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A CALL FOR PROTOCOL

During a recent interview, I was asked how I would maintain a tight budget while still creating idyllic course conditions. I've been fortunate to learn what it takes to make these decisions from one of the best. My superintendent, Robert Maibusch, CGCS, has taught me about the higher expectations placed on superintendents these days. Gone are the days of worrying about maintaining only the golf course. Along with this responsibility comes the task of building and maintaining relationships with golfers, members and staff. To many clubs, polished business competence is just as important as maintaining an exceptional golf course.

One aspect of good business policy is to have a protocol for staff professional development. Almost every business has some form of this. For example, my wife is a teacher, and every five years she's expected to acquire more than 60 hours of professional development. This is in addition to the rigorous staff development her principal provides each teacher's institute.

Much like a school principal, superintendents and assistants are charged with developing their crews professionally. Without a well-managed and trained staff, courses might be preventing themselves from reaching their full potential. A manager who appreciates proper training and communication will help staff members understand the vision and purpose of their workplace.

In my last column (January, page 10), I wrote about the visual improvement program created by the facility at which I work, the Hinsdale Golf Club. As that column indicated, the VIP program is designed to enhance quality control by providing base standards and criteria for

various routine golf course tasks. Every week, we rate our standards to measure our progress. The final outcome – we hope, at least – is to have a staff that takes ownership and shows pride in their golf course just as much as the members do.

With our VIP standards outlined in detail, the Hinsdale grounds department thought of ideas to help train our staff more. We did a good job of posting our expectations and measurements but didn't take time to sit down with each staff member individually to share club needs

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and ideas. So, using our written standards from the VIP, we changed the format and created a booklet, hoping to improve employee relations at Hinsdale in several ways. The publication shows our employees we care and want to know more about them. It also provides a means to convey the department's requirements about safety and job expectations: when it comes to ensuring employees' health and safety, no dollar amount is too high.

The training booklet contains job-specific expectations for:

- Fairway care.
- Greens care.
- Cup and tee set up.
- Bunker care.
- Tee and collar care.
- Practice range care.
- Banks and surrounds care.
- Tree care and chainsaw operation.

Specifically, each job section lists:

- Who the trainer is.

- The tools and protective equipment necessary for each job.
- What to check before the task.
- How to perform the job at the site.
- What to do after the task.

As a result of the program, Hinsdale has benefited in a number of ways. We've reduced our turnover. This year, we anticipate retaining all crew members. Staff retraining has been kept to a minimum, which allows for more time spent on maintaining course conditions. Our budget for staff salaries has been allocated more toward golf maintenance than staff training. We're able to remind staff

about proper safety precautions regularly, which has kept our workplace injuries to a minimum and keeps us compliant with Occupational Safety and Health Administration standards.

Higher expectations require superintendents and assistants to wear many hats. Maintaining idyllic course conditions is no longer our sole duty. We're now expected to be business leaders, as well. Staff development and training is one aspect of being an exceptional business leader.

So, it's important to have a training protocol in place. By doing so, you'll be able to decrease staff turnover, and allocate more resources to course maintenance instead of staff training and ensuring proper safety conditions. Surprisingly, this all relates to the original job description of superintendents and assistants: produce and maintain exceptional course conditions. **GCI**