

Managing the operation: Focus on personnel, office management

By BOB CHADBOURNE

Personnel and office management, two areas that consume such a large portion of a golf course superintendent's time, are nevertheless mostly neglected in the academies of learning. An exception is at the University of Massachusetts (UMass), which retains retired resource economics professor Dr. Donald R. Marion to teach personnel at the annual UMass Winter Turf School.

Marion, who holds bachelor's and master's degrees in agri-economics from Cornell University and a PhD from UMass, feels his instruction is valid and timely for superintendents nationwide, except in the North, where golf is seasonal. While seasonal workers do often return each year, the management approach and style can vary between full-time workers and a more transient work force, he said.

Last month, GCN covered Marion's recommendations concerning management style, hiring, and conducting interviews. This month, he takes us through training, motivation, communications, performance evaluations, discipline, budgeting/cost control, personnel handbooks and public relations/politics.

TRAINING

- Share your goals and objectives with the new hire.
- Train everyone, even if they have done the same job elsewhere.
- Train in small steps with explanation. Marion runs an exercise in which he tells superintendents he wants them to tear the corners off a number of pieces of paper. He then separates the class into two groups, giving one group thorough instruction as to how the paper must be torn, telling the other group nothing. The results usually make a strong case for instruction.
- Follow the standard training technique: explain, demonstrate, conduct a practical exercise, review, have the employee perform the task independently, review again.

"On golf courses and in turf operations, training is largely on-the-job and seldom involves a classroom setting, although a mechanic might be sent to a seminar for training," said Marion.

SUPERVISION

- Never feel you need only train an employee and turn him loose.
- You must be his counselor, his confidante. Many don't like that role, Marion said, but someone has to fill it, or help won't come and problems will continue. As a minimum, seek out a referral for help.
- Recognize that you may be

younger than some of your workers, and they will feel they know their job better than you. (Again, Marion has the class write a paper on difficult problems encountered as a basis for discussion. He gets the usual alcohol, drugs, and age differences as examples, but also some real thought-provokers: "How do we work closely

LAST OF TWO PARTS

together when the son of a greens committee chairman gets hired for the summer?)"

Communications: A principal tool of the supervisor. It is extremely easy to miscommunicate,

and there are barriers that cause communications to break down:

- We assume too much.
- We communicate at the wrong time. Where is the employee's attention? Look for what is known as the "teachable moment." (Not at 5 p.m. Friday).
- We misuse language, semantics.

• We use non-verbal communication: a gesture, expression, tone.

• We apply the "halo effect": Someone is always right; someone is always wrong.

• We fail to seek and use feedback.

Performance Evaluation: The

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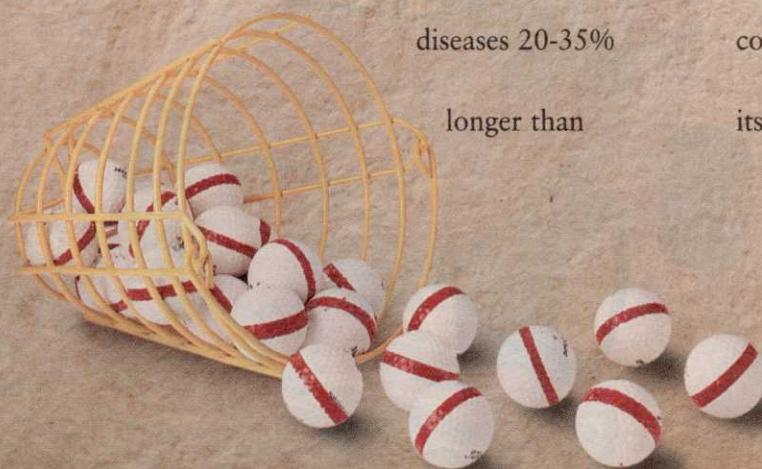
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Management

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disadvantage is that it's time-consuming paperwork. The advantage is that supervisors do it daily anyway. The pluses:

- It's done in a formal way on a timely basis.
- It's objective. Everyone is evaluated from the same format.
- It provides a paper trail for promotion, discipline and ter-

mination.

• It improves rapport through the discussion after it is completed.

"I like forms with descriptive phrases, not numerical 1-through-10 choices," said Marion, who designed a sample that allows a mechanic to be rated in the area of "housekeeping," meaning the appearance of his work area from a high of "All areas 'neat as a pin,' tools and equipment well orga-

nized and well maintained" to a dismal low of: "Approaching or at the disaster point, many areas unsightly and/or unsafe."

Ideally the closest supervisor should do the rating, and it is a good tool to have the employee do one on himself. (The general rule is that the employee will be tougher on himself, hence



Dr. Donald Marion

will not emerge as the bad guy.)

"This eases both people into the real value of the evaluation, which is the discussion that follows, addressing how they get to where they both want to be," said Marion. "The worker should then sign the form and date it, and understand that it becomes the basis for a plan to

correct deficiencies."

Discipline: The objective is not to "get even," but to correct unacceptable behavior. Apply what is called the "Hot Stove Rule":

- Warning: (employee feels the heat).
- Impersonal: (hot stoves burn everyone).
- Objective: (It's not personal).
- Immediacy: (Hot stoves burn you right away).

"Discipline should be administered as immediately as is reasonable, but when the supervisor is still hot under the collar is not the time," said Marion. He outlined the proper sequence of disciplinary steps:

- Oral reminder.
- Oral warning.
- Written warning (placed in employee file).
- Suspension without pay.
- Termination.
- Exit interview.

Personnel Handbook: All of the above should be outlined in writing, and new hires should read the material, and sign and date a form saying they have done so, which follows the original application as the second item to be placed in the employee file.

"This simplifies later decision-making and cuts down on grievances, but it's important not to put a policy in writing if you can't live with it," said Marion, who urged all policies be very detailed and specific. "Probably greens are mowed and sand traps groomed in very specific ways and at very specific times, but the specifics are seldom part of a written policy."

Budgeting Cost Control: "A superintendent is part of a big political game. He's thinking: 'How much should I ask for to get what I need,' while the Greens Committee is wondering, 'How much has he inflated this, and how much does he really require?'" said Marion. He added that the past several years' budgets would act as the basis, with explanations provided for differences in the current proposal. If a one-time, big-ticket item proposal greatly increases the bottom-line total, it should be isolated and explained separately, he said.

"It's another good practice to also prepare a budget that outlines the steps you would take if forced to accept a reduction, and another explaining what you could accomplish with an increase of some fixed percent," said Marion.

Public Relations: "PR is very important," he said. "It's true a golf superintendent has a lot of publics to deal with, but he also has some great opportunities. Golf courses are beautiful and appealing. He can offer clinics, sponsor a Little League team, host groups, offer his expertise to the community, talk to the garden club.

"He's got a great set of tools!"



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