

# The Gator Growls



## **Boost Employee Morale With Motivation And A Better Golf Course**

BY: Sandra P. Carmouche

Pleasant Hills Country Club and Buzzard Gulch Golf Club are both 18 hole championship golf courses in a growing town. They are located on opposite sides of the same street and are each responsible for maintaining 120 acres of land.

Mr. Green, the golf course superintendent at Pleasant Hills, employs seven people and spent 330,000 dollars last year to maintain the golf course and surrounding grounds which was 20,000 dollars less than he had budgeted for.

Every other Monday, when the golf course is closed, Mr. Green and his crew play nine holes of golf in the afternoon, even though some of the personnel are not good golfers. (Mr. Green believes that his employees spot problem areas more easily while golfing than they do when they are working; besides, it's fun).

The members at Pleasant Hills all agree that Mr. Green and his staff do an outstanding job of keeping the golf course immaculate. That is why they have each donated ten dollars into a fund which will provide Christmas bonuses for the employees.

Across the street at Buzzard Gulch, the members are thinking of hiring a new golf course superintendent. They feel that Buzzard Gulch has the potential to be a better golf club than Pleasant Hills, yet it is always in terrible condition.

Mr. Brown, the superintendent at Buzzard Gulch, spent 380,000 dollars last year for maintenance, 30,000 dollars more than he had budgeted for, and has 12 people on his crew.

Of the 12 employees, he can only count on eight to show up for work on any given day, and their performance seldom qualifies as mediocre. He always has help wanted ads in the newspaper because the employees at Buzzard Gulch don't stay for any length of time.

Every other week when Mr. Brown sees the personnel at Pleasant Hills playing golf, he gets frustrated. He never has time to play golf because it takes him two days to accomplish what Mr. Green gets done in a few hours.

Mr. Brown knows he has a problem, but he has no idea

that his difficulties are the result of poor employee motivation. And although Pleasant Hills and Buzzard Gulch don't really exist, they are good examples of how the attitudes of golf course personnel can affect the condition and expense of a golf course.

Today, salary and fringe benefits such as hospitalization and life insurance are no longer stimulating enough to sustain high levels of performance. Employees must be emotionally satisfied or the quality and quantity of their productivity becomes poor.

It is therefore important that a golf course superintendent provide a variety of incentives for his crew members and that he structure work so that each individual can realize his full potential.

Cary Lewis, formerly of Windstar Country Club in Naples, now at the Vintage in Fort Myers, Wayne Lipold of the Forest Country Club in Fort Myers, and Buddy Carmouche of Fiddlesticks Country Club in Fort Myers contributed the following examples of how employee motivation works for them.

The first step to consider in employee motivation lies in hiring people who are suitable for the type of work required on a golf course. A person who dislikes working outdoors or doesn't enjoy physical activities isn't going to remain satisfied for any length of time on a golf course, regardless of the incentives a superintendent offers. And the individual who is dissatisfied with his work has a tendency to infect other crew members with his attitude.

Once the hiring is complete, job satisfaction becomes the next area of critical importance. If employees are to remain stimulated, the superintendent needs to be aware of what most advantageously affects their attitudes.

Cary Lewis gave a questionnaire to his staff to determine what had the most positive effect on their feelings of job satisfaction. Recognition of good performance came in first, followed by opportunity for advancement, with salary, or pay rate, placing third.

There are several different ways of letting an individual know that his work is appreciated, the most inexpensive of which is praise. Complimenting the person who, for

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example, does an outstanding job of mowing greens raises his self-esteem and instills pride in his achievements. It also allows the superintendent to positively reinforce his policies regarding the quality of work he expects from his personnel.

Rewards are another way of recognizing good performance. A day off with pay, an employee of the month award, comp time (the employee gets time off for the amount of overtime he puts in), a free lunch, or a field trip to a superintendent's meeting are a few good examples.

Financial rewards such as sick leave or personal time also help stimulate motivation. For a predetermined amount of time that a person puts in, he gets a paid hour of sick leave or personal time which can be added to vacation time if desired. This type of reward prevents absenteeism and promotes dependability.

Pay raises and bonuses provide excellent incentives for personnel. Wayne Lippold evaluates his staff each year before Christmas and, because the individuals who have worked the longest in his service deserve special recognition, he gives bonuses for longevity as well as performance.

Allowing crew members the opportunity for advancement as higher level positions become available is an additional means of rewarding those who excel at their work. Promotions are great goal builders and employees without goals are seldom high achievers.

To assure personnel that they are being treated fairly, establish a written policy and don't deviate from it. Included in the policy should be proper attire, care of equipment, break and lunch times, safety rules, and reasons for dismissal.

Keeping files on individual crew members and recording their attendance along with specific information with regard to job performance also assures employees of fair treatment. If, for example, an individual is passed over for promotion because of poor attendance, the superintendent won't have to guess how often the person was absent, he'll know. The files can also help the superintendent justify his reasons for firing an employee or giving large pay raises to some and small raises to others. Personnel should be permitted access to their respective files so they'll know where they stand and there won't be

any disputes over the superintendent's remarks or comments.

When negative feedback becomes necessary, calm, rational reprimands made in private get best results. Yelling at a person who has made a mistake while other crew members are present can generate negative feelings that are irreversible. And delegating the task of reproval to an assistant or foreman helps to maintain comfortable communication between staff and the superintendent.

Communication is essential to any productive work force and staff meetings can provide an opportunity for the superintendent to clear up any misunderstandings or problems before they create negative attitudes. Staff meetings also give personnel a chance to make suggestions, which gives them a feeling of contribution while increasing their job involvement.

Buddy Carmouche believes that the key to employee involvement lies in delegating authority and giving more responsibility to crew members. With that in mind, he permanently assigns two employees to nine holes of the golf course who are then responsible for everything from repairing divots to mowing greens.

Not only does this program help prevent the boredom caused by repetitious work, it creates competition between crew members for the best nine holes out of 36. The work is more interesting for the employees and they are permitted to make some decisions regarding their particular nine holes.

As a final suggestion, golf course superintendents should assign the most demanding tasks in the morning when employees are fresh and motivation is highest. Pushing crew members after lunch can be frustrating and the beginning of poor work habits.

Good employees are hard to find and the golf course superintendent should make every effort possible to keep them. As was illustrated by Mr. Green and Mr. Brown, motivation plays an essential role in the productivity of personnel. It is an internal need of every individual and the superintendent who can create a positive work environment for his staff will have a better golf course, with fewer problems, at a lower cost. ■

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