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HIRING RIGHT REQUIRES PLANNING

“I can’t find good help!” I hear this all too often from golf course superintendents and managers. Hiring is often difficult and frustrating. (Actually not unlike looking for a job.)

During the 20 years I’ve worked with superintendents, I’ve never heard one exclaim: “I can’t grow excellent turf!” It’s not because growing excellent turf is easy. Superintendents grow well-conditioned turf because it’s their job and they work year round planning it.

Similarly, hiring is an integral part of a superintendent’s position. Those who successfully hire great employees have a hiring plan and work year round at it. Successful hiring also makes growing healthy turf easier. A hiring plan includes preparation, recruitment and selection. Here are some suggestions for creating a hiring plan:

Be a preferred employer. Think about how you attract new golfers or members. You probably advertise, but the image or reputation of your facility is central to successful advertising. A good product or service is easier to market than a crummy one.

So, what’s the image of your facility and maintenance staff as a place to work? Just like advertising a product or service, hiring is easier with a great image or reputation as a place to work. We call such a facility a preferred employer.

How do you become a preferred employer? Just as successful advertising of the course starts with a great course, the key to being a preferred employer is being a great place to work. This means creating a work environment and team spirit that results in employees with superior productivity and extraordinary job satisfaction. This, like growing well-conditioned turf, is a year-round job.

Build your hiring plan around competencies. The reason for hiring is to have employees who are productive, who succeed. Those successful characteristics are

called competencies – the combination of experience, skills, knowledge, performance behaviors, and personal attributes and attitudes that contribute to employee success. Based on my experience working with superintendents and a recent visit with a local superintendent, an example set of competencies for a maintenance staff position are reliability, identifiable successes and a willingness to learn.

Because most maintenance employees begin with little or no directly relevant experience, the identifiable success competency is a record of success in whatever the candidate has done – school, other positions, volunteer work, etc.

Recruitment. The goal of recruiting is to reach and persuade a large number of qualified candidates to apply for the position that’s open. When a company advertises – let’s use Subway as an example – it promotes the positive attributes of its sandwiches, convenience and quality ingredients with the objective that potential customers will purchase its sandwiches.

Similarly, with recruiting, employers promote the positive attributes of their facilities and open positions. With recruiting, employers provide more detailed information about what will enable a potential candidate to succeed in the position – the competencies.

Sadly, positive attributes are lacking in most recruitment materials I read. Recently, I was teaching a seminar for superintendents, and they had difficulty moving past a concern that they couldn’t offer a competitive wage. Compensation is important but not nearly as important as most think. Do superintendents enter the profession for

the money? Take the time to brainstorm the positives about working on a golf course maintenance crew. Some include:

- Working outdoors;
- Operating modern equipment;
- Completing a work day by mid-afternoon;
- Having a regular schedule;
- Being part of a small, close-knit team;
- Learning new skills;
- Taking advantage of opportunities for advancement;
- Working with an experienced supervisor;
- Gaining work experience; and
- Playing golf.

Include the aforementioned positives in a job announcement, want ad or Internet job service for recruitment. An example is:

“Scenic, local golf course – Successful Valley Golf Course – seeks reliable individuals for seasonal, full-time golf course maintenance positions. Experience isn’t necessary. Applicants must have a record of success in school, previous jobs or volunteer activities and be eager to learn. Our valued employees work as a team with state-of-the-art machinery. They’re supervised by knowledgeable, skilled managers. Spend a summer with us. Work hard, play some golf and leave much better prepared for your next position. Call or apply at ...”

Note the inclusion of the competencies and positives of the Successful Valley Golf Course.

Selection. A planned, professional selection procedure highlighted by an excellent interview is necessary to complete a year-round plan to hire excellent employees successfully. **GCI**

