



Unfair Criticism, Lost Loyalty and Rumors

Dealing with Unwarranted Criticism

You've just been chewed out by your boss about something that is inaccurate, unfair, and absolutely not your fault. You feel your blood pressure rise. You don't know whether to tell him what you really think of him or punch him in the nose (which is probably the same thing).

You resist, knowing that, at this point in your life, it's imperative to remain employed, but the feelings persist. You're mad! What can you do?

First, you can take a deep breath and remind yourself that your reaction is healthy. And the fact that you did not punch this guy is also healthy. No one likes to be criticized, especially if it is unwarranted. In the future, try these four steps.

One, ask questions. Even if you believe the criticism is unfair, delay reacting defensively. State that you're confused and that you'd like to understand it better. Then ask questions about specifics. "Exactly what I have done that is making you angry?"

Second, actively listen. This involves listening with more than your ears. It also involves paraphrasing. "Let me make sure I understand. You felt angry when I told one of the members our plans for

Editor's Note: I came across a couple of articles recently that seem to reach out and grab me, because I hear the topics everywhere I go. Our jobs can be quite stressful at times, and learning how to deal with that stress can save your life or avoid serious illness. Read on and find out you're not alone out there and maybe you can find something in these articles to help your situation.

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How to Lower Your Blood Pressure

1. Ask questions.
2. Listen with more than your ears.
3. Agree with some part of the criticism.
4. Accept your critic's right to feel any way he wants.

renovating the course? Is that it?"

Third, agree with some part of the criticism. You might offer, "I can understand how that made you angry." Notice that this is not agreeing with the criticism merely shows some degree of empathy. It is very disarming.

Fourth, accept his right to feel any way he wants; even if he is wrong... and do not take it personally.

If you follow these steps, you will find that your blood pressure remains low and the criticizer is left believing that you have heard and understood him.

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Loyalty Between Employers, Workers at an All-Time Low

Loyalty: faithful adherence to a person, government, cause, duty, etc.—Webster's New World Dictionary Third Edition.

Gone are the days when employee/employer relationships are built on long-term trust and loyalty. There are occasional exceptions, like the following story I read several years ago. A

textile factory in Massachusetts was gutted by fire a month prior to Christmas.

Several hundred employees were suddenly put out of work, or so they thought. The employees feared that the owner (a single owner, not a corporation) would choose not to rebuild the company, but just close the doors and collect the insurance settlement.

Twenty-four hours following the fire, owner Aaron Feuerstein surprised employees by announcing that he planned to rebuild the plant immediately, with portions to be completed and operational in 90 days or less. Not only did Mr. Feuerstein begin immediate reconstruction of the plant, but he continued paying all 1,400 employees their full wages for the next 30 days and provided 90 days of insurance coverage.

He said it was his responsibility to both his employees and the community because they had been responsible for his success. This gentleman showed a tremendous amount of loyalty to his employees, above and beyond what many current-day entrepreneurs and corporations consider reasonable.

Except in rare cases like this, loyalty between employees and employers is at an all-time low. Employees no longer are rewarded with job security for many years of faithful service. Salary increases and benefits that coincide with long-term employment are often looked upon nega-

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tively by upper management.

Such rewards are considered too damaging to the bottom line. This attitude seems to be found throughout the entire business world. Everyone is looking out for number one with a survival-of-the-fittest mentality.

Tenure and experience seem to mean little these days because there are many up-and-coming turf professionals willing to work countless hours for less pay. They get a nice increase in salary compared to their prior assistant's position, but very often nowhere near the pay level of the experienced superintendent. The course "saved money" by this move, or at least that was the justification used by management—a corporate downsizing philosophy, I suppose.

I have seen a number of older, very good golf course superintendents released over the years, replaced by a younger person with a college education and maybe two or three years of experience as an assistant. Does this cost-cutting move make up for many years of experience and local knowledge of a property? I don't think so.

In reality, the overall financial position may not have improved other than in the superintendent's salary line item category. A careful look at the entire

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budget in subsequent years might reveal that overall spending increased while course conditioning remained the same. How could this happen? Could the previous superintendent's many years of experience have paid off in more cost-effective management and fewer mistakes? Equal golf course conditioning at less expense? It is possible. I am not implying that all young turf managers are incompetent or wasteful, but remember the adage, "You get what you pay for," and this goes for work experience also.

It is not just employers who have forgotten the meaning of loyalty. Superintendents, both young and old, are also guilty of changing jobs at the drop of a hat. Superintendents will jump ship for a small increase in salary, or make a lateral move for the chance to manage a more prestigious course. This quite commonly is justified as required to move up the ladder.

We all need to stop and think about the good and the bad times we've had over the years. Course officials must ask themselves who it was who stuck by them when the going was rough. Who was there during the lean years when there wasn't money in the

budget to perform needed course improvements or purchase new equipment? Who spent their nights babysitting an unreliable pump station to get the course watered? Or, as a superintendent, perhaps the course officials stood by you in a time of serious need such as a personal family problem or serious illness? If you are fortunate enough to have a trusting and loyal working relationship with your employee or employer, do you really want to throw it away and risk what you have for a few more dollars in your paycheck or budget? Loyal working relationships don't just happen; they must be developed. Once developed, they need to be appreciated

MIKE HUCK

Mike Huck loyally works as an agronomist in the Southwest Region of the USGA Green Section. Credit: March/April 1999 USGA Green Section Record.

Facts Grind the Rumor Mill to a Halt in a Hurry

Alan Puckett, CGCS of the Lake Region Yacht & Country Club told me recently about a communication tool that has cut the infamous rumor mill at his course by 80–85 percent. Alan's general manager, Mike Fiddelke, picked it up from another club manager and it goes something like this.

All department heads are encouraged to report immediately or at staff meetings any unfounded rumors they hear circulating through the club. The general manager will post a memo titled "Rumor! Rumor! Rumor!" in the pro shop, clubhouse and locker rooms. The memo will simply state the rumor and then present the facts of the matter.

For example, the Lake Region Club recently rebuilt their greens and planted FloraDwarf bermudagrass. When the

first cold snap of the season hit the newly seeded greens, the bermuda turned its usual cold temperature purple. Immediately the rumor spread that the new greens were dead or dying.

The club manager wrote a memo with information supplied by Alan about the normal reaction of warm-season grasses to cold weather and posted it, killing the rumor in its tracks. Other club managers have reported similar results using this program.

It seems people become more reluctant and embarrassed to spread rumors when their gossip proves to be so inaccurate when the facts are posted quickly and everyone knows who spread the rumor. If you have a rampant rumor mill problem at your club maybe this tip can save you some grief from the whiners and complainers.