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## MASTERING THE TASK AT HAND

**“M**y golfers expect the course to be perfect every day.”  
 “My employees just can’t learn to do task the way they should.”

We all hear statements like these, but they’re not limited to golf course superintendents. Customers’ expectations of products and services without defects and the difficulty meeting those expectations dramatically impacts every industry. For example, the introduction of Japanese cars produced with a “no defects” mentality has had profound impact on the quality of cars we drive.

So how do we instill this “no defects” mentality in golf course maintenance staffs? Well, it begins with mastering the tasks the staff must complete every day to produce course conditions golfers demand. Here are two examples of mastering tasks:

1. A couple years ago, new road construction provided me a better route to work. I learned the new route in a day or two. It took several months before I never reverted to the old route. That time was used to master the new route (no defects).

2. A friend of mine is a good recreational golfer. A couple years ago, he working with a pro and dramatically changed his swing. In a couple months, he learned the new swing, and many of his drives were his best ever. With other swings, however, he would revert back to his old swing with ugly results. At this point, he had to really focus to consistently execute the new swing perfectly (no defects). He had not yet mastered the new swing. It took about two years before he was able to do so.

Just like these examples, everyone has two phases of mastering a task or a new routine in place of an old one: (1) The shorter and easier part – learning the new task or new routine and (2) the longer, more challenging part

– mastering the new task or new routine. The key to the first step is to teach the new task or new routine effectively. The key to the second step is to maintain focus on the new way of performing the task until the new routine becomes a habit.

A manager recently said, “I learned teaching is more than just showing employees what to do and expecting them to do it.” For this manager, the first step, teaching, isn’t easy. It’s more than just showing. The simple but effective prepare-tell-show-do-review job instruction training procedure works best.

**Prepare.** Describe to the employee what you’re about to do. Create a relaxed environment in which you won’t be interrupt-

ed. Acquire and arrange needed materials.

**Tell.** Clearly, slowly and carefully tell the learner how to do the task. Explain why each step is important and why it’s done the way it’s done.

**Show.** Show the employee how the task is to be performed. Encourage questions and reinforce why the task is completed this way.

**Do.** Let the learner complete the task. Have the employee repeat the steps just demonstrated. Provide a few handwritten notes or a checklist to help the employee remember each step. Coach the employee, making suggestions and answering questions as needed.

**Review.** After leaving the employee to perform the task independently, check back to see that the employee is completing the task correctly. Provide quality feedback that reinforces correct steps and redirects those not completed correctly.

You’ve now completed step one, but the goal of the employee mastering the task has just begun. It takes 21 to 30 days to establish a habit, according to research. When completing a task correctly becomes a habit, one is well on the way to mastering it.

The key to mastering a task is maintaining focus on the correct procedure until it’s a habit. Focus is maintained by encouragement, compliments for success and corrections of any defects that happen. Superintendents must not overlook little errors because they’ll preclude mastering a task. Superintendents are great coaches when they encourage, support, correct and teach their employees to excel.

Whether you’re playing a pickup basketball game, a round of golf or a friendly card game, you’re more focused when you’re keeping score. The same holds true for employees. They will be more focused when you establish clear performance expectations and then track actual performance compared to the expectations.

Mastering a task equals teaching plus a continued focus. **GCI**



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