

A case for non-traditional employee relations

By TERRY BUCHEN

WILLIAMSBURG, Va. — I have taken unscientific random opinion polls from some very successful CEOs of some successful companies nationwide, who also happen to be prominent golfers as well. Some of the results are interesting.

My favorite question to ask the captains of industry is, What is the most successful way to deal with employee/employer relations? The most resounding, consistent answer they gave is; "We talk to each other."

What a great answer. Think about it for a minute. "We talk to each other."

Most problems with employees usually originate if a supervisor has not totally communicated to them what they are unhappy about or what is expected of them in their job performance, or if an employee has not totally communicated their problems, or their ideas are not heard from a supervisor.

The most successful superintendents I have visited in my travels are great communicators and "people persons," above and beyond the call of duty. These supers have said many times that:

- growing grass is the easiest part of the job;
- nothing can be accomplished without people; and
- people issues are the hardest and most important part of their job performance.

It is interesting to note that most agronomy schools in this country spend the least amount of class time on employee relations/personnel management, etc., while spending the most time on agronomy/turfgrass management issues.

The second most popular answer to the question about employee relations is the most important: Trust!

Every aspect of everyday life, both at the workplace and off the job, involves trust. And the more successful operations there are in golf course maintenance, the more trust there is in each and every golf course management operation.

Do you trust your employees? Do your employees trust you?

The most successful superintendents are good communicators with their employees as they "talk to each other" and "trust each other."

To further explore the trust issue, consider some non-traditional ways to make important management decisions that affect employee/employer relations in the course maintenance department. Is an employee time clock really necessary when an individual time sheet filled out by each employee can do the job just as well, implying trust between supervisors and employees?

√ Do employees have to punch in and punch out for lunch, or can the honor system work just as well if there is trust?

√ Except for a listing of employee benefits and important safety issues, why is an employee manual really wanted or needed?

√ If employees and supervisors talk with each other regularly, why not set the policies together where they can be updated and modified as they occur, not locked in stone with the traditional employee manual?

• The employee suggestion box is becoming more commonplace in our end of the business and some fine ideas

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have come forth from employees who really like what they are doing and want to make their jobs more efficient and productive. The ideas go on and on, tailoring functions at each department totally involved in trusting each

other. It's as simple as that.

One last favorite idea — which I have used in employee relations to further

the communication process — is to have a nicely framed wall hanging in the lunch room, with the words "This is a nice place to work" in full view of everyone. It initiates positive issues and values and helps set the standards of employee relations from the time an employee enters the workplace, while they are having lunch and just before they leave for the day. I have had many employees comment positively on the sign and have even seen them straighten out the wall hanging when it becomes crooked, which is a great compliment in itself.

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