



When  
Sausage  
Biscuits  
are  
...

# Worth More than Money

What is it that really inspires employees?  
You might be surprised that oftentimes, recognition  
is worth its weight in gold. BY STEVEN TINGLE

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**It's 5:45** a.m. and Mark Rogers is waiting in line. He's impatient. There's a lot to do. He needs to get going. Rogers is the superintendent at the Grove Park Inn Resort in Asheville, N.C. He's fairly new to the job, coming in November from a private club one county over. His plate is full. He's got a crew of 17, a tight budget, a corporate command chain and a 7-year-old daughter. He's got members and outings to keep happy, not to mention the hundreds of resort guests, many of whom have dropped a buck-forty to play the course. But it's all about priorities, so he waits.

When it's finally his turn Rogers pulls forward, rolls down the window and yells, "18 sausage biscuits please."

Like most superintendents these days, Rogers' budget and

staffing has been cut and he and his crew are being asked to do more with less. "Bringing the guys biscuits once a week is a little thing," Rogers tells me later that day, "but the little things make a difference. It goes a long way in keeping my staff happy." Continuing with the "through the stomach" approach, Rogers recently used his "early order program" points to acquire a grill for the shop. "We cook out on Fridays," Rogers says. "It's something the guys look forward to. It keeps them motivated."

As a former certified golf course superintendent, I found motivating staff a constant challenge. My maintenance crew ran the gamut from a fairway-mowing Archie Bunker to a guy who looked, and acted, like a roadie for the Doobie Brothers. How do you consistently motivate such a diverse crew? It's got

to be money, right?

But in report after report money falls surprisingly short of praise, status and freedom in motivation effectiveness. Money may talk the talk but when it comes to morale, emotional needs are much more important. For example, recent studies by executive coach David Rock and neuroscientist Jeffrey Schwartz found autonomy to be a highly effective motivator. Employees who perceive they are making their own decisions without someone constantly looking over their shoulder feel more in control of their jobs and in turn more motivated to do them well.

One superintendent at a private course I'm not allowed to name — it stays on the radar by consistently flying under it — puts each maintenance employee in charge of three holes. Each maintenance employee, therefore, hand-mows the three greens and tees, rakes the bunkers, weed-eats the creek banks, edges the cart paths along his or her holes and so on.

From tee to green those three holes belong to that employee, and it's the employee's responsibility

to take proper care. In return, the employees get autonomy and a feeling of ownership; the superintendent gets quality work and low turnover from a proud and motivated staff.

### The power of recognition

Recognition is another powerful motivator. Consistent praise for a job well done enhances an employee's perception of status and has a lasting positive effect. From a simple pat on the back to a "way to go," praise increases morale and builds respect.

Jim Alwine, superintendent at Stockton Golf and Country Club in Stockton, Calif., takes the "fist pump" approach to praise.

"I learned it from a guy named Mickey when I was at Morris Park," Alwine says. "When Mickey rode by on his mower he would pump his fist in the air or give you a thumb's-up. It was his way of saying 'good job.' I've used it at every course I've worked at since."

At first his current staff thought he was crazy, but now they all do it. They're a team and they show their support for one another. "It does have a downside though," Alwine admits. Recent damage to a John

Deere 3245C was caused by an overly enthusias-

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A simple fist pump can improve morale.



## Dollars and Biscuits

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tic fist-pumping operator and an unfortunately placed pecan tree.

### The daily huddle

So how does a superintendent put personal motivators into practice? Take a trick Fortune 500 companies have used for years called the

WELL DONE!

Kind words can go a long way  
toward motivating workers.

“daily huddle.” A 15-minute meeting each morning, the “daily huddle” gives managers an opportunity to take the pulse of their staffs and start conversations.

It’s the perfect time to share news, ask for input and offer kudos. Most superintendents meet with their staffs each morning to assign the day’s work, but unfortunately it’s often more monologue than dialogue. The huddle should be one part oration and three parts discussion:

“Archie, how’s Edith? I want you to supervise the walk bridge project on 15, any ideas? Doobie Brother, nice job with those creek banks last week. I told a group of members yesterday you were a hard worker. Keep it up.”

Simple, effective people skills.

Proud to be the first to ever quote Mary Kay, the pink Cadillac makeup magnate, in a golf trade magazine, I’ll let her sum up the art of motivation in one simple line: “Everyone has an invisible sign hanging from their neck saying, ‘Make me feel important.’”

Whether your staff members are selling makeup, washing dishes or cutting grass, give them some freedom and ownership in their work and make them feel important, needed and part of the process.

A paycheck elevates our bank accounts, but praise, independence and value elevate our sense of self worth, and that’s really what drives us.

Well, that and biscuits. ■

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The author, Steven Tingle, an efficiency consultant, says to give employees ownership of their work to make them feel important.





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