

Start communicating, reap rewards

Isn't it a shame that we have to be constantly reminded about the importance of the human element in business.

Why do we so easily forget that communication is probably the most crucial element to making a business run? Not just employer/employee communication, which is crucial, but supervisor/employee and employee/employee communication.

It's the glue that binds people together, and in turn, keeps every operation afloat.

A slap on the back from an employer is as important to the spirit of a business as the chat about last night's game among co-workers or inter-organization banter about an upcoming company function. Sure, there are a few in any operation who feel as if they can't be bothered with such idle nonsense, but I've come to learn that the more I learn about the people working around me, the more I understand how to work with them — and work more effectively.

As Terry Buchen's "A case for non-traditional employee relations" (page 21) points out, nothing can be accomplished without people. Ask any employer and they'll tell you that personnel is the number one issue on any day of any week.

If you manage or supervise a maintenance or course construction crew, my advice is to read Terry's piece first and then take a few active steps:

- Go from employee to employee and ask them how they're doing.
- Ask if they had a chance to change something in the standard day-to-day operations, what would it be?
- Plan a company event for no reason but to get together — munchies, food, maybe even a keg of beer (away from the mowers, of course).
- At the event make the announcement that you plan to get together with the crew once every other month to go over operational plans.

Sound silly? Think again. We hear about building business-to-business relationships as the key to growing business, but you can't do that unless you have a sound business to grow.

Granted, some of you may have an established and proven program going right now. But for those who don't I dare you: Increase your inner-office communications then write us and tell us the results. I personally guarantee rewards.

One quick note: Mark Leslie did an excellent job putting together our special Safety by Design section (see cover & pages 31-34). Safety is yet another issue we don't take into consideration until it's too late. Plan ahead, study that section.



Michael Levans,
editor

Remember the Boston Tea Party?

Once upon a time in these democratic United States, the call was simply: "Uncle Sam Wants You." Now our government is Father and Mother as well as Uncle, wanting to control absolutely everything its citizens do, and to finance this control it wants a good portion of what they own, or hope to own as well as themselves.

It's time to ask Father/Mother/Uncle Sam: Did you ever hear the story about the man with the goose that laid the golden egg? Kill the goose and there is no more golden egg, Unc.

But this is a hard pit to swallow for some in our federal, state and local governments. Take, for instance, Sarasota County in our beloved state of Florida. Golf is big in Florida. No, it's huge. It means billions (capital B) of dollars to the state every year. It is the state's goose that lays the golden eggs. Golf courses in Florida — Sarasota County included — pay their fair share of every tax known to man. Or they thought they did.

That was until county officials decided stormwater runoff was taxable (See story, page 1). "Assessment" is the word, but who's quibbling? Heaven forbid if it rains on your property. And if you own a lot of property it had better be a farm, nursery or pasture. If it's a golf course — Whack! Off with your hand.

While assessments were made to help pay for the county's new stormwater system, golf courses saw their turf areas added to their parking lots as assessable. The result: Bills increased by as much as 20 times over.

This is especially eye-raising since studies have shown that turf is an excellent filter for surface runoff water, whereas agricultural land is horrendous in that regard. Some communities are even seeding turfgrass areas around stormwater drains in order to screen out debris. It seems none of those enlightened communities are in Sarasota County, hm-m?

At many golf courses this kind of cash (\$30,000 to \$46,000) can mean choosing between paying the assessment or letting go an employee or two. I suppose for a few it could mean the thin difference between finishing the year in the red or black. And, Sarasota County, in case you were wondering: Red does not equal gold.

Dr. George Snyder of the University of Florida at Belle Glade made an interesting comment concerning the public's fright at the presence of even insignificant amounts of pesticides in drinking water:

"The bottom line is, people will take risks over things they have control over — like hang-gliding or auto racing — but not what they have no control over..." Like drinking water.

The topic of safety on golf course construction sites raised an insight from one of the industry's most quotable guys, Seed Research of Oregon's Skip Lynch, who once worked with Jack Nicklaus' construction division.

"By and large, it's a pretty safe industry," he said. "You're dealing with dirt, not 2-by-4s."

Corky Buell, operations manager for golf course builder Landscapes Unlimited, said employees can shut down any operation about which they feel unsafe. He observed: "Fear is nature's way of keeping you from doing something stupid. You have to listen to your gut once in awhile."



Mark Leslie,
managing editor

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GOLF PARTICIPATION STATISTICS

Oh, Canada: Study shows golf at new high among our northern neighbors

Edit Note — The following story ran in the Sept./Oct. issue of the National Golf Foundation's "Golf Market Today."

An estimated one million Canadians have taken up golf in the last seven years, according to the Royal Canadian Golf Association's (RCGA) latest survey, giving our northern neighbor one of the highest per capita golf participation rates in the world.

The survey report shows that 4.8 million Canadians age 12 and over were playing golf in 1996, an increase of 26% from the 3.9 million total that was recorded in 1990 when the NGF conducted Canada's first golf participation survey in conjunction with the Cana-

dian Golf Foundation.

Given a current population that totals 24.7 million [age 12 and above], this gives Canada today a national golf participation rate of 19.4%. It was 18.4% in 1990.

A measurement of golf's popularity among Canadians is reflected in NGF research which show that, over the last 10 years, golf participation in the U.S. has never been above 13.5% — with the latest reading showing 11.4%.

The marketing and research firm of Jarvis, Sherman and Jarvis was commissioned by the RCGA to manage and report on the survey which was conducted in October 1996 by Market Facts Canada Ltd. More than 7,000 households representing more than 14,000 individuals re-

sponded to the survey, making it one of the most comprehensive ever undertaken on golf participation in Canada.

"While the numbers show an overall increase," says Paul MacDonald, RCGA director of membership development, "the study highlights certain areas that need continuing attention, particularly women and juniors."

MacDonald noted that, while approximately 200,000 more Canadian women are playing golf today than in 1990, the percentage of all women who play golf has only increased less than one percentage point [0.3%] to 10.4%. This, he adds, contradicts the widely held belief among many of those involved in the country's golf industry that the game's

popularity has grown significantly among Canadian women.

"In total, there are many more [Canadian] women playing golf," says Tony Jarvis, the researcher who directed the study for the RCGA.

"But there's almost no significant difference in their participation rate. From the national perspective, there just isn't a surge in the popularity of golf among women, although this may vary greatly by region."

The study also indicates little growth in Canada among junior golfers. While there are currently 359,000 of them in Canada [up from 325,000 in

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