difficult aspects in training someone in a task that you once did on a regular basis is learning to let go. We all believe that we are the best in what we do. Sometimes we want to do it ourselves because we are the educated experts. Well, I have come to the realization that the educated experts have to learn to train, observe and fine-tune. I remember the first time I trained someone on how to syringe a *Poa annua* green. I thought to myself that this is going to go horribly wrong and I am going to get blamed for it when this green dies. After training the individual I was pleasantly surprised. Someone who I thought of as just an average worker, turned out to be my number one hand waterer. He became my go-to person even on the hottest of weekends. This process of teaching, training and letting go helped me grow as a leader and be more efficient as a manager. Now I spend more time fine-tuning other aspects of the golf course and am not so narrow-minded and controlling.

Golf course superintendents often get labeled as perfectionists. I see that as a good thing. If we teach everyone on staff to be a perfectionist in their tasks, that will be a great thing. After teaching and training is complete, just remember not to kick into auto-pilot and look at things each day. You are still accountable for someone else's work. When you give the right training and tools to the right person you too will find that you have more time to spend on other aspects of life, especially your family. **-OC**