

Greenkeeper's Labor Investment Has Biggest Problem of Waste

By PROF. L. S. DICKINSON

GREENKEEPERS give much thought to the purchase of equipment, especially large equipment. A considerable portion of two or three days, together with travel expenses are frequently spent in studying the various competitive machines before the purchase is made. Time thus spent is justified by the fact that the piece of equipment purchased is the best possible choice for the given condition.

If the total cost of the study reached \$50 or even \$75, it would be cheap insurance or perhaps assurance for a \$500 machine. A considerable saving in cost is the result.

A laborer is hired for the playing season of approximately 25 weeks or 150 working days at a wage of \$4.50 per day. This laborer represents an investment of \$625.00 in labor, or if it is taken on the installment plan an investment of \$4.50 per day. Is much consideration given to the investment? Usually very little, and too frequently none at all.

Why is more consideration given to the machinery investment than to the labor? Isn't it because machinery is better understood and there are certain specifications that must be met before the machine is accepted? Also machinery is impersonal in its reaction, balking for one boss as quickly as for another if the adjustments are not correct. Laborers balk for one boss and not for another because the adjustments are not right.

GOLFDOM, in its recent survey, found that between 60 and 70% of the total expenditures for course maintenance was for labor. That fact is undesirable. Isn't labor worthy of thoughtful consideration?

Chief Responsible for Waste

After 19 years of *practical* experience in hiring, directing and discharging workmen the writer is convinced, that in maintenance work, at least 75 per cent of labor inefficiency is directly chargeable to the superintendent or foreman in charge. Also, fully 50% of the 75% or 37½% is chargeable to poor selection of laborers.

Who selects the laborer? Usually the greenkeeper or superintendent.

Usually the first step in effecting or suggesting a remedy for any trouble is to obtain the clear understanding of the existing conditions and what has been done in the past.

From the above paragraphs it should be clear that the first and most important factor effecting labor management on a golf course is *correct selection* and the present methods of selection must be understood.

How are laborers found? They are either gone after, brought in by another person, or appear by their own efforts. How are laborers appraised? In a very great majority of cases by (I've been guilty myself) "I saw him working on another job and he's highly recommended. I'll get him," or one of the influential members brought him around, or he's "my sister's husband's brother, and she insists that I hire him" or "he's a likely looking man." Really, very little systematic consideration is given to the hiring of a laborer.

As a machine has specifications, so should the job. That is not theory or bunk, it is a practical fact. Not only should the job have specifications but so should the laborer be subject to a measure of specifications.

Hiring Specifications

Job specifications are frequently considered, for example, trimming bunkers and traps. One very necessary specification for such a job is the ability to swing a scythe. Other examples are numerous and because these specifications are generally realized, inefficiency because of lack of job specifications is low.

Inefficiency because of the lack of man specifications is very high. A very common error is to overrate a laborer's ability, especially when about to hire him. Who is responsible for the inefficiency if the laborer is given work to do that is beyond his physical, mental or moral capacity? Certainly not the laborer, especially if he does not shirk on the job.

A laborer that is physically, mentally or morally unsound for the particular job he is to do is bound to be inefficient and very likely will become a liability. Man specifications decrease the number of misfits.

When a prospective laborer appears, find his specifications, the same as you would for any piece of equipment. "What are his specifications" should be the first thought of a greenkeeper when considering the hiring of a laborer.

Should the laborer know that he is being rated according to his specifications? Certainly. If questioned "can you do this or that" will he invariably answer "yes" to mislead? No, surely not without being detected.

No set rule can be made for specifications; they should be very theoretical, but tempered back to a point of practical application. They should form a basis whereby the employer can place a just value on the applicant's abilities. They should be the same for all applicants and obtained without reference to any particular job.

Having obtained a prospective employee's man-specifications, see if you have any job-specifications that correspond. If so, hire him and then if inefficiency occurs the laborer alone is at fault. If not, help him to find a job having his specifications, but do not hire him, and do an injustice to him, your club, and yourself.

The hiring of relatives and legacies from "the boss" are very numerous among golf course laborers. They are more inefficient and cause more unrest among gangs of men than is usually realized. How efficient do you think a relative or legacy can be if he is low in man-specifications? Not only is he inefficient himself but he has a very appreciable effect upon the efficiency of the entire gang.

Specifications help the employe, for if he is morally satisfactory and industrious his discharge will be only because the job is completed or he failed to meet the job specifications. Neither reason will hurt his chances for employment at other work having a less exacting job specification.

How Time is Wasted

On nearly every golf course there is a recognized foreman or an accepted right hand man that assumes charge when the greenkeeper is away. The selection of the foreman is very vital to the labor efficiency. Here is an actual experience showing what gross inefficiency can be: The

greenkeeper selected a foreman for the gang because he was physically large and was a mechanic. He had stood around talking wise while the greenkeeper did the real mechanic's work. Before the foreman's appointment the greensmen had been coming in at about 10:30, cleaned their machines and did odd jobs until noon. The foreman found them leisurely but thoroughly cleaning their machines and bawled them out for not working faster. It took only three bawling outs to cause the greensmen to stay out mowing greens until noon for which they were not censured. Result for four months, four men lost at least one hour each day, for the same reason that you or I would. Were the men lazy? Were they inefficient? And should they be censured? No! "They acted human." The foreman should have been discharged, not demoted. The greenkeeper should have noticed the inefficiency.

I remember one experience that I had, that is very common with small gang management. We were laying a stepping stone walk and I had six men and a single horse tip cart on the job. I was such a good foreman that when I came to my senses I had four men idle, one man setting stakes for me to dig to, another watching to see that I dug square corners. All were saying to themselves "look at the poor fool work." When I realized what was happening, I began setting stakes, watching holes and laying out the work and the men began to work.

Inefficiency and imposition are the inevitable results of a foreman or superintendent "being one of the gang." Experience has taught me that better labor efficiency is obtained by being superior in every way, than by being "one of the gang." "High-hat" is not a good specification for a greenkeeper but one can think and act in a sure and firm manner.

Avoid Obligations

Some laborers are very far-sighted in their actions. At first they work better than the average laborer, become familiar and too often a favorite with the boss, and before the boss realizes it he is under obligations to them. Once having gotten the boss obligated, the laborer plays all the tricks in his bag for he knows he won't be fired.

There are many factors that enter into the labor game when one starts to set the men to work. The routing of greensmen if they start from a central tool shed is not merely "John, you mow number 5, 8,

7 and 12 greens." It becomes "John, you mow number 5, then 12, then 7 and end upon 8." John is routed so that there are the least number of occasions to stop for any cause whatsoever.

Laborers (and you and I) are alike, industrious if there is nothing else to do, but we are willing to stop at every opportunity. If a greenkeeper so directs his men that they have many occasions to be distracted from their work, the greenkeeper is at fault. What are stopping possibilities? The meeting with a fellow laborer, a drinking fountain, an apple tree in fruit, the end of a job, hose across a green that has to be moved to permit the green being mowed. There are many other occasions each of which may cause the loss of from 5 to 20 minutes time. Don't blame the laborers if they stop,—reduce the stopping places. One hour's planning for a stretch of the course could easily save an hour of the laborer's time each day.

The laborer will do (so would you if you were in his place) just about as much work as you expect him to do, less a little bit "that he is entitled to" each day. Many golf courses are paying the price of "I'll allow you so much time for the job each day." Just to show the greenkeeper that he is wrong, the laborer soon "requires" 15 minutes more.

Of course with certain jobs such as mowing the greens there is not a great variation in the daily time. There should be, however, and the greensman should be encouraged to come in *as soon as is reasonably possible* after finishing his work, and not to stall until all mowers are in, or to be in at a regular time each day.

Inefficiency is bound to follow "example work" (here again have I been caught). "Here let me show you how to do that." Grab the pick, mower or whatever it is and work like a Trojan, fast and furious (until you get tired) and because you are boss you can stop. Drive the man to your example pace. He'll work as hard as you did (while you're watching) but how he will loaf afterwards! Young foremen are more frequently guilty of this offense than the old timers.

Efficiency is gained by having the men play cards, or go home with pay, rather than do some obviously foolish job just to take up the time. I know of 1,000 flats that were mowed from the southeast corner to the northeast, then to the southwest and again to the northwest corner

in order to give the men something to do. Before they started mowing the men knew why they were told to mow them. Lazy habits are easily acquired and the inability of a foreman to have *real* production or construction work to do causes loss of respect. All tend toward lowering the efficiency of laborers.

Given laborers with good specifications, in jobs having comparable specifications, and directed so that there is a minimum number of occasions for stopping, and very few will shirk their work. They will do a fair day's work for their employer and for themselves.

Mrs. A. R. Gates, Wife of Pro Administrator, Dies

Glencoe, Ill.—Mrs. A. R. Gates, wife of the business administrator for the P. G. A., died suddenly of a heart attack at the Gates home, November 12. Mrs. Gates suffered a previous attack during the St. Louis Open but was thought to have recovered completely. She attended the theater with Mr. Gates the evening of the 11th in apparent health and died early the following morning.

Mrs. Gates was former women's golf champion of the South Shore C. C., Calumet C. C. and the old Washington Park C. C. She was prominent in social and club circles, being an active member of the D. A. R. and the Daughters of the British Empire among other organizations.

She was a woman of charming personality and her untimely loss is mourned by a host in the golf field. Besides her husband she is survived by one son, William A., two sisters and three brothers.

Wisconsin Plans Greenkeeping Short Course for 1931

Beloit, Wis.—Charles Bingham, 1253 Eighth st., greenkeeper at the Municipal course, is writing members of the Wisconsin Greenkeepers' association in his capacity as vice-president, soliciting suggestions for the second short course in greenkeeping to be held at University of Wisconsin, Madison early in 1931. Prof. J. G. Moore of the university faculty again will be in charge. The registration fee will be \$10.00.

Greenkeepers in Wisconsin and adjoining states are invited to advise Mr. Bingham of their intention to attend the course and detail any points they would like to have covered in the curriculum.