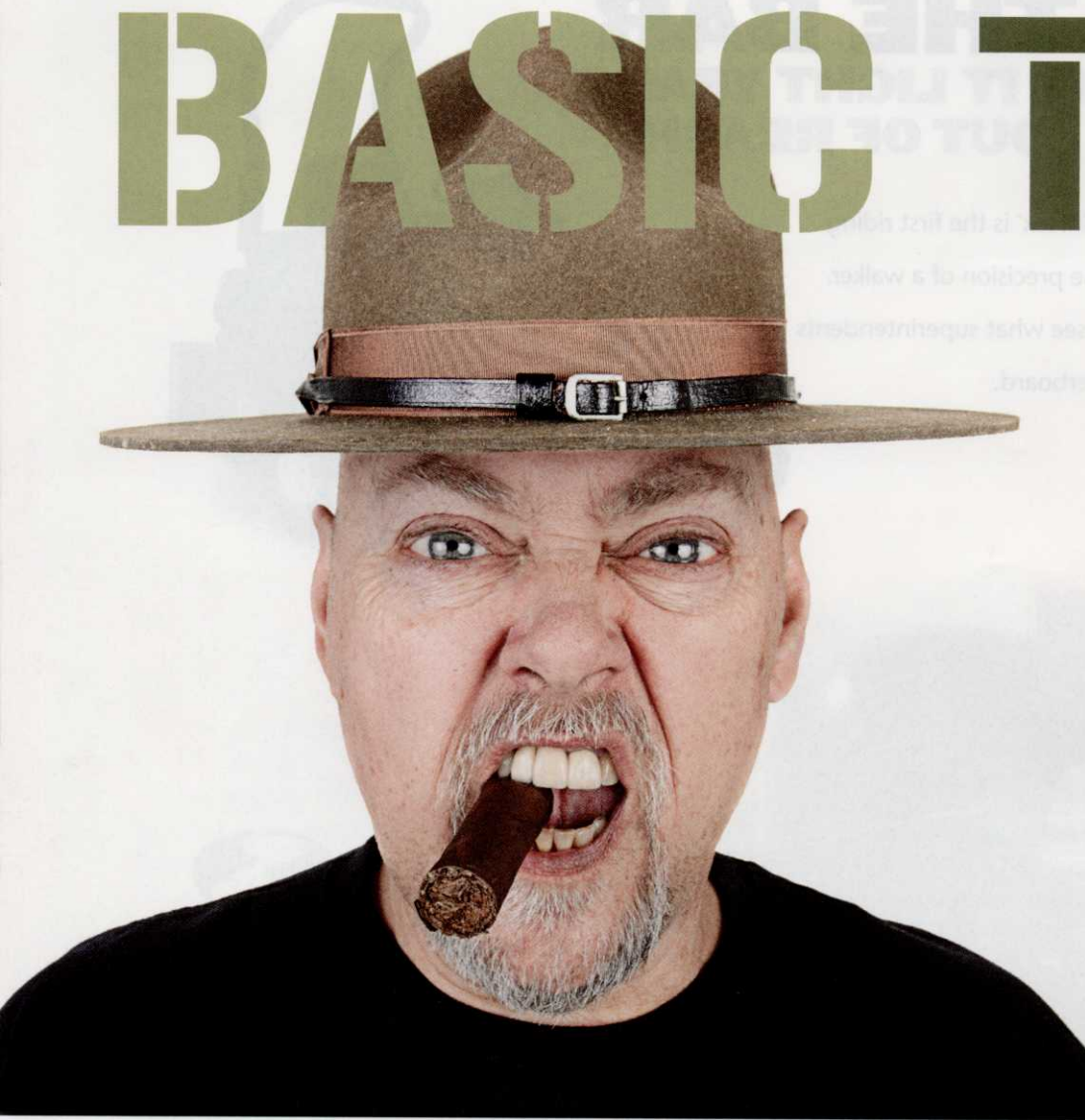


# BASIC TRAINING



It is hard to imagine what iconic businesses like McDonald's, or highly effective groups like the U.S. military, would have become without the development and investment in proper training programs. In golf I am aware of a number of company-wide training programs, however these tend to be with management companies, high-end country clubs and government-run facilities.

The development of an effective and successful formal training program will take time and money. However, it's an investment that will have an immediate return on investment and will actually make your job easier as a manager of a well-trained staff.

**BASICS.** Golf courses have a variety of repetitive tasks that need to be accomplished daily to provide desired levels of conditioning and playability. Most of these tasks are done by workers who may not understand what the finished product should look like and whether the job was completed successfully.

Golf courses are living entities and they grow and change daily. However, many of the maintenance practices don't evolve at the same rate and often do not require substantial judgment decisions for the average worker.

For example, mowing greens, nearly 100 percent of the time, is a routine performed the same way over and over and over again. Yes, there are instances when we may have to use different approaches, such as with new seedlings, first mowing of the year, or after aeration. The

## Is your training regimen killing your maintenance department? Bruce Williams outlines an effective strategy to pass on best practices and eliminate bad habits and shortcuts.

I often tell the story about training that is fitting for golf courses. The story is based on my observations over the years and defines the challenges that all facilities face with being run and managed like a business.

The primary question is how many people would send their children to a school that had no teachers and where the students are only taught or trained by their fellow students? The answer is simple, that nobody in their

right mind would do this. Yet, it is commonplace in golf course management for superintendents to follow this practice.

The typical scenario is to hire new employees and then have them show up the next day for work. After a brief welcome with their fellow staff members, the employee is sent to work alongside a co-worker who shows them the ropes on tasks such as bunker raking, weed eating or another job. Therein lies the problem.

Under this scenario, the new employee begins to develop their own idea of what management wants and what defines the facility's maintenance standards. While the new employee may learn some good techniques and the proper way to do things, they may also pick up some bad habits and shortcuts that management would not find acceptable.

There is only one way to prevent this and that is to have a formal training program.



# TRAINING



first approach would be to train people to handle the task and then deal with the isolated incidents later in the training cycle and reinforce those practices that are used on a seldom basis.

When staff goes out to mow the greens you want to be sure they understand what scalping is, what straight lines are about, which direction you should be mowing that day. They need to look for isolated dry spots, fix ball marks and be cognoscente of dew removal, overlapping, proper turning and clipping disposal. If all of your operators are doing this daily, then you will have uniformity on your greens and similar putting quality including speed, trueness and look.

**TRAINING TRAINERS.** Training should be conducted by management and not fellow workers with longevity. To assure standardization of procedures, it is best that training comes from one person on the staff – the superintendent, an assistant superintendent or a foreman. There are a variety of methods that can be utilized. For a training program to be formal in nature, the program should be in writing and reviewed on an annual basis and adjusted when necessary.

It could take a few months to develop an outline and training program, but it is time and money well spent. Other components include video training. I particularly like the Superintendent Video Workshop from EPIC Creative. These videos teach a generic version of various tasks on the golf course and pictures are worth a thousand words. Each individual golf course then must customize

their own training program to fit their specific needs.

Training should begin at the point of hire and then be continuous throughout the period of employment. New technologies, new practices and occasional tweaks in programs should be addressed with refresher courses for long-term employees.

Without a formal training program the staff tends to do things in the manner that is quickest, easiest and not in sync with the rest of the team. Without proper training it is very difficult to manage a team that makes up its own rules and where the members call their own plays. So the time invested in the training will result in less time spent managing and teaching on the fly after the mistakes are made.

**TRAINING MODULES.** Training modules are an efficient and effective way to conduct not only training, but continuing education, as well. Here's a cross section of training modules and what they should include:

- Orientation
- Hazard communication
- Safety
- Standard Operating Procedures (SOP)
- Equipment operation
- Equipment maintenance
- Cultural practices
- Standard tasks

The law requires several of these training modules. While others are not required for employment, they will increase quality and efficiency and also possibly keep your club and department out of some potential law suits.

(TRAINING continues on page 50)

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435/ 797-6650

*Research Interest:* Water conservation, Ornamental Horticulture and Extension. Work focuses on turf grass water use efficiency, water-wise landscaping principles, water and nutrient management in turf grass. Working closely with Utah state agencies for best water management practices.

*Comment:* No matter where we live and work, we need to develop best-management practices for water use as well as pesticide and nutrient run-off and management. Water is a valuable resource everywhere.

**Dr. Scott McElroy** – Auburn University, College of Agriculture, Agronomy and Soils

Jsm0010@auburn.edu  
334/ 844-3992

*Research Interest:* Evaluation of herbicides for use in turf grass management and development of new sustainable organic and non-synthetic pesticide weed management practice for use in turf management.

*Comment:* Reduced pesticide use, alternative practices, and pesticide development will lead to cleaner, safer and weed-free golf courses.

**Dr. Brian Horgan** – University of Minnesota, Department of Horticulture Science

bphorgan@umn.edu  
612/ 624-0782

*Research Interest:* Work revolves around nutrient fate and general turf grass management. In addition, research focuses on salt tolerance in cool season grass, water use and distribution practices.

*Comment:* You would think the “Land of Ten Thousand Lakes” wouldn’t have water concerns. But it does and water is very valuable to Minnesota’s economic development.

**Dr. Alec Kowalewski** – Oregon

State University, Department of Turf Grass Science

Email not available  
541/ 737-3695

*Research Interest:* On getting settled at Oregon State, his research will focus on maintaining quality turf grass conditions within operating budget restrictions, reducing the impact to the environment through proper turf grass practices, researching various turf grass varieties for those species which use less fertility and water.

*Comment:* Effective management of turf grass resources is essential if we are going to continue to produce quality playing conditions.

**Dr. Doug Karcher** – University of Arkansas, Department of Horticulture

karcher@uark.edu  
479/ 575-5723

*Research Interest:* Research program to improve the functional and aesthetic quality of turf grass through the refinement of cultural practices, especially those pertaining to soil management. Developed digital image analysis techniques to quantify turf grass cover and turf grass color.

*Comment:* If we can improve what turf looks like, the consumer will be more open to the various practices we employ.

As this “Not So Dirty Dozen” proves, there is no shortage of important agronomic ideas to study in this industry. But their success relies on our support. We can’t let funding be allocated to the same participants year after year after year. Be a voice for progress and get involved with local, regional and national groups encouraging research that will help make our lives better and safer.

Be on the lookout for new and better ideas and when you see them, let everyone else know. **GCI**



Training should be conducted by management and not fellow workers with longevity.

At the point of orientation, I suggest explaining some of the following items:

- What is a golf course?
- What are our objectives?
- What are the standard work rules including items like tardiness, absenteeism and anything else that would be included in an employee manual?
  - Pesticides, their storage and usage, location of MSDS sheets
  - Hazards in the workplace
  - Emergency evacuation information including fire exits and also location of extinguishers, etc.
  - Disaster Plan if applicable that might be for tornados, hurricanes, earthquakes, tsunamis, etc.

It could easily take a few days to cover these items for new hires. For those superintendents that choose to delay this, you are really putting yourself and your club at great risk. If something happens to an employee in those first days of employment without this type of training, then the facility will likely be liable.

In recent years, it is fairly standard to receive either a training video or an operator manual for most of the equipment used on a golf course. Each employee must read or view these training and safety manuals so that they understand how the equipment works and how to use it in a safe manner. Should an accident ever occur this will be one of the first things an investigator or the injured parties will look into. “Was the employee properly trained?” If not, it is hard to defend safe usage of any piece of equipment. Be sure that employees view or read this material and then sign off on their understanding of the information and keep that on file.

**OUTCOMES.** Imagine a well-trained team of employees that operates in a precision manner to accomplish the goals and objectives of your facility. Imagine a team that understands what spells success for the golf course facility. Imagine a team that all knows how to execute daily the plan that you have for them. If this sounds like a fantasy it may be because you have never worked in an operation that holds training as one of the fundamentals for success. I suggest you visit a facility that utilizes formal training and see what their efficiencies are and their ease of management.

Cross training of employees will lead to several things. Not only are people checked off to do a variety of tasks, but they also are inspired to take on more training that could lead to more responsibility and potential pay increases. The more an employee knows and can do for the facility then the more value he has to the employer. Employees that are learning and growing are happy employees and this will lead to longer tenure with up to date skills. **GCI**