

## “Strictly Business”

By Bob Costa

It's no secret that a productive maintenance staff is one of the keys to a successful maintenance operation. The benefits are not only reflected in a better maintained golf course, but also in fewer employee related headaches.

Having a productive work force becomes more critical when your operation is limited with a small staff. What's the solution? It begins with hiring competent employees, then providing the proper training and guidance so they can succeed. Sounds simple doesn't it? We've no doubt heard about it in seminars, or read about it in books on management before, but how do we make it work for us?

After years of frustrating experiences I have developed a system which I feel has worked very well at our golf courses. Here's how it works.

## GCSAA — Public Relations (Cont'd)

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comments on the development of environmental principles for golf courses in the U.S., professional image and titles, Audubon Schools, a new slogan for the Association, corporate sponsorship of events and "Par For The Course."

Many ideas were exchanged by the committee whose members geographically represent the membership. The consensus amongst the group was that we are pleased by the direction and efforts being made through the various programs, however, one thing is very clear. In order for any of these programs to succeed they must be embraced and supported by the membership.

Begin by making a list of the qualities you expect from your employees. For me it's: **Communication Skills** - How can we train our employees, and set performance goals if we can't communicate? **Reliability/dependability** - Employees are of no value if they're not at work, or not on time. **Have pride in their performance** - All of what we do is visual, employees who care about quality are essential. **Motivation** - There's always more work than there is time. Employees who aren't productive are a handicap.

Once you know what it is you want, it's time to go find it. Take interviewing seriously. Develop a list of questions that helps you determine whether an employee has these qualities, and don't hesitate to mention, up front, that you demand these qualities from your staff. Check references and never hire an individual after the first meeting.

Bring them back several days later for a more informal interview on the golf course. You'd be surprised what you might learn. Lastly, don't be swayed with someone's golf course or maintenance experience, unless this is one of the conditions you have established for hire. Maintenance skills can be taught, character can't. I've never seen a supervisor who has been able to teach an employee pride.

Once you have reached a decision and hired an individual, the next step is to provide sufficient training. To be truly effective, training should occur prior to an employee setting foot on the golf course. One of the biggest pitfalls of on the job training is it never gets done, or it gets done poorly. Here is some information you should consider including in a new hire training program: a job description, a

policy, safety and procedural handbook specific for the maintenance department, safety training and equipment operation videos, and a tour of the golf course and maintenance facility.

Most training programs fail because they are rushed, and poorly organized. Try using videos, written materials and a checklist that outlines the training program to help make the training more efficient, freeing you up, so you can fulfill the other requirements of your day.

As an employee is transitioning into his, or her job, they are naturally curious about their performance. Take this opportunity to communicate with them regularly, and provide constructive feedback. This is your chance to reinforce good performance and correct bad habits before they become chronic. I have found that a

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The role of GCSAA is to develop the programs and provide the resources for public relations efforts. It is our responsibility as members to get involved at the grass roots level and make a difference.

One of the most exciting activities during the meeting was the opportunity to participate in the planning of "Par For The Course". For those of you who have never seen it, it can be described in one word — **impressive**. For an Association of our size (15,000) it's quite a feat to have a weekly television show on a major network. The biggest complaint, justifiably so, is the 4:30 a.m. west coast time slot on Sunday morning. Unfortunately ESPN calls the

shots on this one, however, in 1996 episodes will also be shown on ESPN 2 Wednesday nights at 10:00 p.m.

Although it is certainly a show we should want to watch, the target audience are golfers, and an occasional non-golfer. One excellent suggestion was to tape several episodes and show them in the pro shop throughout the day. Just think of the audience you could capture while the golfers are waiting out a frost delay.

The show format is designed to encompass all aspects of golf, including features on environmental projects and maintenance practices, its message is simple, promote and add exposure to golf course superin-

tendents. Commit to helping make it happen.

If I could summarize my feelings as I returned home, it is that we are being led at the national level by bright, dedicated individuals who truly have the best interests of superintendents at heart. The low road would be to sit back and follow their lead, let them fight the battles while we lose the war. I challenge each of you to find a way in which you can raise the image of golf course superintendents just one notch. Take advantage of the opportunities and resources which are available and travel the high road. Make a difference. ♦

## NorCal Sierra Nevada Meeting A Success

On a day whose dark clouds brought the news of Steve Young's shoulder injury and was punctuated by the Raiders humiliation on Monday Night Football, the silver lining proved to be the success of the NorCal Sierra Nevada joint meeting, hosted by Sonoma Golf Club. Attendees at this year's event, which numbered over 150, experienced an informative talk from GCSAA's Scott Smith, a tasty south of the border lunch, and a great afternoon of golf.

Smith, director of Media Relations and Video Services, discussed the need to improve the image of golf course superintendents and highlighted several programs GCSAA has developed to assist superintendents. He pointed out that perception is the key to image development and therefore, superintendents must utilize every opportunity to project a professional image. He praised superintendents for the job that we do, particularly as it relates to environmental management. Our short-coming, Smith stated, has been our failure to effectively tell our story, which has manifested itself in our lack of recognition

He urged superintendents to actively participate in public relations efforts, noting that the success of the GCSAA's public relations campaign relies heavily upon its members. Smith cited several examples of how each of us could enhance our image. His ideas were as fundamental as being more conscious of how we dress, to enrollment in the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program.

Smith's presentation concluded with a viewing of a promo tape featuring "Par For The Course". To increase viewership, the 1996 schedule includes telecasts every Sunday, March through November, and a rebroadcast on ESPN 2, Wednesdays at 10:00 p.m. The show was created to increase the exposure of golf course superintendents and highlight environmental projects. Thus far, it has been a success on both counts.

A classic fall day greeted those who took part in the afternoon shotgun. On behalf of all of those who participated, we thank Larry Norman, his staff, and the entire staff at Sonoma Golf Club for hosting a very successful event. A final word of thanks is

due to Ross Brownlie of Farwest Supply and Chuck Dal Pozzo from O.M. Scotts for hosting the beverage carts. All proceeds were donated to the scholarship fund. ♦

## Strictly Business (Cont'd)

formal evaluation scheduled after 90 days, and 6 months during the first year, helps to guide an employee, provides a vehicle to set performance goals, and demonstrates your interest in their performance.

One last bit of advice that has made a big difference in our operations. Consider hiring permanent part time employees. Our philosophy has been to hire quality, competent part time staff that can be groomed and trained for an eventual full-time position. This approach has allowed us to fill, full time positions, with employees who are trained, and with whom we have had a chance to evaluate over a period of time. They benefit, from the opportunity to be promoted into a full time position, and we benefit by improving the quality and productivity of our full time staff. ♦

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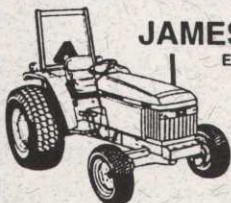
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