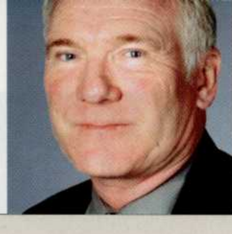

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EMPLOYEES: ASSETS NOT COSTS

For at least two decades, we've heard the phrase "employees are assets not costs." The phrase represents a significant shift in how employees are led, supervised and managed by world-class businesses, including golf courses.

For costs (fertilizer, pesticides, etc.), superintendents seek to determine the optimal quantity, always keeping in mind cost control. For assets (land, greens, machinery), which are investments, superintendents determine how to use them to get the greatest return. A mower, for example, does no good until it's used. It must be maintained and repaired to maximize the return on the investment.

Employees are quite different from other assets because they can think and feel, possess multiple talents and have other employment options. Superintendents must consider what it takes to get the greatest return from this asset.

How superintendents maintain a fleet of mowers has a considerable impact on the return on the club's investment. Similarly, how superintendents lead, supervise and manage employees has a significant impact on employee productivity and job satisfaction. Gaining significant return on employee productivity and satisfaction starts with superintendents' attitudes toward employees and permeates how they manage employees.

Here's a story relating to the idea of employees as assets. Several years ago, after a presentation at a nursery and greenhouse conference, a gentleman named George approached me and asked to tell his story. He had worked for a small landscape business for 23 years. That day, looking back at the 23 years, he determined he was a terrible employee. He took all of his vacation and sick leave whether he was sick or not. He did the minimum. His justification at the time was that everyone did the same because the owner/supervisor provided no clarity or feedback. Then he found a job with another small landscape business. This owner/supervisor provided clear expectations, feedback, encouragement and support. This was the second time George had been encouraged to attend the conference. At the time, George said he worked hard, enjoyed what he was doing and believed he was an excellent employee.

George's productivity and job satisfaction were dramatically different when working for the two similar businesses. What's the difference? Obviously, George was older; however, few workers change their values, personality, motivation, etc., sufficiently to explain the difference, which, in this case, was the owner/supervisor. The first owner/supervisor did little to manage his asset, George, and received little in return. The second owner/supervisor worked to manage, supervise and coach George, and his efforts were rewarded with an excellent employee.

This story and the phrase "employees are assets not costs" reflect a significant change in recommended practices for supervising and coaching employees. I call the old approach that viewed employees as costs the control-focused school of supervision. I call the newer approach that has emanated from the quality movement and excellent research about supervision, the quality-focused school of supervision. The table on this page compares the two approaches.

	CONTROL FOCUSED	QUALITY FOCUSED
Employees are	A cost	An asset
Supervisor's role	To tell the employee what to do	To ensure the employee succeeds
Core value	Based on compliance	Based on fairness
Supervisor activities	Training, directing, reprimanding, discharging	The control-focused four plus coaching, mentoring, encouraging, rewarding, empowering, redirecting and holding accountable
Supervisor's informal name	Boss	Coach

Every business, including the golf facility at which superintendents work, is in the process of moving from control focused to quality focused. It's a difficult but rewarding journey. The rewards are personal and financial for the owners/supervisors and the employees.

The following are the three pillars of a world-class, quality-focused human resource program:

- An organizational culture and a clearly articulated and continuously communicated business direction (vision, mission, core values) that's completely consistent with a quality-focused approach to employee management.
- A recruitment, selection and hiring program that attracts employees who have the competencies – knowledge, skills, abilities, experience, attitudes, behaviors – to succeed.
- A work environment in which the attitudes and actions of each supervisor are consistent with, and built on, the business direction, organizational culture and quality-focused supervision. Each employee is viewed as a valuable asset with unique and beneficial talents and strengths. Each employee is provided the tools – training, quality assurance, coaching and feedback – that enable him to succeed.

The three pillars aren't independent. Golf course owners, superintendents and managers are responsible for developing an environment that inspires and motivates every member of the work force. This leads to superior productivity and extraordinary job satisfaction.

Establishing the aforementioned three pillars in a golf course environment isn't easy. Superintendents might need help like they do with other aspects of their job, such as turf management and equipment repair. GCI