

Turn Off The TV

By **Jake Schneider**, Assistant Golf Course Superintendent, Blackhawk Country Club

Like most Americans, I probably watch too much TV. The news, Survivor, Modern Family, Criminal Minds, and political ads (kidding on that last one) are some of my favorites, and my wife will tell you that I view more football games than should be allowed by law (to which I strongly agree to disagree). We used to eat our dinner on the coffee table in front of the TV but made the switch a year ago to the peace and comfort of our dinner table. Not only do we have better conversation, but we also don't have to deal with a pint-sized dog harassing us for table scraps. Why am I telling you this? Well, back to the better conversations that I just mentioned.... Chances are that most golf course maintenance facilities have breakrooms with cable-linked televisions, and in my opinion, that's a mistake.

Here, at Blackhawk, the only form of "entertainment" that we have during our 15-minute morning break and 30-minute lunch are the daily newspaper, magazines, and, I suppose, smartphones. Whether it was by choice or simply not an option when the shop was built, we are completely TV-free, and I believe that it has played a significant role in developing the positive atmosphere and good camaraderie that our crews seem to consistently exhibit. Instead of mindlessly staring at the small screen, our employees talk to each other and get to know their co-workers. And, frequently, there is quite a bit

(okay, a lot) of good-natured ribbing that goes on. These interpersonal connections have led to consistently high employee retention and, for the most part, happy and productive workers. While I fully realize that we are not the only grounds crew with these attributes, I thought that I would share this and the other following ideas for creating more cohesive staff.


Hit the Links

One of the truly great things about a golf-industry job is the ability to play a lot of golf for not a lot of money (you may recall that I'm infinitely cheap). I've probably played 30 rounds this year and due to generous superintendents have maybe spent \$100. On nearly every Monday throughout the season, there are four to eight of us who play golf. If there isn't an outing at Blackhawk, we tee off after a full day of work, and if there is an outing, we call around to local superintendents to see if they have any openings. It's quite a treat for all of us to play these courses for next to nothing, and I have no doubt that it keeps some of our very overqualified part-time employees around. Plus, we can get a better sense for how the conditions affect playability both at Blackhawk and at neighboring courses.

Grill Out

A few times each year, we dust off the charcoal grills and fry some burgers and

brats for the crew. It's by no means an elaborate spread, but there's just something about changing the normal lunch-time routine that seems to boost people's spirits. Additionally, if a Monday outing has grilled food prior to a shotgun start, we take the entire crew to the clubhouse for lunch after they have teed off. While this does take a bit from the budget, it makes for a great, tasty start to the week. When winter rolls around and we can finally breathe again, we usually head to a local restaurant for lunch on Friday, and while this isn't paid for by the club, it's nice to get out of the shop for an hour.

While I am not sure that any of the above suggestions are necessarily innovative, they certainly have a positive effect on our employees, and they may be a relatively cheap way to enhance your workers' level of satisfaction and productivity. As you plan for the 2013 season, don't just think about agronomics, but also implement new ways to keep your employees happy; the results will show on the course. 



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