



Palm Beach Trade Winds



I'M A GRADUATE FROM FLYMO UNIVERSITY

By Mike Bailey
The Falls Country Club

There is a theory that people work hard and upgrade themselves until they ultimately reach their level of incompetency. If you can agree with this theory, there are some interesting points to analyze. I remember a professor in college analyzing this theory. Back then, it really made very little sense to me. However, after being out in the real world and dealing with employees for the last ten years, "the incompetency theory" does make sense.

This theory holds true for everybody that works for a living, whether you are a flymo operator or a golf course superintendent. There are really two types of working class people. Those who work up the ladder and those who do not. The individual that works up the ladder is not a problem. This type of person sets goals, achieves them, and continues to strive upward. Within the golf course maintenance staff, this usually is the upper half of the entire department. There usually are enough goals and rewards to satisfy these people.

1. At the top of the ladder, the golf course superintendent sets goals and can achieve job satisfaction.

(When this does not occur, we typically associate the club as a musical chair type, where the salary is too low, the club impossible to satisfy or perhaps the superintendent incompetent.)

2. At the next level, hopefully the assistant superintendent is hardworking and striving to become a superintendent themselves, therefore the rewards are high and motivating.

(When this does not occur, either the assistant is restrained to move onward by upper management, burdened with personal liabilities such as the lack of formal education along with financial limitations to obtain such, or simply the assistant feeling unqualified to move on.)

3. Next, the mechanic too can have goals. Not so

much the goal to move beyond the role of the mechanic because he is usually specially trained for that specific field, but to achieve satisfaction within this department. To achieve ultimate satisfaction, whereby nothing breaks down would be idealistic, because even a perfect machine requires maintenance. Therefore, at this level, satisfaction is one huge task.

(When satisfaction does not occur, unfortunately the mechanic is being restricted by the repairs budget, being given ratty old equipment that's impossible to repair, or simply does not have the desire to be proud of his machinery.)

4. The foreman, spray technician and the remaining upper half of the crew can foresee advancement and therefore set their goals to work hard and move up the ladder. At this level, there can be a great deal of employee satisfaction because good workers are constantly in demand.

(If this does not happen, we typically find the remaining sector of the crew is generally untrained and unsatisfied. It is difficult to produce self esteem at this level and difficult to maintain the staff on the payroll.)

Now for the other half of the crew:

The laborer with low pay, few benefits and little ambition to move upward is the most difficult employee to find and retain.

Lets face it, there is only so much room for the chiefs and the remaining crew staff needs to be the indians.

How can you obtain the indians without having them run off to another camp? One of the simplest cures would be the "money grows on trees" theory and give the employee whatever they ask for in order for them to stay. Obviously this would not fly as budgets would become exhorbitant. So, where do we draw the line? At what stage do we try to help the employee professionally and personally satisfied.

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I hear quite often, fellow superintendents distraught over poor employee morale, lack of attendance and overall poor performance. This problem seems most disheartening because we convince ourselves there is little that we can actually do to help alleviate the problem. To the contrary, there is a great deal we can do to improve employee morale and to create an environment conducive for a superbly maintained golf course.

Our ultimate goal for the so-called lower half of the crew is to create an environment that will satisfy their desires. We are not necessarily talking about extravagant ideas or cost. More to the contrary, these benefits should be relatively standard throughout our industry. Because these benefits are not the standard, those clubs with the better benefits ironically obtain a better crew, all the way down the line to the lowest crewmember on the totem pole. Listed below are relatively standard benefits that should be prevalent for every golf course maintenance department.

1. Vacation:
 - 1 week after 1 year
 - 2 weeks after 2 years
 - 3 weeks after 5 years
2. Medical Plan: Full coverage after 3 months
3. Dental Plan: Paid by employer. At least option for employee to purchase
4. Retirement fund
5. Savings plan
6. Yearly Bonus or Christmas Bonus

7. Opportunity to receive overtime pay
8. Uniforms
9. Lunch program: Purchased at cost through clubhouse or, purchased at cost plus
10. Lunch Room facility with:
 - Air conditioning
 - Refrigerator
 - Microwave
 - Vending Machines
 - Personal lockers
11. Golfing privileges
12. Employee tournaments
13. Discounts provided for proshop purchases

I'm sure you could easily add a few more standard equipment items to the list in order for employees to remain on the payroll.

Sadly, considering most golf course maintenance department budgets are lacking in funds, and good employees are difficult to find, the most important item is the retaining of crew members. If we can instill an attitude of incompetency to competent, unfulfilled to fulfilled, unsatisfied to satisfied, lazy to hardworking, tardy to ontime, grumpy to cheerful, disagreeable to agreeable, ultimately, the wave of negative feelings can transfer to positive. The feelings at the lower level of the crew can improve to a point where team work will improve. A cohesiveness from the top all the way to the bottom can make even the flymo operator feel as proud as if they're a graduate of Flymo University. ■

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