



**Stephen Tucker** is the equipment manager at the Ritz-Carlton Members Golf Club in Bradenton, Fla., and past president of the International Golf Course Equipment Managers Association. He can be reached at 941-309-2913 or [stephen.tucker@ritzcarlton.com](mailto:stephen.tucker@ritzcarlton.com).

## HIRING A GOOD TECHNICIAN

In our industry, it's common hear that it's difficult to find a good technician.

Well, what makes a good technician? How do you know if you're interviewing one? How do you keep them? Answers to these questions might help you find the technician you've been looking for.

**So what makes a good technician?** The answer to the question depends on your operation. You want to look for someone who's well rounded and has skills in many areas, from fabrication and electrical to reel set-up and hydraulics. While many technicians are better in some areas than others, one common trait among good technicians is their desire to learn. A good technician isn't one who thinks he knows it all. Rather, he's the one attending seminars or classes to refine what he already might know. He's also the guy who doesn't have to prove how good he is because everyone knows it.

Good technicians won't always come from colleges or trade schools and won't always be the guy from one of the top 100 clubs. Top technicians come from everywhere, but they all have one thing in common: a passion for what they do. They love the job, and you can tell.

**How do you know if you're interviewing a good technician?** You can tell by his appearance and attitude during the interview. Many want to know about the budget, equipment, hours of operation, expectations, salary and benefits. Technicians want to know about these things because when they come in for the interview, they look at the facility, figure out what changes need to be made, how much time it would take, what equipment is there and how old it is, if the tools to do the job are there and how the golf course looks.

The rest of their questions will determine whether they're interested. These individuals know what it takes to manage a facility and need to make sure the operation has what it needs to make the changes and implement the systems they use to

manage the operation effectively and be successful. Every technician manages a different way so thinking you need a huge budget, while it helps, doesn't push technicians away. More times than not, personality is the deciding factor for a technician. If someone doesn't feel he could get along with you in an interview, he'll rarely make the decision to join you.

Technicians, like everyone else, spend at least 45 hours a week at work. When you figure the time individuals sleep and spend driving to work, you realize they spend about 16 hours a week at home with their family. So getting a job where you're going to be happy is crucial and needs to be a well-thought-out decision no matter what your profession.



**How do you keep them?** Technicians have a difficult time leaving a place where they feel valued. When you feel valued and a position opens, you eventually question yourself and ask, "Will I work more hours," "Will they be flexible with my time off," "Will I get the same perks," and "Will it really benefit me to go." Normally, the answer is it's better to stay. There are some cases in which it won't matter how good of a boss you are and what perks someone has. There always will be places that pay more

money and offer more things. There always will be those technicians who want to move up in the industry and move on to a bigger course.

When it comes to your relationship with your technician, the biggest thing is communication. Encourage technicians to attend seminars and more training. Ask their opinion about subjects instead of telling them. Call them occasionally, and tell them how good the greens and fairways look. Discuss topics that don't involve equipment, such as turf, diseases, fishing, etc. Try to plan cultural practices the week before to give them time to prepare. Finally, go out in the facility and learn something. Let them teach you about what they're doing and how they do it. Not only does this help you understand how good the technician is, but it helps them learn how to teach others to do what they're doing.

One of the biggest factors in finding a qualified technician for Nick von Hofen, golf course superintendent at The Ritz-Carlton Members Golf Club in Bradenton, Fla., is word of mouth.

"Our industry has been using this for years, and if there's one thing you can normally count on, it's a good recommendation," von Hofen says. "When interviewing people, I try to get a sense of how they present themselves from personal appearance to professional attitude. After all, they'll be communicating with members and guests. An environment in which individuals can do what they do best every day is a recipe for success. Hiring a technician is by no means an easy task. At different levels of my career, I've seen the frustration a technician goes through when there's a breakdown in communication. Asking for feedback and suggestions from my technician has proven to be successful."

While finding and retaining an equipment technician is no easy task, the biggest factor in all of this is communication with them, from the time they interview until they leave. If you can do that, you might be surprised how long a technician stays with you and the line at the door the next time you're looking to fill the position. **GCI**