

Employer/Employee relations: walking the two-way street

In the article "Condo/Apartment Landscapes" (October, 1985), you summarize findings of a recent WT&T survey. What grabbed my immediate and emotional attention was that, "by far, finding good personnel was the most-cited problem of undertaking the landscape maintenance of a condo property."

My first impulse as an employee is to twist the perspective and counter that it's difficult as well to find good management to work for. But that's not very constructive criticism. My own experiences suggest that—trite but true—the key factors to acquiring and maintaining good personnel are wages, benefits and employer-employee relations.

Wages and benefits for any employee in any undertaking must be sufficient to provide a decent standard of living. Where is this money to come from? From the consumer, to start. The consumer must start paying the costs of consuming and abandon the search for the "Cadillac job with the Chevette price tag." Only the worker bears the

brunt of that philosophy.

Management must undertake to sell quality to the consumer and to charge the consumer the real price of that quality. Sure, the cost of that quality will be higher, but a consumer who understands that they're buying a quality product produced by workers who are being well-rewarded for their work will be willing to pay the price.

Well-rewarded employees are likely to return season after season, providing experience, consistency and a feeling of pride in a job well done. Unrewarded employees are like Dixie Cups: use 'em up and throw 'em away; more can always be had.

Two-way, symmetrical communication between employer and employee is the *sine qua non* of maintaining good personnel. Employees need positive as well as negative feedback, and they need to know that management has an open door/open ear policy. This is not a revelation, I know, but some employers still have not seen this light.

These thoughts are drawn from reflecting on my experiences last summer as a groundskeeper. A uniform, workman's comp, \$4.39 per hour and unemployment are the only benefits. A worker starts out with the best of attitudes and quickly bogs down in the "us-them" mentality promoted by both "us" and "them." A good worker becomes a bad worker.

Someone wrote once last summer on the lunchroom chalkboard: "Don't expect maximum effort for minimum wage." I tried to suggest that the opposite is also true: "Don't expect maximum wage for minimum effort." See? It becomes a vicious circle. No one wants to unilaterally give in, and the feud and distrust continue. There must be communication to resolve all this obstinacy.

In conclusion, if anyone reading this wants a good worker, write me.

Lorelle B. Knoth

827 Wisconsin

Stevens Point, WI 54481

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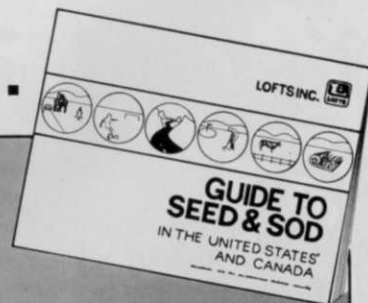
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