

Dealing With People

*Managing Your Staff Needn't Be More Difficult
Than Mowing Grass and Battling Insects*

If You Want Something Done Right, Do It Yourself!

The days when that was an option are mostly over. Maintaining a golf course today means learning to manage a staff, not just care for turf and maintain equipment.

"Today's golf course superintendent is perceived as one of the true professionals at the club," says Jeff Burgess, Director of Golf Maintenance for the prestigious Weston Golf & Country Club, Toronto, Canada. "You've got to wear a lot of different hats to be a superintendent. You have to know grass, but you also have to be politically correct, a good communicator and a good motivator for your staff. People skills and presentation skills are becoming more and more important."

Sometimes, taking care of plants and machines is the easy part, but here are suggestions for honing your management skills:

Learn to Communicate Clearly

Employees who feel they are part of the overall plan for a successful course feel better about what they do and are more willing to pitch in and pull extra duty. But, don't just give them a quick overview, bring them in on the little things, too. Changes in work or vacation schedules, special assignments, or a new format for their payroll may seem minor to you, but

these can be big deals to your crew. Explain things and you prevent costly rumors.

Share Responsibility

You cannot do everything yourself and when you come to grips with that, you are way ahead. You have to learn to delegate responsibilities to your staff — and you have to let them make some of their own mistakes and solve problems in their own way. Just because it isn't your way, doesn't mean it's the wrong way.

Establish Clear Guidelines

Even though you are giving your staff more freedom to grapple with day-to-day decisions doesn't mean you're giving up control. The bottom line responsibility still falls on your shoulders. Set up a clear set of guidelines so your staff knows when to handle problems themselves and when to call you in. Be open to staff recommendations and don't second guess your people's decisions — especially not in front of the rest of the staff. When everyone knows the ground rules, everyone can function more efficiently.

Don't Make Disagreements Personal

If you do disagree with a decision one of your people has made, or the way he or she is operating, don't take

it personally. Maintain a professional attitude and be objective.

When You Notice Problems, Act

While it isn't good to try to do too much, it is equally harmful to wait too long to react to a problem situation. When you identify a problem, take action, but do it in a positive, constructive way. Don't just nitpick and criticize.

It Doesn't Take Long To Say "Thank You"

Think back to your own experience and former bosses. A word or two of praise for a job well done, and a simple "thank you," go a long way in boosting employee confidence. Your staff needs to know when you're pleased with their performance, not just when you aren't.

Don't Treat Every Employee the Same

Blasphemy! No. All employees don't possess the same skills, the same experience or the same temperament. That means you shouldn't have the same expectations for everyone, nor should you try to motivate or manage everyone with the same style. Some need a tight reign and precise directions, while others need freedom to tackle problems on their own. Your most difficult job may be figuring out which is which.

Don't Make Hasty Decisions

Information is the key to success. Don't make management decisions without all the up-to-date information you can get — from formal employee evaluations, casual conversations and periodic observations of your own. By knowing what's going on you can avoid unpleasant surprises — for you and the crew.

(Ed. Note: This article was reprinted with permission from JD Approach.)

Mel Strand, CEO
35 years experience

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