

SUCCESSFUL COACHING (For Golf Course Coaches)

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The Grass Roots

Being a successful golf course superintendent consists of more than teaching fundamental skills and manipulating textbook agronomic principles into workable golf course applications.

Motivating crew members to work hard and believe in themselves is also a full-time task.

Whether we like it or not, we're also salesmen, communication specialists, and psychologists. It all comes with the territory.

In other words, golf course superintendents are coaches.

In a nation that is becoming one in which apathy and satisfaction with mediocrity is the rule rather than the exception, why not consciously manage your crew as a team in the sport of golf course management?

After all, sports offers participants the opportunity to pursue excellence and overcome adversity, and in the process to extend themselves to the limits of their ability.

Although we face a multitude of tasks much like coaching in our work (e.g., scheduling, budgeting, maintaining equipment and facilities, paperwork, etc.), the coaching task itself can be reduced to two areas, teaching and motivation.

We teach crew members the skills, patterns and strategies necessary to operate in our sport, and then we motivate them to give their best efforts in "playing the game."

Obviously, the better teacher a coach is, the more his/her players will learn in terms of skill, patterns and strategy—assuming that the coach possesses a basic understanding of the skills, patterns and strategies associated with the sport.

What is not so obvious is the fact that motivation involves far more than pep rallies, slogans and inspirational talks.

The best coaches in the business are, without exception, totally committed to excellence in their coaching. In order to build a successful pro-

gram, you must first develop your own set of philosophies and techniques. There is no such thing as a prototype coach.

Bobby Knight is supposed to be too intense and too tough on his players to get many of the top basketball prospects nowadays. But have you checked Knight's career won-lost record lately?

Many people who are opposed to Knight's philosophy and techniques keep hoping he'll fall flat on his face, but every year the wins keep piling up for Coach Knight.

Regardless of whether outside observers agree with your coaching style, you must make it work with the people who really count: your team. It is important that you surround yourself with a crew that will accept your style as best for them.

You, as coach, need to decide what kind of players you want on your crew. Selection of team members should be based at least in part on the basis of respect for you and other teammates.

It's all part of the "weeding-out" process when entering a new program or rebuilding an old one.

You'll need a good head assistant who shares in your sense of direction.

The key to a good relationship with your assistant(s) is contained in a single word: **Professionalism.**

As a coach, you will constantly transmit your values to your players, whether consciously or unconsciously. Sometimes you'll lose players whose values differ widely from yours.

Most of the athletes (employees) you come in contact with will accept your values as best for the team. Many of those players will, in fact, adopt your values into their own lives, which is probably the most important and lasting contribution you'll make to the people who comprise your team.

As mentioned previously, coaching styles vary with the individual. But, by examining a coach's program closely, you can see some basic guidelines by which they adhere.

1. Consistent relationships with their players. This doesn't mean that you have to treat all players alike; rather, it means that your players have the right to fair and equal treatment, whether in disciplinary matters or in helping them to solve personal problems.

If you can't be consistent in your administration of a rule, you should get rid of the rule. If you can't be up front, open and honest with your players, you shouldn't expect to develop an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect among your players.

2. They don't treat all players alike. They know who can be pushed and who requires pulling. Your players' motivations as well as their personalities vary widely. Some thrive on praise and compliments. Some players need the incentive of sharp criticism to stimulate them. If you study your players individually, you'll learn what motivates them best.

3. Great coaches are never too busy to listen to their players. Communication is a two-way street.

4. No matter how hard they drive their players, they treat them with dignity and respect. Don't rob them of their pride.

5. They are always searching for team leaders. Peer pressure is normally a powerful motivating force. Good team leaders can simplify your tasks enormously.

6. Organization. Good organization is a habit. Good coaches are good administrators. They can't afford not to be!

You still may not consider your crew a team in the sport of golf course management. Or, if you do, you may not agree with my viewpoint. But, you need to be aware that my philosophy of management exists, if for no other reason than to prepare your crew to work harder when going up against teams like mine.

Best of luck . . . Coach!