



Robert A. Milligan, Ph.D., is professor emeritus at Cornell University and senior consultant with Madison, Wis.-based Dairy Strategies. He can be reached at 651-647-0495 or rmilligan@trsmith.com.

INCREASE INFORMAL FEEDBACK

No matter your golf facility's location, now's the time for you to increase the quantity and quality of informal feedback and coaching you give your crew members.

One terrific benefit of the multisession Webinars I'm teaching is I hear managers discuss their successes and challenges as they implement supervision and coaching principles and ideas. I've built on insights from these discussions to provide six suggestions for you to use to increase the productivity and job satisfaction of your maintenance staff.

1 People want to succeed
Managing people, especially when your real love is turf, can be challenging and frustrating. In the midst of management, it's easy to forget the fundamental reality that your crew members want to succeed. We all want to be part of a winning team, whether through sports, family, work or a social network. Few employees head to work at 4:30 or 5:30 or 7:30 thinking, "How can I screw up at work today?"

As I listened to the discussion of successes and challenges faced when implementing the activities in the Webinar sessions, I was reminded of this reality. The stories of crew members responding to feedback and training and coaching are examples of the idea that everyone wants to succeed. I shared this observation in one of the Webinar sessions, and every manager agreed.

2 Positive feedback
One of my assignments after a session is to increase the quality of positive feedback (specific actions participants want repeated) for the 21 days following. I've been amazed by the impact the implementation of this assignment has had. Here's what some have said:

- Numerous managers said the atmosphere, the culture of their business, changed. It's a more positive, pleasant

place for everyone to work.

- One manager said he was satisfied most when hearing from the spouses of his employees. They told him how much the employees appreciated the positive feedback. This example underscores the reality that most employees appreciate positive feedback even more than their immediate outward reaction indicates. Most of us aren't good at receiving positive feedback, but that doesn't mean we don't want it or appreciate it.

- Several managers said employees become more focused on doing a good job and even ask for additional tasks or responsibilities as a consequence of more and better positive feedback.

3 Explain why
In the past, I've discussed providing greater clarity about acceptable behaviors and expected performance. During those discussions, I've emphasized the importance of explaining "what" and "why" when it comes to policies, tasks and performance expectations.

The Webinar discussions contained numerous instances of employees completing their tasks better and more enthusiastically when the training and coaching included explaining why. One business reported a considerable increase of product quality as a result of explaining why each step in a critical protocol is important.

4 Redirection feedback
You're probably thinking this sounds great, but what about when behaviors or performances are below expectations? Our tendency as human beings is to blame others when they fail to meet expectations. Research confirms this. In reality, the failure might be caused by a) their effort, motivation or concentration, or b) the situation, as a result of circumstances beyond their control. Knowing our tendency (bias) is to blame the employee's effort, always

think about what you can do first – encouragement, training, assistance – to enable the employee to meet the expectation. This is referred to as redirection feedback.

5 Work environment
I've often written about the changing role of the supervisor. Just as golf course superintendents better turf performance by using continually improving technologies, managers provide the supervision employees require to excel by continually improving their understanding. Great supervisors provide a work environment where their employees can succeed. They provide direction, encouragement, coaching and support to enable success, and don't simply expect compliance.

The power of creating a success-oriented work environment was evident in these Webinar discussions. Increased training and coaching (including explaining why) and greater positive feedback and trust created opportunities for managers and employees to increase performance and gain greater satisfaction from the job.

6 Informal coaching
My final suggestion is a bit more proactive but informal. I've had great success learning what employees are thinking and feeling asking the following two questions:

1. What's going great?
2. What could be better?

In combination, and when asked informally and genuinely, these two questions can elicit successes, ideas, concerns and insights you can use to develop an improved supervisory relationship and improved course performance.

The two-question coaching sessions can be individual or with your staff. They also serve as a great component of performance management (see my March column, page 16), performance appraisals and staff meetings.

Just as your greens and fairways require fertilization and protection from pests, your maintenance staff requires your coaching and support. **GC1**