

Work as Art

TEACH EMPLOYEES TO FIND
THEIR CREATIVE SIDES

By Luke Wagner

Motivating others to their full potential can be one of the most complicated tasks handed to anyone in a position of authority. My advice for superintendents: Consider yourselves lucky. You have more motivating opportunities in one day than an assembly-line foreman gets in a decade.

The idea of why my coworkers and I were motivated to do our best job on the golf course came to me during the time in my life I was enrolled in a creative writing workshop and working on the golf course simultaneously. I noticed I was looking at my artwork in school much the same way as my daily tasks of walk-mowing greens, striping fairways and other maintenance practices. I found both responsibilities were something I looked back on after finishing and could appreciate.

While every human being doesn't have a creative side, or wish to openly admit it, I believe most people do. For that majority of us that do, a superintendent must look no further than to generate a creative outlet in their assignments. If a manager is fortunate enough to have a job where this is possible, such as golf course maintenance, there are four key elements to explore: stimulation, supervision, satisfaction and appreciation.

By stimulation I mean getting employees to realize what they're doing, whether it be weed eating or mowing tees, will lead to an artistic benefit for themselves or an appreciative benefit to others. For example, friendly competition was an effective stimulant for some of my coworkers and me. A group of us walk-mowed greens every morning for about a year, and our boss encouraged competition. The competition, while trivial, was to see who could make the straightest lines with the fewest skips and least overlap.

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By being encouraged to look over our jobs after we were finished, this stimulated the artistic and critical portions of our minds. We ended up being three of the most talented greens-mowers I saw in my six years. This was also an advantage to those we trained later on.

If friendly competition is the route a superintendent decides to go, supervision is the second element that must be mastered. I compare a lack of supervision to removing the referee from a football game. Chaos is bound to ensue. As an authority figure, a manager must be aware of what's going on and what is right in order to move forward to satisfaction.

The satisfaction element, which includes dissatisfaction, is a two-way street. An employer and an employee must have a goal in mind to be satisfied or dissatisfied. For example, if a long-term goal for an employee is to burn a checkerboard pattern into the zoysia fairways on the par 4s, the point of satisfaction needs to be clear. Once the job is done, though, it's important the employee has some reason to repeat the performance. The appreciation element comes last and is where the artistic outlet really begins to materialize.

Like satisfaction, there are two kinds of appreciation — employee and manager. In order to simulate an appreciation in an employee, the manager must show an appreciation himself. Nothing tells an employee more that he or she is appreciated as when the manager tells the employee verbally. This takes on the same principles as an artistic workshop. If an educated veteran (professor or superintendent) says a piece of work is worth appreciating, it's much easier for the artist to grow. This is the connection, subconsciously, I was making between school and work. A golf course employee can be visually stimulated by a landscape he or she created in the same way a painter can.

While this method may not work with everybody, I've seen it work more times than not. I'm convinced if you encourage employees to see the golf course as a painting and their equipment as paintbrushes, they'll discover their creative sides. I know I did.

Wagner, a student at the University of Southern Indiana, worked at Oak Meadow GC for six seasons.