



Superintendent John Lammrish at LPGA Golf Facility with two Hispanic coworkers. Photo by Bruce Witt.

Diverse Workforce Requires Creative, Flexible Management

By Bruce Witt

This past summer I had the privilege of traveling across Florida and visiting numerous golf course facilities. My aim was to interview managers and other workers of all types to gather the best management-practices information available in the greens and service industry. This venture was made possible by a partnership grant through the Florida Turfgrass Association, Club Managers Association, and the Florida Golf Course Superintendents Association. Their generous assistance and belief in the importance of this study is greatly appreciated.

In February, 2006 I sent out a short e-survey to members of the Golf Course Superintendents Association and Club Managers Association to determine the percentage of non-English-speaking workers at their facilities. The respondents with the greatest percentage of non-English speaking workers were

sent a follow-up request to visit with them and interview various managers and other employees. Their kind invitations set the stage for my travels.

Over a three-week period in June I visited 21 facilities and interviewed 49 people ranging in position from club managers, human resource managers, superintendents, assistant superintendents, office managers, mechanics and foremen. These individuals provided me with a wealth of information regarding management practices used for their workers. I traveled from Jacksonville to Key West and experienced a tremendously diverse assortment of management practices which I recorded in my interviews and have compiled into a training model for new or inexperienced managers supervising a culturally diverse workforce.

The cultural breakdown of the countries represented at these facilities was surprisingly diverse. Many people be-

lieve the Hispanic worker has occupied a large percentage of the labor force in Florida. That perception reflects reality in many parts of central and south Florida, but I found large pockets of areas where Hispanic influence is minimal or entirely non-existent. These areas and others across the state still have predominantly American workers or an assortment of other various cultures.

Hispanic countries: Mexico, Argentina, Honduras, Puerto Rico, Nicaragua, Ecuador, Cuba, Peru, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Colombia, Guatemala*, Venezuela, Chile, and the Dominican Republic.

Non-Hispanic countries: Haiti, Poland, Serbia, Germany, Philippines, Albania, Korea, Croatia, Czechoslovakia, and Russia (several states).

** Many Guatemalans speak a Mayan Indian dialect which is not of Hispanic origin.*

At the 21 facilities I visited, these are the countries represented in their workforces:

Hispanic countries: Mexico, Argentina, Honduras, Puerto Rico, Nicaragua, Ecuador, Cuba, Peru, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Colombia, Guatemala*, Venezuela, Chile, and the Dominican Republic.

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Many great books and resources address cultural diversity and its impact on management, and I recommend that current and new managers utilize these important resources to broaden their understanding of cultural differences.

What I found to be most valuable in researching these many differences is the individual dynamic that occurs at each facility and how it is managed by the people there. This unique and powerful variable is not found in books or

videos but establishes itself uniquely at each facility and is based upon several factors which include:

- different cultures present in the workforce
- personalities of all the different workers and managers coming together
- management styles of the club manager, superintendent, etc.
- individual club policies and procedures

When these dynamics are mixed together, it is easy to see quite a difference per facility on how to best manage that particular establishment. This concept I have hoped to capture and utilize in my model development that will show new managers the best management practices utilized in a culturally diverse workplace.

Obviously, the ability to speak the language of your workers well enough to communicate effectively is critical in successfully managing your staff, but equally important is the need to identify and understand the differences of each cultural group as it is filtered through the many personalities at your specific facility.

What I have found in my travels is great respect and appreciation for the many cultures represented in the workplace, and a tremendous flexibility on the part of the manager and workers in coming together to reach a common ground of understanding, respect and responsibility.



Bruce Witt, professor of golf course operations, Lake City Community College.

My hat goes off to all the managers and workers in our ever-changing and exciting industry; they have made their facilities productive and successful. I'm looking forward to the future, and believe that the best times are yet to come!

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