

Managing a Crew

by Boyd Montgomery, CSFM; Sylvania Recreation Commission

First things first! We need to change the title to Managing a TEAM! After all, to effectively manage your employees, you need to work together as a team. There are five key aspects to managing your team!

1) In order to give guidance to your team, you must first start at the beginning and develop goals and guidelines for your facilities or field. This could mean your organization having a mission statement stating that your organization is to provide the best quality facilities for your community. It could also mean having a high profile field in your organization for which specific goals and guidelines have been set. Organizational goals will need to be better defined into specific departments. Your organization might have programming, facility maintenance, operational, and capital goals and guidelines. Specific field goals and guidelines will be easier to define.

2) Once goals and guidelines are defined, you will need to make job descriptions for the team members that will have to meet the set goals and guidelines. Job descriptions should be in outline form and detail all the aspects you expect that specific position to complete. A job description should be broken down into five categories: job summary, supervision, task description, compensation, and qualifications. A job description needs to be developed for each position, not just management. Seasonal team members are just as important to the success of the operation as management.

3) Team training is one of the single most important commitments your company or organization can make. It is tied into so many other factors that affect the way you operate and do business. Employee safety, equipment care and use, customer care and safety, company/organization image, productivity, and time management all tie into proper staff training. Team training should not be looked at as a burden but an investment in your company/organization.

How do you go about building a proper training program? First, you must identify your company/organization goals, expectations, and long range planning. Finding and reading your company/organization's mission statement can help you find some answers. Next, you need to identify your facilities, their requirements, and the equipment you have. At this point, it is also good to sit down with your boss, board of directors, and representatives from the user groups to get an understanding of what their expectations are for the facilities. Approach your meetings with an open mind knowing that some of the things that might be expected by some parties might not be feasible due to budgets and equipment. If those situations do occur, make sure you, as a turf professional, give them the reason why their expectations cannot be met and possible solutions.

Once you have all this information, what do you do with it? As a turf professional this is when your knowledge and expertise will come into play. Break down the information by facilities and their maintenance requirements. Establish staff

requirements for each facility. From this information you will be able to start developing your training program. Here are some examples: One of the requirements might be to maintain your soccer fields at the facility at 1.5" cut with a reel mower. Assuming you have a grass that can tolerate that cut and you have a reel mower, you could set up your operator training for that facility to include reel mower operations and maintenance (daily, monthly, and yearly), safety issues, and also include cultural practices to maintain grass at 1.5" cut. Another example would be if your team is also responsible for cleaning the surrounding (non-field) facilities i.e. restrooms, stands, and trash. Your team training program would include training on infectious diseases, safety and health concerns, and hepatitis vaccinations along with the proper way to accomplish such tasks.

Once you have gathered your information and set up your program for each facility, how do you go about actually training? The majority of us in this industry are guilty of "throwing them to the sharks." That is, giving minimal instruction and turning them loose to learn from

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their mistakes. Your only hope is that their "mistakes" are minor inexpensive problems. How many times is that the case? I would wager not many! Who is to blame when this happens? Can you honestly blame someone that has not been properly trained? No! The actual blame falls on you and your training practices. Maybe when you hired your new team member, your trainer was busy with a major project and you were buried under a mountain of paperwork. Does that sound like an excuse for not properly training? No! The simple fact is that if you do not take the time to train, you will spend more time than you can believe fixing the mistakes.

In order to develop a viable training program, you will have to have an understanding of how your team is set up. Do you have full-time employees, hire a lot of seasonal team members, or have a mixture of both? You also must have an understanding of what motivates each of your employees. Motivation is a key factor in the success of your training program. Don't just tell your team that they HAVE to show up for the training session - motivate each of them to attend. That way they will walk away from that experience with a feeling of accomplishment. Unfortunately, you as a turf professional are going to have to find this motivation factor. There are all different types of motivation: money; advancement; accomplishment; sense of

appreciation, and leadership are just a few. Here is an example: If you have a team member that has been through the training session a couple times and their motivation is leadership, you can put them in charge of running a small part of the training session. You will want to hold several training sessions a year with your team (include equipment safety and maintenance, public safety and operator safety, public image, and team development in each training session.) Allow those team members that are not trained on various pieces of equipment the opportunity at each session to learn the necessary procedures. Also, bring in various speakers on those topics to talk to your team at these sessions.

An important element of any training program is the equipment. Since this can be a company/organization's biggest investment, a team member should not use equipment unless properly trained. This can be a great motivation point for some team members that would like to operate a different piece of equipment within your fleet. Training on equipment should include operations, safety issues, and maintenance (daily, monthly, and yearly). Safety is something that you cannot stress enough. The last thing you need is a team member getting injured due to the lack of training. All safety aspects should be covered:

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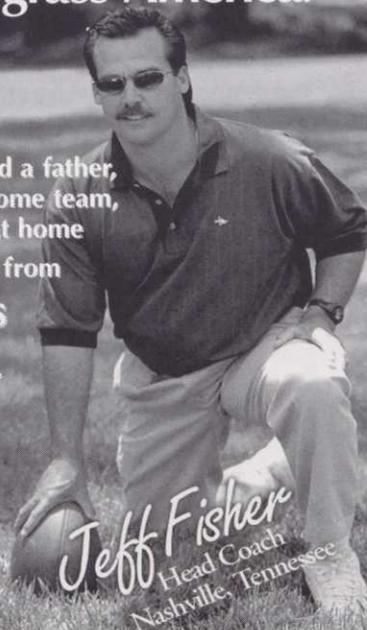
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equipment safety; first aid and CPR training; public safety, and occupational hazards safety just to name a few. This training can be done with videos or having experts from this field come in and talk. It is also likely that this will be the most expensive part of your training session. Companies/organizations should view this as money well spent. Public Image should be touched on during each session due to the fact that in our industry team members are in contact with the public on a daily basis. Topics that should be discussed are dress codes, proper crisis notification and speaking, rules of the facility, and improving the overall image of the company/organization. The last aspect of the training session, team development, is where "fun" enters the equation. Good training sessions will include team development training in every session. This is where you want your team to learn the "team" concepts. There are plenty of games and challenges on the market that can be used to build team spirit, trust, and friendships.

4) 90% of all organizational problems stem from or can be traced to ineffective communications! There are 4 basic styles of communication:

- Contributor - Task oriented providing good technical data, does his/her homework, pushes self and others to set high performance standards, and uses resources wisely.
- Communicator - Process oriented effective listener and facilitator of involvement, consensus building, feedback, and the building of an informal, relaxed climate.
- Collaborator - Goal-oriented sees the vision, mission, or goal of the team as paramount but is flexible and open to new ideas, willing to pitch in and work outside his/her defined role, and able to share the limelight.
- Challenger - Questions the goals, methods, and even the ethics of the organization or group, is willing to disagree with authority, and encourages the team to take well-conceived risks.

Understanding how people communicate will help you better motivate your team members. Present your

problem solving ideas in a way that earns credibility and respect. Keep your supervisors informed without it being gossip or tattle-tale. Weekly/bi-weekly team meetings will help insure that your team is on the same page. Relay constructive criticism without it being taken personally. Remember - your team members have feelings! If you need to discipline one of them make sure you are doing it in a comfortable and secure area. Leave professional impressions throughout the organization.

Some important communication words are: I admit I made a mistake; You did a GOOD job; What is your opinion; Thank You! and We. One least important communication word is I.

5) Always remember that the success you enjoy everyday is due in large part to the efforts of each team member. Many of us never get the extra pat on the back or call stating what a great job we have done. Make sure your team members know how valuable they are to the success of the operation. When good fortune shines on your efforts make sure that you acknowledge the hard work of those who got you there, whether it's with a free lunch every once in a while; a note or card in their locker or paycheck, or just a hearty "THANK YOU!" Encourage all your management to do the same. There is a great book written by Bob Nelson - "1001 Ways to Reward Employees." Many of the ideas in this book are low cost ideas that will really go a long way to making your team members feel appreciated.

The majority of Sports Turf Managers got into this business because they loved to work outside and with people. In reality, 80-90% of your time will be spent on managing people and 10-20% will be on working outside! If you can train and develop a successful team, any challenges that come your way can be overcome!



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