



Jack Brennan founded Paladin Golf Marketing, Plant City, Fla., to assist golf course owners and managers with successful marketing. A former associate publisher for *Golf Week*, he can be reached at Jackbrennan@lj.net.

Contests inspire results

Getting things done means taking action. We're a society that loves results. In business, it's often said there's little else that counts.

But think more carefully about the process behind getting results. It starts by identifying a problem or some opportunity. In business planning, this step often is called brainstorming—an open discussion about what could be done, should be done or what's possible.

Once an idea is generated, the second step is to decide how to solve the problem or make some advance. Basically, this is a planning process that involves deciding what is the best way to get something done, deciding what the priorities are and looking at any of the trade-offs involved when taking one course of action versus another.

Results come when your best idea(s) are put into practice.

This process isn't an issue for superintendents when it comes to their agronomic duties. Any superintendent who doesn't approach turfgrass management in this way is probably not going to have his or her job for long.

But few superintendents apply the three-step logic to the nonagronomic parts of their jobs. Few stop to take an open-minded view of everything they do, or everything they could do for the course, especially in the area of marketing to generate more profit.

One of the exercises I use to help a golf course make its marketing effort more creative is to hold daily contests for all department heads and their staffs. Each supervisor is responsible to generate at least one action every day that will generate future profitable revenue for the course. This contest can last from several days to more than a month.

It's somewhat of an awkward contest to gain immediate momentum, but once department heads get on board with it, most are surprised at the many opportunities that they and their staffs have never seen before. Many times superintendents and their staffs are the contest winners because there are many aspects of the course they touch. And once the team is trained to think about contributing to net revenue every day, their mindset changes.

One superintendent handled his contest assignment by directing three of his staff to spend one hour per day finding something that could be done—without taking away

from their primary jobs. One staff member saw the county shredding trees in the area and asked if the course could take the chips to put around trees on the course. The county agreed, and the result added an attractive clubhouse curb appeal for almost no cost.

Another superintendent began to take grass from out of the way areas to patch the cart path. Another superintendent strategically ceased mowing 70 of his 260 mowable acres and created a turf repair farm located in different areas throughout the course. These ideas made maintenance easier and saved money for little or no investment.

But just as important as the actions taken is the creation of the mindset this contest produces. Most of us are so busy day to day we never stop to think about what could be done, or about the impact our creative thinking and actions could have on the course and our jobs. Thinking creatively isn't just the superintendent's responsibility. It's also tapping your staff for their best ideas—they're the ones out on the course everyday that see problems and opportunities that usually don't get voiced.

Which brings us back to the first two of the three steps listed above—brainstorming ideas and developing action plans. The good news is you don't need a consultant to make

or she talks. Try to capture the essence of the idea in writing in a few words.

When the brainstorming session comes to an end, when there are no more ideas, you should have many sheets with ideas on them. At this point, take a break and tape the sheets on the walls. After the break, analyze each idea, group the ones that are similar and start to prioritize them by deciding which are most important or easiest to do. The process is simply a cost/benefit analysis—if something is beneficial and easy to do for a low cost, then there's no reason not to do it. If another idea is beneficial but involves cost and more effort, then you have to decide whether to make the investment.

Some ideas will sound dumb during the analysis period. That's OK. They were created during the brainstorming session, so don't make the person who came up with the idea defend or explain it. That will kill their participation the next time. It's better to ask someone else if they think the idea has merit or could be modified to become workable. Some ideas will be unworkable. That's OK, too. But a few are going to be excellent ideas. Focus on them and start generating an action plan—the who, how and when of getting it done.

Many staff people will take ownership of ideas and give them extra effort to make

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this happen. You can do it in your next staff meeting. Just get a flip chart and a magic marker and start asking your staff how you can improve the course, make their work faster or easier, or improve communication. Then start writing the answers down without allowing any editorial comment from you or anyone else. Brainstorming gets killed when people start making fun of someone else's idea. No one wants to be made fun of, so unless you eliminate that fear right away, you won't get the ideas you want.

If certain people dominate, ask them to give others a chance to talk. If some don't offer ideas on their own, call on them.

It's fair to ask for clarification of an idea during the brainstorming process or to let the person who suggested it develop it as he

them happen. That's another benefit of this exercise.

Here are two suggestions to make your brainstorming and action plan session more successful. First, make sure you set the right tone right away by telling everyone that their jobs involve more than just doing their assigned work. Ultimately, everyone's job is to improve the course, cut costs, work safer and help the course be as profitable as possible. Second, make the meeting fun. Give prizes to the best ideas, and have some food and drinks as a way to thank everyone for their time and best ideas.

Actions generate profitable revenue. But actions begin by seeing the opportunities and planning the best way to make them happen. GCN