

# SPORTS TURF MANAGER

... for better, safer Sports Turf

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## Managing Seasonal Workers

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**M**anaging seasonal workers takes a distinct set of skills. Not only do you have the normal stresses involved with managing employees, but you also have the added stress of knowing that your employees will be with you for a short time and that you will have to rehire next season. This mass turnover means that every season you face the difficult tasks of recruiting and hiring quality staff; orienting and training them to become proficient very quickly; motivating staff to do the quality job that needs to be done; and providing compensation in a seasonal atmosphere.

Employers of seasonal staff face an uphill battle at the outset. They are forced to become very adept at recruiting the best employees for their less than ideal workplaces. By "less than ideal" I refer to the conditions of a seasonal workplace: temporary, part time jobs that are usually low paying and do not offer benefits.

### Recruiting Employees

Recruiting refers to the process during which employers seek out possible new staff members. Several recruiting sources include: word-of-mouth, referrals, job boards, co-op programs, professional associations, job fairs, newspaper advertisements, and returning employees. The recruiting sources that an employer uses

depends on several factors: time available, geographic location, funds available, the expertise and comfort level of the individual doing the hiring, sources available, and so on. For instance, an employer with a limited budget may not want to place an advertisement in a newspaper. Likewise, an employer not in a geographic location in proximity to universities or community colleges may not use job boards or co-op programs as a major source of recruits. If the positions that need to be filled have no direct ties to a professional association, that may eliminate professional associations as a potential source of recruits.

### Screening Resumes

The next step is screening resumes to determine who you interview – a genuine skill. It is very easy to let the perfect candidate slip by during the resume screening process, so proceed very carefully. Focus on different aspects of the resume for different positions. For instance, if education is not important for the job, then don't focus on the candidates' education. Take your time! First sort the resumes you receive into three piles – yes, maybe, and no. Never go back to the no pile; you put the resumes in that pile for a reason. Start



with the yes pile; if you still require candidates, cautiously move to the maybe pile.

### Conducting Interviews

Now you are ready to conduct the interviews. It is important to fully understand the job

for which you are hiring before you conduct an interview. The best way to do this is with a job profile. Write down and understand the importance of the following with respect to the job: experience (both direct and related), skills, knowledge, education, personality traits, attitude, and longevity in the position. The importance of each of these factors depends on the specific job.

Next determine the actual interview questions. The questions that you ask depend on several factors: the level of the position; what's important to the position; and what's important to the department and the company. Do not ask questions that are protected by the prohibited grounds of discrimination. These include race, religion, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, age, record of offences, marital status, family status, and

*continued on the back cover ...*

In this issue of Sports Turf Manager, you'll find ...

2 Advertising Opportunities

6 Effective Delegating

12 Turf Related Injuries

4 The President's Desk

8 Soil vs. Sand Sports Fields

13 Turfgrass Benefits

5 The Service Department

10 No Mow Lawn

14 Press Releases

... continued from front cover

handicap. Phrase your questions so that you can learn as much about the candidate that relates to the position for which you are hiring. Some good questions include: what did you like best about your last job; what did you like least about your last job; and if you could have made one suggestion to management at one of your previous jobs, what would it have been and why?

### Staff Training and Motivation

Once you've hired your staff, it's time to orient and train them. This is a crucial step for seasonal staff. Seasonal staff have a very short period of time in which to become proficient in their new jobs. Take a golf course for example: you hire part time greenskeepers once the course is open in the spring because you have no work, nor a labour budget, prior to the course opening. However, once the course is open, it's full speed ahead with respect to having the course ready for play and routine maintenance. This leaves little time to train your new staff how to do the job properly.

Remember that training is continuous; it need not stop after the initial orientation. In fact, it shouldn't. Nothing acts as a motivator more than on-going training. Not only does it ensure that staff are very aware of what needs to be done and the proper way to do it, but also it sends a very powerful message that you feel they are worth your time, effort, and money even though they will be leaving you at the end of the season. This, in turn, will help to create a productive staff.



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There are several motivating ideas that you can utilize to keep your seasonal employees happy and productive. These include one-on-one discussions, incentives, compensation, and staff surveys. The most obvious, and common, of these is compensation. It's no surprise to employers

that people work for money. However, most businesses, including golf and country clubs, do not have unlimited budgets. This means that there are usually other jobs available that pay the same or more than the jobs you have to offer. Therefore, you need to differentiate yourself using other motivators. For instance, one-on-one discussions can be very beneficial. These can be quick, informal discussions with each of your employees throughout the season. This invites open communication and a comfortable rapport between manager and employee. Also, they can help to prevent disciplinary problems by preventing or stopping them before they become serious. The benefits of open communication alone can be tremendous.

Incentives are an obvious way to keep employees happy and productive. There are several things an employer can do that do not cost a lot of money, or take up much of your time. Something like providing employees with an employee handbook makes them feel valued, as well as answering many questions and allowing employees the opportunity to fully understand what your organization stands for and what is expected of them. Also, simple employee outings such as golf tournaments, staff baseball games, picnics, bowling, lunch, and birthday cards go a long way in creating a staff that work well together and feel secure in their jobs. This, in turn, creates a staff that are motivated to do their best for you.

Another idea is a confidential staff survey. Not only does this allow staff an anonymous method of giving their ideas and complaints, it can tell you an enormous amount about what your staff feel you are doing well and what they believe needs improvement. Remember, anything you can do to positively distinguish your workplace from another will assist you in maintaining productive and happy seasonal employees. ♦

*For more information regarding managing seasonal workers, or any other human resources training and development issues, please contact Rhonda Gordon, owner of Gordon Consulting, at (519) 823-1088. Gordon Consulting specializes in advising the golf club and private club industries. Rhonda has also been a Human Resources Manager for over eight years – first at retail giant Woolworth Canada in Toronto, and currently at the prestigious Westmount Golf and Country Club in Kitchener. Rhonda is also an instructor at Conestoga College in Kitchener.*

## Coming Events

### March 7 & 14

University of Guelph, Office of Open Learning *Pesticide Applicators' Certification Exam Preparation Course*, Guelph Turfgrass Institute Guelph, ON. Call: (519) 767-5000

### March 8 & 9

Ontario Parks Association  
44<sup>th</sup> Annual Educational Seminar  
*Protecting Tomorrow Today*  
*Explorations 2000 Trade Show*  
(March 8), Toronto, ON  
Call: (416) 426-7157

### March 22-26

*Canada Blooms*, Toronto, ON  
Call: (800) 730-1020

### April 7-9

Ontario Amateur Softball Association  
*Annual Convention*, Midland, ON  
Call Bea Weber at (519) 824-8061

### April 30 - May 5

Ontario Recreation Facilities Association Inc. *45th Annual Professional Development Program Corporate Exhibition & Marketplace* (May 3), University of Guelph, Guelph, ON. Call: (416) 426-7062

### July 11, 12 or 13

*3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Solving Turf Problems*  
University of Guelph, Guelph, ON.  
Call Marilyn Dykstra at (519) 767-6258 or Pam Charbonneau at (519) 824-4120 ext. 2597

### August 16

Sports Turf Association  
*13<sup>th</sup> Annual Field Day*  
Guelph Turfgrass Institute, Guelph, ON  
Call: (519) 763-9431

### August 22

Guelph Turfgrass Institute  
*Research Field Day & Summer Turf Workshops*, Guelph, ON  
Call: (519) 767-5009

