

Are Your Methods Effective?

Crew Training Techniques Matter

The kind of crew training a golf course superintendent does is the result of many decisions, conscious and unconscious. Are your training decisions still valid?

Your first decision is how much time and effort to devote to training. It involves several factors: How many people have to be trained? Have they had experience or are they new? Who will help with the training? What do you expect from your investment in training time? If you do a thorough job, will it help bring people back year after year, eventually reducing the amount of time you spend? Will thorough training improve your golf course management? Many superintendents think so.

After deciding how much time your training program should receive, the next step is deciding what to include.

Much of it is essential — how to operate machinery, what the terminology means, what needs to be done, and how — the basic information without which no one could do the job. But there is more — much more — to training a crew.

Have you considered asking the golf professional to talk to the crew about the play of the game and how it can be affected by maintenance procedures? How about encouraging the crew members to play themselves? Understanding adds perspective.

Of the many things you teach, perhaps the most essential are those procedures governed by OSHA standards. How you teach them is up to you, but it must be done correctly, or you may face legal sanctions. Some superintendents test crew members after they have read each necessary manual, and require those who don't pass to read them again until they do. Some walk their people through the procedures. However you do it, remember that a recent court ruling

stated that merely telling employees that the procedures and safety measures are in a manual and asking them to read it, is not enough.

It can make a big difference in your crew's attitudes if they understand what you are trying to accomplish — the big picture. How about sharing with them your philosophy of golf course management? Does your crew know what your club's philosophy is?

Public relations is something else you can teach. Do you invest time explaining how to handle an irate golfer who has just been syringed along with the 11th green? Do you teach courtesy? Even a friendly smile from a person on a mower may save you many minutes of apologies and explanations later.

Another thing to consider is that many crew members soon know what to do, but few know why they are doing it. Do your mower operators know the physiological reasons for changing the direction of the cut on greens, or do they know only that that's the way you said to do it? People are more cooperative about following exacting directions if they understand why.

Crew training is an ongoing process, not just a week or two of concentrated instruction. The superintendent who makes it a point to see and talk with each crew member every day shows that he cares about them as people and that he cares what they are doing.

People want personal recognition and they want to progress, to feel that they are part of the organization. Crosstraining, teaching one person to do many jobs, is one good way to allow a crew member to advance, while insuring that you always have trained people for all jobs.

It is helpful to encourage questions. Communication will stop altogether if employees discover that their questions aren't appreciated or taken seriously.

One way to offer the chance to progress is to send crew members to national, regional or local training conferences. They will return better able to serve you and your club, and they also will feel that something of value has been invested in them, so they will put forth more effort. You usually can recover the cost of the conference in saved training time alone.

On-the-job education can be viewed as a valuable fringe benefit for your employees — a benefit that costs nothing extra. It helps your employees gain knowledge, a chance to earn advancement and a feeling of self-worth, and it pays in work excellence and low turnover. Remember that as people gain in knowledge and experience, they want to request a job change, to advance, or to take on more responsibility.

Some superintendents fear that thoroughly teaching employees, especially assistant superintendents, threatens their own job, but many superintendents are justly proud of having trained talented people who became superintendents and moved on to other clubs. The proof of your own expertise is your ability to pass it on to others.

Whatever decisions you make about training your crew, you can be certain that they have long-range, as well as immediate, ramifications.

FORE FRONT

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November Meeting Slated

November 8 is the date and the Hanson House in Long Lake has once again been selected as the site. Long Lake Ford will host the meeting in what has become a pleasant tradition.

There will be a business meeting from 4:00 p.m. until 5:00 p.m. followed by a social hour from 5:00 p.m. until 6:00 p.m. An excellent steak dinner, as only the Hanson House can prepare, is scheduled for 6:15 p.m.