The Human Touch

■ EMPLOYMENT ISSUES

Keeping Tabs On Your Employees

BY DAVE ST. JOHN

If the Y2K transition taught us anything, it was the importance of thorough planning for an event whose impact no one could predict. Many people saw it as an event that would affect others more than it would affect them. But even the most cynical critic had to admit that Y2K would have some effect on us.

What got me about the oncoming of Y2K was the endless proliferation of checklists. There was a checklist for everything: food, water and other necessities whose availability might be interrupted by the changeover. I like the idea of checklists, and I like the idea of the thought discipline that goes into their development and use.

The need for checklists has not been eliminated with the advent of the new millennium. Like Y2K, there's another issue facing all of us in this industry, and it has to do with attracting and retaining good people.

In other times, this was not a big deal. Call some contacts, do some networking and the position was filled. But things are different now, and there is no reason to believe that labor-intensive businesses like golf courses are going to see relief any time soon.

The problem requires a new and more aggressive role on the part of superintendents and the folks who report to them. The reality is that while club members may be experiencing the same pressures in their own businesses, they will be far less tolerant of short-handed staffs who fail to provide good service and upkeep.

Every well-coordinated plan starts with a collection of tasks and things to do. Not all tasks are created equal in terms of importance, but when fully integrated they should form a well-defined picture of what must be done. Here are some things, in checklist form, that superintendents should consider regarding their employees:

• How satisfied am I with the quality and quantity of my employees?

• Are the issues my customers continue to discuss about the club traceable to performance problems with my employees?

• When was the last time I sat down with my management team and did a review of our employees' strengths and weaknesses, formulated a plan to recognize and reward good performers and correct the deficiencies of poor performers?

• Have I taken a leadership role in contacting

CHECK OUT THIS CHECK LIST TO HELP YOU ASSIST AND RETAIN TOP EMPLOYEES

and regularly interacting with organizations that could help me with my people-related needs?

• Have I developed internships and other industry orientation programs to provide first-hand information about solid careers in this field to interested, but undecided, potential employees?

• Do my current employees regard this as a good place to work, and if so, how many others would they refer to work here?

• When was the last time I did a quick survey to determine whether my pay scales and benefit offerings were competitive with similar roles in the surrounding community?

• Are there available, but unused, opportunities for outside training and certifications for good people on my staff?

• Have I gotten to know something about each of my folks, such as their birthdays, wedding anniversaries, birth of children, which give me an opportunity to do something thoughtful and unexpected for them?

• Am I able to use time off as a reward for top performers?

• Do I think outside the box when it comes to devising ways to recognize and reward good performers?

• If I have a large Hispanic/Latino workforce, am I looking for ways to improve their communication skills and encourage upward mobility?

• Do I encourage feedback (good or bad) about my group's performance from our customers?

• Do I use this information constructively to raise lowered standards?

The list goes on, but I'm sure you get the picture. By any measure, the attraction and retention of good people will continue to be a top concern well into this millennium.

And you thought Y2K was tough.

Dave St. John is co-founder of GreenSearch, an Atlanta-based human resources consulting firm. He can be reached at fsjserv@mindspring.com