

Video an important component of crew training

By DARREN DAVIS

On my first day of turfgrass school at Pennsylvania State University, Dr. J. M. Duich, the professor, whom I had heard so much about, stood in front of a class of eager "turfers" and drew a circle. Inside the circle, he sectioned off a "slice of pie" representing about 15 percent of the circle. Inside this small portion of the circle, Dr. Duich wrote the word "turf." Inside the remaining 85 percent of the pie, he wrote the word "people."

As new students, we were confused about what we had just been told. But it didn't take long after graduation for many of us to realize how accurate this statement was. I will never forget that day and the "Duich Pie" theory.

As turf managers, a major key to our success is the people who work for us. The quality of a golf course frequently reflects the ability of the turf manager to attract and hire quality employees, then provide them with the training to perform their duties correctly and in a productive manner. A method I have found extremely valuable is the use of VHS videos in training all my employees.

Instructional videos can provide a thorough means of training that is both visual and audible. How many times have you given instructions to a new (or veteran) employee only to receive a blank stare in return, or perhaps a head shake assuring you that he understands? Oftentimes, you find out later that he had no clue what you were talking about.

Or, how many times have you taken the time and sincere effort to go into the field to train an employee, spending a large amount of time explaining the correct method for accomplishing the task, only to realize later that you forgot one major point?

A fellow superintendent recently told me a story that highlights this very well. He had hired a new employee that had no previous golf course experience and did not understand the intricacies of the turf maintenance equipment. So, in an attempt to break the employee in slowly, the superintendent trained the employee on a riding rotary mower. After some instructions and demonstrations around the maintenance facility, the employee was given directions to the clubhouse so he could mow the clubhouse grounds.

However, on the way to the clubhouse there was an

obstacle the employee was unfamiliar with: a putting green. Trying to do the best job possible, the employee decided the quickest way to the clubhouse was straight ahead across the putting green.

When the supervisor arrived later, he noticed the damage to the putting green and asked the employee if he knew how it got there?



Darren Davis

"I guess those are my tire tracks, why do you ask?" the employee responded.

After the initial shock wore off, the superintendent realized he had not taught the employee as fully as he should.

Similarly, what if the one point you forgot to explain was "Always keep a watchful eye for hydraulic leaks," and you now have streaks of dead grass on all

the back nine putting greens.

These are some of the reasons I use VHS video tapes religiously to train and educate employees. The use of video allows me to thoroughly educate an employee, first in the office, then through a hands-on demonstration in the field. I have found a good video ensures that vital points are not missed in the training process.

However, the videos do not replace the need to provide hands-on training, frequent supervision, or the operator reading the owner's manual.

Beginning the first day of

employment at my course, before the new employee even sees the golf course, an employee views an introductory video tape to golf courses. Then, before any of my employees get on a piece of large equipment like a triplex, walking greens or tee mower, they sit down and view the video on the assigned task.

When using videotapes, I've found it helpful to provide written material for an employee, such as a workbook, to accompany the video. This workbook gives an employee or

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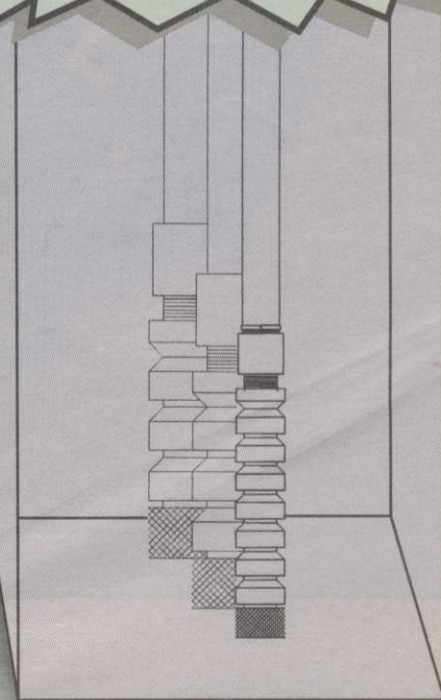
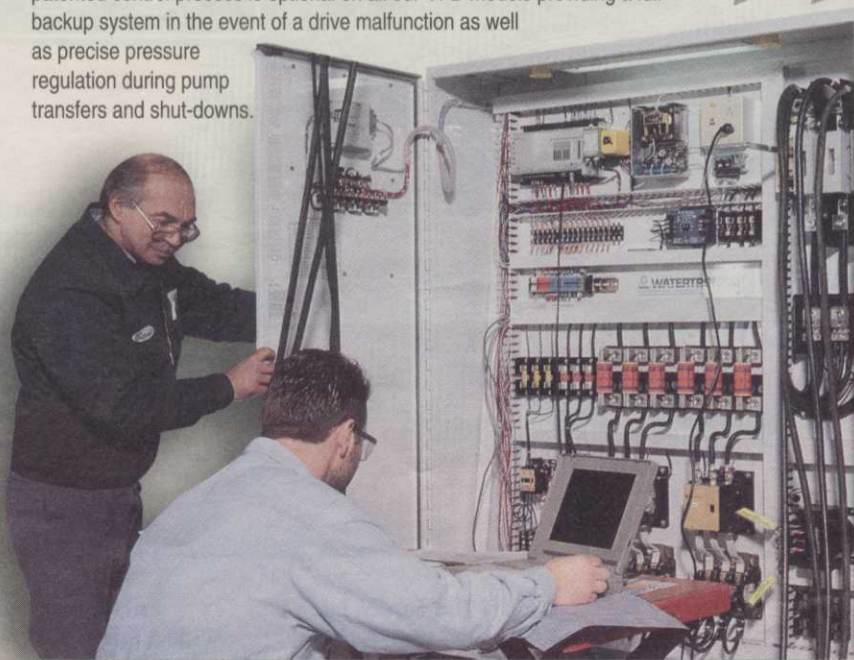
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CIRCLE #106

Darren Davis is the golf course superintendent at Olde Florida Golf Club in Naples, Fla.

Davis comment

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supervisor space to make notes on site-specific course policies or any changes.

After the employee views the video tape, he or she is asked to complete a short written examination to insure complete understanding of the video. After the exam is graded, and I am confident the employee learned the material, his or her signature is required on a sign-off sheet that is placed in his or her personal file. Storing the exam, or the sign off sheet in the employee's file, decreases the potential of receiving an OSHA violation due to improper employee training.

Employees can only perform to your standards if they fully understand what is expected of them. A well-trained employee is able to do his or her job effectively and will feel rewarded by a job well done. If employees are not thoroughly trained and told what is expected of them, the job they perform will most likely be unacceptable. An employee who continually performs unacceptable work will probably be continually disciplined and will never feel a sense of accomplishment. The employee's morale then goes down and productivity decreases.

No training method will ever be fool-proof, but I have found videos to be a valuable tool in the training process.

Leslie comment

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this, and they're not used to seeing grass die," said Patty Knaggs at Hazeltine Golf Club in Chaska, Minn. "They don't understand how complex the whole growing system is for turfgrass, or the lengths you go to to balance it. If you have poor drainage, you learn to be meager with your water. If you have a shady green, you spray extra chemicals there. But when you're faced with the weather, you can't make up for that imbalance."

Perhaps to their undoing, "su-

perintendents have gotten the reputation as 'can-do' guys," said Gary Grigg, president of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America. "We can control genetics, fertilizer and fungicides. But we can't control the climate. Sometimes that's hard to explain to your members."

Grigg saw a possible correlation with "the higher-budget clubs that maintain their turf the finest: When they get in stress conditions, they get hurt the most."

The problem? At many private clubs, the superintendents are "walking a tightrope every day and it doesn't take much to push them over the edge," Grigg said.

It's ironic that because of pressure from the club members, superintendents sometimes push the turf over that fine line. And those club members who exerted the pressure are the ones holding the door open when the super gets the boot.

In other cases, club members just like to gripe. I recall a six-game winning streak by the Boston Red Sox a couple of summers ago. The Sox had just swept three-game series from both Minnesota and then-league-leading Detroit. But callers to a Boston sports radio station didn't want to discuss the win streak. They preferred to talk about the New York Mets' Anthony Young and his record 24-game losing streak.

Whatever case a superintendent faces at his club, some factors can help. "You really have to be strong with communications and hope you have good backing from the inner structure of the club, or you're out on the sidewalk," one super said.

Communications. That's one method that can help survive these trials.

"Most of the people understand through communication and education," another said, adding: "You have to have a thick skin during these times. Do your research and know who you are and you can get through this."

Possessing a strong character, and knowing who you are. Two keys to remember, because, as one fellow mentioned: "We may not have another year like this for 10 years. But we may have two more like it in the next five. You just don't know."

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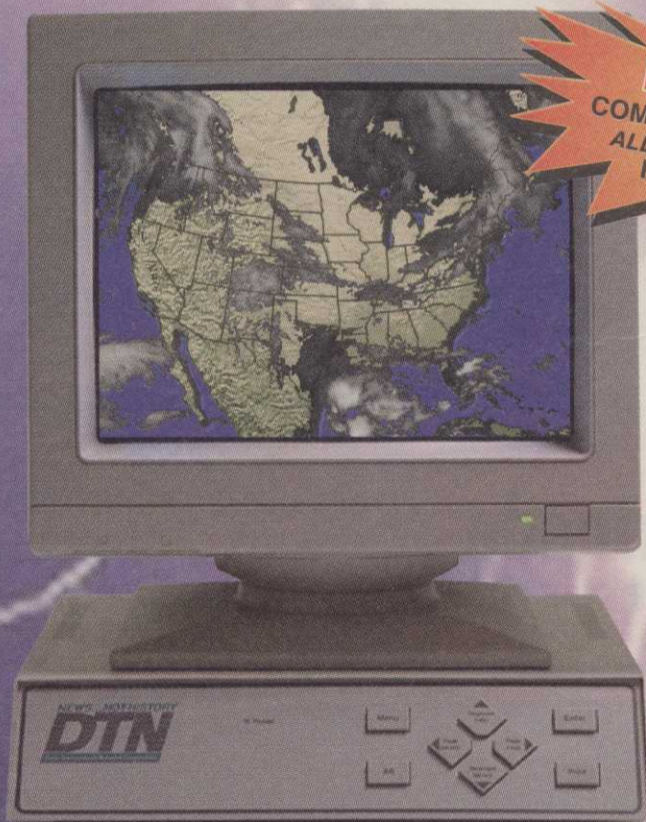
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