

Managing A Multicultural Workforce ¿Cómo Usted Dice “Golf”?



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In February 2001, a group of golf course superintendents attended a seminar in Dallas Texas entitled “Managing a Multicultural Workforce.” Prior to the seminar superintendents were asked to complete a survey regarding their experiences managing Hispanic workers. A total of 30 superintendents completed the survey, which included a variety of questions relating to culture, language and supervisory issues. The superintendents reported on their successes and challenges in dealing with this growing segment of the workforce.

Over half of the golf course superintendents surveyed indicated that they had employed immigrant workers for six years or less. The primary reason that the majority of golf course superintendents cited for hiring immigrant workers was availability; most employers had difficulty attracting dependable golf course workers. In addition, superintendents indicated that the work ethic of immigrant workers was superior to that of many local workers. Superintendents also reported that the overwhelming majority of their immigrant employees came from Mexico. Most of the other countries mentioned were either Central American or Caribbean countries. When asked about the residency status of their immigrant employees the superintendents were split in their responses. Half said that their employees were long term residents of the local area, the other half indicated that they were seasonal employees who returned to their home country in the off season. Only two of the employers surveyed provided housing for their Hispanic workers.

When superintendents were asked to discuss the challenges of dealing with an immigrant workforce the majority indicated that language was clearly the biggest challenge. They used a variety of strategies to overcome the language barrier. Over half indicated that they and their supervisors were making a concerted effort to learn Spanish and have taken Spanish classes. Approximately one-third of the respondents indicated that their non-English speaking employees had taken English classes. At one time or another approximately one third of the respondents had hired an interpreter to help with translation in the work place. In addition, many superintendents have a bilingual employee interpreter for the rest of the employees. Most employers indicated that overcoming the language barrier was a gradual process, which involved a variety of strategies at the same time.

Cultural Issues

The superintendents surveyed also reported on the issue of cross-cultural understanding. Some indicated that their workers were motivated primarily by money and did not take a longer view of their job. One employer indicated that older Hispanic workers did not like younger Hispanic supervisors telling them how to perform a job. Similarly, women superintendents reported that Hispanic men often did not readily accept or respect their management role. All of these examples relate to Hispanic cultural values and traditions.

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Some superintendents noted the need to help employees understand the customs and policies of their new country. For example, when superintendents were asked if their immigrant employees had any problems with law enforcement authorities the most common difficulty cited was motor vehicle violations. This indicates a need for employers to work with their employees to understand local laws and customs.

Superintendents discussed openly their feelings about their most challenging aspects of employing immigrant workers. Communication and language issues were very common. Another challenge some superintendents raised was motivating Hispanic workers to take pride in work and to make a long-range commitment to the job. They felt that their ability to motivate was tied to understanding the culture of their workers. Training was also raised as an issue that is linked to the language and communication problem. By far the consensus of superintendents regarding challenges came down to several key issues – motivation, training, language, and cultural understanding.

Regardless of the challenges, golf course superintendents are impressed with the work ethic and personal qualities that their Hispanic employees bring to the job and they are committed to creating a work environment where people will stay and be satisfied with their jobs.

Keys to Successful Multicultural Management

Turf managers who are successful in managing Hispanic employees generally possess the following characteristics:

1. They work aggressively to overcome the language barrier, including learning to speak Spanish themselves.
2. They make a considerable effort to learn about the culture of their employees. This enables employers to better understand their employees as people, and to understand the supervisory techniques that are acceptable and unacceptable to employees from another culture.
3. They develop an organizational culture that accepts and appreciates the differences that individual employees bring to the workplace. They build an organization based on respect and trust for all employees.
4. They establish employment policies and carefully communicate them so all employees understand employer expectations for proper conduct on the job. Once established, employment policies are uniformly enforced with all employees.
5. They continually work at building a multicultural team. They encourage their employees to work and problem solve together.
6. They help orient their employees to United States laws and customs. ♣



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