

Treasure Coast "Tide"ings

By JAMES P. CALLAGHAN
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EMPLOYEE RELATIONS TOP PRIORITY AT RIVERBEND

During the last decade, one of the most frustrating facets of golf course management has been attempting to lure and retain good personnel for the maintenance operations of the golf course. Tremendous competition with the construction trades and clubs' commitment to low wages has made it difficult to attract labor into our field of endeavor. Recently, the situation has eased somewhat due to the high unemployment and more realistic compensation being offered by more golfing facilities.

Joe Snook has experienced periods of high turnover during his eight year tenure at Riverbend Country Club in Tequesta. In addition to maintaining his George Fazio designed executive properties, Joe is also responsible for the maintenance of the condominium properties. Since his labor force contains over 15 individuals, Joe has become very keen on employee relations over the years.

Joe has found that one key factor in hiring a new employee is impressing upon him the importance of punctuality. This point is brought up several times during the interview. If a newly hired employee arrives one minute late at Riverbend on the first day, he is immediately sent down the road. Joe has found that an employee who is not punctual will fail in other aspects of his job and by "nipping it in the bud", future problems will be avoided.

After years of hard work, Joe contends that he has a fairly stable crew. He strives to maintain their interest and desire to stay with the club in many ways. Of course, wages play an important part but can only add resolution to the total picture. Enjoyment of work, understanding of the individual, diversification of jobs and compliments have produced a unique give-take situation that has developed into a happy picture for all.

Snook stated, "I have found that diversification of their routine duties is of great importance to my crew. Regardless of seniority, all must take turns at the unpleasant and menial tasks. Weeding, raking and edging of sand traps are shared by all."

The Greens Chairman at Riverbend has become part of Joe's employee relations program especially when a compliment is in order. When they are touring the golf course together and Joe receives a compliment for a particular job, Joe automatically drives his Greens Chairman to the employee or employees responsible. The Greens Chairman is made aware of the fact that this particular employee was responsible for that particular job. It always ends up with a direct compliment to the crew member and a smile on his face. Joe feels that with many of his employees, that is worth more than money.

Known as "pop" to many, Joe is always there when one of his crew members is having a personal problem. He commented, "Employees are not robots and as all humans, they have personal problems. If an employee should tell me in confidence of a problem, I make a concerted effort to listen and from time to time inquire to how things are going. By showing my genuine interest and concern, I feel that there is a closer relationship and loyalty that would not exist otherwise." Joe continued. "I am not an advocate of loaning money or socializing with the crew, but if a little of my time or encouragement is needed, it pays big dividends. I feel better inside and the employee is more apt than not to have it show in his performance on the job."

As we all know, one of the greatest assets on the golf course is an alert and aware employee. In striving for this, Joe tries to answer any questions of an employee in detail

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regardless of the significance to him at the time. He says that it most always pays off. "If a superintendent fails to notice such problems as webs on a green, a missing trap rake, or a ball washer empty, he is most appreciative when an employee notices and advises him," he stated. Joe added, "When an employee advises me of any problem whether it be of priority or not, I make it a point to jot it down in front of him and to thank him for his expertise. In writing it down, he is sure to know that it was important and will continue to keep me informed. If practical at the time, I may ask him to drop what he is doing and takes care of the problem right away. That shows the person how important it is to bring problems to my attention."

Rescheduling working hours has been another way to make the job attractive at Riverbend. The crew works nine hours a day Monday thru Thursday and only four hours on Friday. They then alternate weekends for the work dictated by our profession. This gives the employee a 2½ day weekend every other week and Joe says that they love it.

In closing our interview, Joe commented, "As all golf course superintendents are aware, our finished product on the course is a reflection on us as an individual. However, the results cannot be attained alone. The golf course crew does it as a team effort. And only through our guidance can we obtain the desired result. If we are going to succeed in this profession, we must master the art of human relations." ■



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