

Business Record

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The Priority of Personnel: Why it Matters

BY MATTHEW J. WARD

Turnover and morale: The best facilities do not take them for granted. The ignorant clubs, however, take the approach that the primary emphasis is on turf maintenance — not the people doing the labor. But these out-of-sight and out-of-mind clubs do not factor in how such indifference can escalate to a far greater and more daunting challenge, as in turnover. Clearly, it's hard to fathom how much time, attention and dollars can be allocated to turf maintenance while very little of that is paid to the people doing the work.

Sometimes the work — rather than the personnel — becomes the only important issue. In such a scenario, unfortunately, it's easy for the boss to assume that everyone is on the same page when they're not. Sadly, the boss doesn't realize how corrosive his inertia to personnel

issues can be, and how his staff's resentment for his management style can quickly sap the morale and overall mission of the entire team.

Turnover in the golf course maintenance department is common. Much of a course's help is seasonal and includes high school students and college-age workers. But the issue of plummeting morale and chronic turnover isn't caused by seasonal changes in the workforce — it's prompted by an environment that fails to provide a range of communication tools. Hence, any facility that fosters a high dosage of turnover among its critical personnel will invariably see a steady erosion of trust. Then the desire for workers to give extra effort in all aspects of the operation can also be jeopardized and abandoned.

Once the pattern of isolation becomes the norm,

As long as there are real people doing the dirty work, it's never just about turf maintenance

repairing the rift can take far longer than most can ever imagine.

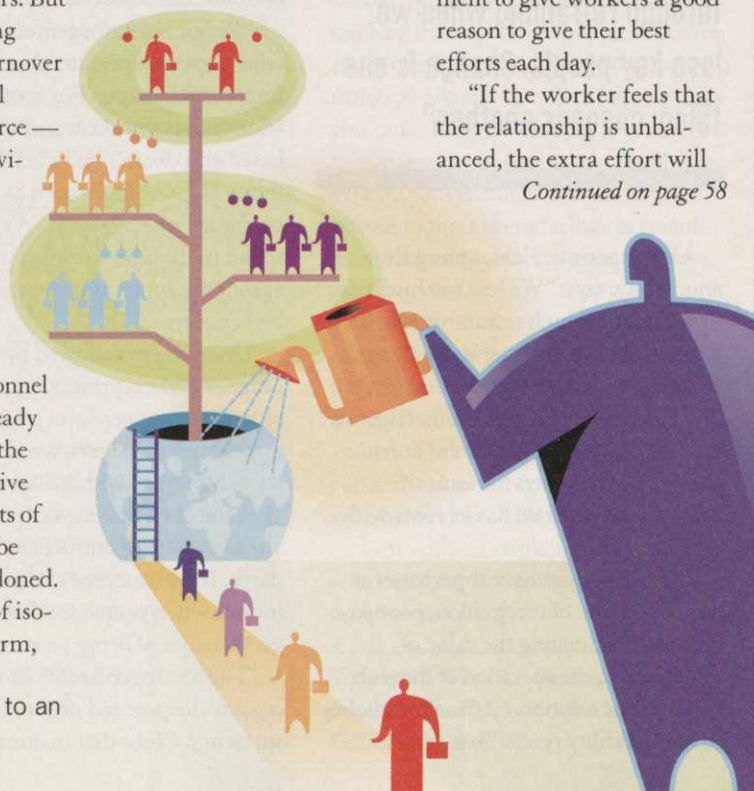
"To me, turnover is the most draining problem that can occur," says Pat Brockwell, superintendent of Black Mesa Golf Club in La Mesilla, N.M. "The time

and energy spent on hiring and training along with the low productivity that comes with the inexperience and errors of new hires keeps an operation in a crisis-management mode."

Brockwell believes it's incumbent upon management to give workers a good reason to give their best efforts each day.

"If the worker feels that the relationship is unbalanced, the extra effort will

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PERSONNEL TURNOVER will inevitably lead to an erosion of trust.

PRIORITY OF PERSONNEL

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never be given," he says. "That extra effort is always at the discretion of the worker — he chooses how much effort he will give. Management's job is to get employees to give more than the minimum."

Employee morale is affected by much more than wages, Brockwell says. A boss' flexibility and sensitivity to an employee's family or personal issues also plays a major part, he points out.

Despite the importance of two-way communication to attain positive employee morale, some bosses might opt to back off and take the denial route when things go bad. They believe it's far easier to tag people who quit as malcontents or simply unproductive. But that reaction is predictable and debilitating, and inevitably the same downward spiral of resentment and withdrawal can spread among crew members.

"We lose too much time going through retraining when we lose key people. Change is one thing; chaos is another."

One superintendent, opting for anonymity, says: "We lose too much time going through retraining when we lose key people. Change is one thing; chaos is another."

Steve Cadenelli, general manager of the Cape Cod National Golf Club in Brewster, Mass., says the issue of turnover and morale has its roots with three items.

"Generally you have three issues at work — a lack of recognition, poor pay and underestimating the value of employees to the operation of the club," he says. The solution, Cadenelli adds, lies in how a facility reacts. "It is very



IN-HOUSE PROMOTIONS encourage company-wide morale and require less training.

important to understand group dynamics and how personnel inter-relationships can make or break an operation. Slackers or negative individuals must be weeded out, or their behavior can have a very demoralizing effect on good employees."

For Jeff Spangler, the senior vice president of science and agronomy for Troon Golf, a Scottsdale, Ariz.-based management company, the issue is not one of denial but of better familiarity.

"Personnel management is an area where many superintendents could improve," he says. "For most, their education is technical and agronomy-based and doesn't include other areas of their responsibilities such as financial or personnel management. We actually spend more time working with our key agronomy supervisors on these non-turf concerns."

One strategy followed by a broad range of clubs is promoting from within, especially to upper-level positions. "For upper-level managers, we almost always try to hire from within," Spangler says. "For the obvious reasons, [people] are already aware of our policies and standards. It also can provide great company morale when people see they have a good chance of being promoted."

The key ingredient is short-circuiting any deep-seated negativity from surfacing. Clubs that make assumptions

that "all is well" often miss the subtle cues present and allow them to fester and grow.

"I have found over the years, more often than not, that such problems arise from negative employees who bring down the morale and enthusiasm of others simply by their constant complaining and back biting," Cadenelli says. "Hopefully, the immediate superiors are on top of things in this regard, but if not upper management must look into such problems as a continued loss of one's better employees, which is costly in terms of re-training and productivity."

Brockwell concurs. "It's always better to talk to each other rather than about each other," he says. "Meetings can facilitate this type of exchange and promote a culture of organizational self-examination that is done in a non-threatening way."

The proper integration of all people is a daily task. They must operate with an understanding of the mission at hand and that includes how people relate with one another.

For many facilities the workforce contains a number of employees whose primary language is not English. Oscar Bucaro, superintendent of Bergen Hills Country Club in River Vale, N.J., understands that situation firsthand.

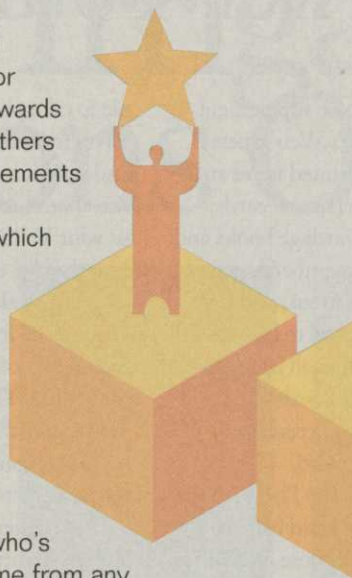
"I have an advantage because I'm

Turning off turnover. Maxing morale. What can be done?

1 SEEK EMPLOYEE SUGGESTIONS — There needs to be a mechanism for personnel to communicate their most candid comments without repercussion. Management should respond to suggestions made whether they are followed completely, partially or not at all.



2 PROVIDE MEANINGFUL RECOGNITION FOR THOSE ON STAFF — Some facilities opt for employee of the month-type awards or length-of-service awards. Others opt toward annual acknowledgements at a holiday party or the like. Appreciation bolsters loyalty, which intensifies ownership of the work ethic and its correlation to the facility. Pay is not the only consideration that workers value.



3 FOCUS ON RESULTS, NOT HIERARCHY — Too many organizations bog down because of so-called status — fixating on who's been around the longest. Solutions can come from any person at any time, and facilities need to move away from thinking of low-level personnel as drones.

4 UPDATE ALL ESSENTIAL JOB DESCRIPTIONS REFLECTING WHAT'S REALLY NEEDED NOW — Progressive facilities update job descriptions as needed. Job descriptions provide a map for employee and employer. When job descriptions become nothing more than empty words, the possibility exists that some on staff will be doing more and others less.

5 SCHEDULE INDIVIDUAL MEETINGS AS ROUTINE MATTERS — Meeting with key personnel through one-on-one meetings builds awareness before critical issues enter the scene. Don't simply meet only when there are issues. Regular one-on-one meetings alleviate anxiety and build long-term awareness between people. When critical matters do come forward, the relationship that's been built will weather whatever occurs.

6 CONSISTENCY: THE GOLDEN RULE — Want to know how to burn bridges? Be inconsistent with your staff. Consistency provides a reliable road map in terms of process, procedures and outcomes. Those venturing away from that road map are bound to get lost. The amount of time spent to get back on course will drain everyone and only add to the uncertainty that such situations will repeat again.

Editor's note: Information for this story was compiled by Matt Ward from interviews and research.

bilingual. I can speak with any member of the crew without a third party involved."

Such a direct link allows Bucaro to have daily interaction and prevent any misunderstandings. While the idea of having bilingual superintendents is not a mandatory job requirement, it pays to have someone with language command beyond English — particularly for those facilities located throughout the Sunbelt areas where there are many full-time and seasonal Hispanic workers.

No matter how well a communication program is created to deal with turnover and morale, there will be times when a definitive corrective action is needed — such as firing a disruptive employee.

"If a manager doesn't do this part of his job, why should the workers do theirs," said Brockwell. "Getting rid of bad employees also sends the message that good work is appreciated — that management knows the difference between the two."

But before such a Draconian action needs to go forward, it pays to avoid sending messages to employees that are easily misunderstood. Bucaro sees the situation plainly. "Don't promise things you can't deliver," he says.

Once promises are made, employee expectations escalate. The inability or refusal to meet them facilitates resentment that can spread to even the best staff workers.

In the final analysis, good and bad relationships between employees and their superiors may end up showing on the golf course. "I can play a golf course and tell if the management has an adversarial relationship or partnership with its workers," Brockwell says.

Left without corrective action, it won't be long before the paying customers see it too. ■

Matthew J. Ward is a freelance writer from Clifton, N.J., and editor of Jersey Golfer magazine.

How to Create the Right Web Site to Market Your Club

BY HEIDI VOSS

I have very bad news for printers. We no longer need you to print big, fancy color brochures for country clubs. People are turning to the World Wide Web to research potential clubs.

I have assisted in designing more than 100 club brochures, and I can tell you some very simple facts. First, the club rarely looks as good in the brochure as it does in real life, unless you have hired someone very talented to take the photos, and they have digitally remastered them.

Second, the brochure is usually out of date by the time all the "powers that be" sign off on it and it gets produced. Third, even though you proofed it one zillion times, the minute that your board president reads it, he will find a typo that you missed.

Here are a few things to keep in mind when you are creating your club Web site:

■ Your Web image should match up with your club. If you are a Tuscan-looking club in California, your Web site should portray this. You

are going to be supplementing a person's Web experience with printed items such as newsletters, scorecards, yardage books and membership applications, and you need to be sure that all images and fonts are the same for a consistent brand.

■ The Web site should be friendly to those on dial-up.

Yes, there really are people on dial-up. Not everyone is surfing at high speed, and your loading times need to be reasonable. Don't let your Web designer create something that will frustrate those on dial-up. Your site should not have membership fees listed. You may wish to list your categories of membership and a "Frequently Asked Questions," but make them call your membership director to discuss membership fees.

■ Clubs that have successful sites have something that keeps members coming back. Photo galleries are a great way to keep them perusing the site. These need to be set up with catchy captions, and many clubs make photos available for the members to reprint.

■ The Vellano Country Club took the gallery a step further and encouraged peo-

ple to take photos of themselves in club logo apparel and send it in to be put on the site. The club called it "Show us your Vellano." You can't beat that for exposure.

Vellano also created an auction site for members to bid on one-of-a-kind items for charity. This is a kind of "e-Bay twist" that keeps members coming back to see if they need to up their bids.

■ Another new private club in Richmond, Va., called The Federal Club has more than 80 members and has just begun construction of an Arnold Palmer signature

well as social nights out for members to meet and mingle. Members are sent an e-mail notification to sign up online to attend one or all of the events. Events are kept to a manageable size and most are selling out at a rapid pace.

Utilizing a Web site helps to conserve trees and stops the dreadful mailing of flyers that cause members to become numb and pitch all mail in the trash. Many designers can work with your club accounting software for easy bill viewing and for automatic billing when the member books the event.

There are so many benefits to putting your marketing dollars into your Web site. It can be kept fresh, and it's easy for members to tell others about their clubs.

Also, members who miss the club can log on while on the road and get up-to-date info on what's happening there. I know when my family misses me, they merely go to www.bauervossconsulting.com to see my smiling face.

Heidi Voss is the president of Bauer Voss Consulting, a club marketing consulting company. She specializes in new development, conversions from public to private and member buyouts. For more information, visit www.bauervossconsulting.com.

Successful Web sites have something that keeps members coming back. Photo galleries are a great way to keep them perusing the site.

golf course. To encourage camaraderie among members and to also encourage people to join the club during this formative stage the club has set up a monthly schedule of activities. It's offering clinics for juniors and ladies, one- and two-day golf trips to play other fine courses, as



More Than Business Partners

Ohio golf course owners Arnold and Todd Ingraham are father and son first and foremost

BY LARRY AYLWARD,
EDITOR IN CHIEF

While a golf course brought Arnold Ingraham and his son Todd back together after being separated by many miles and many years, that amazing thing called unconditional love also played a role in their reunion.

Todd was 6 years old when his parents divorced in 1979. A year later his mother moved him and his sister, Heather, from Ohio to Georgia and later to New Jersey and Southern California.

"It was not a happy time," Arnold recalls of the family's breakup.

Shortly after the divorce, Arnold joined the family

business, Bunker Hill Golf Course, in Medina, Ohio. Arnold's mother needed assistance in running the course, which she and her late husband had purchased in 1940.

Arnold knew the course, which wasn't in great shape, needed some attention to remain competitive in the area. He invested some money into it to improve its marketability. He began developing leagues to bring in more business.

Todd and Heather, meanwhile, would visit their father, who lived in a house on the course's rolling property, for a few months every summer. Life was like a roller-licking ride on a merry-go-round when Todd was with

his dad at the course. He loved playing the game and hanging out at the course. When the summer ended, it was sometimes difficult for Todd to go home.

Arnold knew his son would excel at running the family business, but his offer wasn't just a business one.

"Dad wanted us to live with him and he would have happily had us there," Todd says. "But kids went to live with their moms back then. That's just the way it was."

Todd understood that then and he understands it now. For the record, Todd has a loving relationship with his mother and still refers to his stepfather as "Dad."

Arnold also understood the situation, and he tried to make the best of it.

"I really tried to stay involved with them," he says of his kids.

"There was some hard times, especially when they were young. I don't think divorce is ever a happy situation. But it has worked out."

Actually, it has worked out wonderfully for father and son. In 1996 Arnold called Todd and Heather with a proposition.

"He said, 'I've been running this business for nearly 20 years, and I've had enough. I'd like some help or I might sell it,'" Todd remembers.

Heather declined her father's offer, but Todd was intrigued. He was 22 at the time and at a period in his life when he wanted to make a change.

While Arnold knew that Todd loved the course and would do well in helping to run the family business, his offer wasn't just a business one.

"I wanted to pass it on to him as a legacy," Arnold says.

While Todd viewed his father's proposal as an opportunity to join the family business, he also saw it as a sign of his endearment.

"I think he saw an opportunity to get me closer into his life, which he always wanted," Todd says. "And I've always appreciated that. I've always felt love from

"I WANTED to pass it on to him as a legacy," Arnold Ingraham (left) says of his proposal to son Todd.



him, even though there was the divorce."

In Bunker Hill's modest clubhouse, there's a small, framed picture on a shelf that celebrates Arnold's and Todd's relationship. The photo, taken in 1980, shows Arnold presenting a trophy to a beaming Todd.

Actually, the trophy had been awarded to Arnold years before for his performance in a golf tournament. Todd received a few of such trophies from his dad. The story goes that when Todd would break a certain score for nine holes, Arnold would dust off one of his old tro-

phies, place a new placard on it with Todd's name and reward him with it.

Now, as business partners, Arnold and Todd are winning awards together. The National Golf Course Owners Association named Bunker Hill as the Ohio Golf Course of the Year in 2004.

Todd says he and his father have clicked largely because of their love of the game.

"I've talked with other owners who really aren't that interested in golf," Todd says. "It's just a business to them, but it's a passion to us."

They are business part-

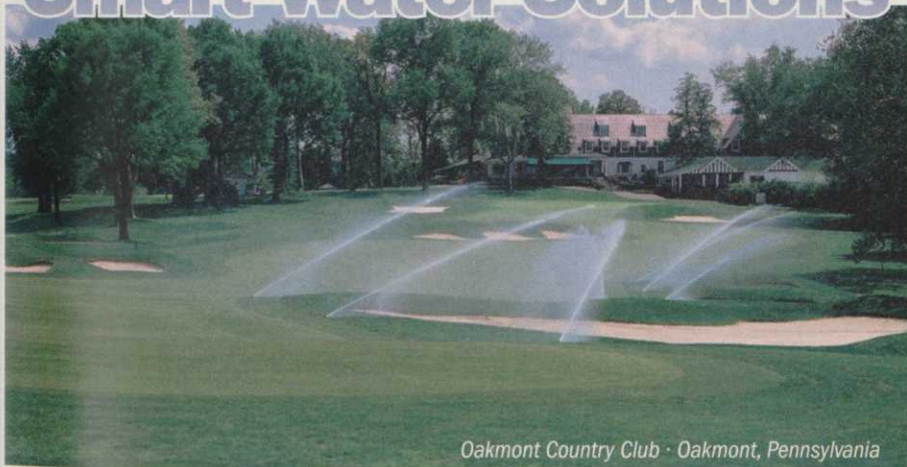


FROM FATHER to son, trophies were often passed in recognition of improving nine-hole scores.

ners, but their true bond is their blood. After all, it was their unconditional love for

each other that brought them back together to the golf course. ■

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