



Working within 'the system'

It's mid-summer. Temperatures in most parts of the country are frequently reaching into three digits. As mercury in thermometers rises, so do tempers. And you are faced with the annual question: How to save those most valued employees during this especially trying time of the year?

Dave Coyle has an answer.

Coyle is acting director of Cleveland, Ohio's Department of Parks, Recreation and Properties. He is responsible for 35 year-round maintenance workers at the 10 city cemeteries, plus summer help.

Coyle cites several steps he's taken in recent years that have not only kept employees happy, but increased their productivity.



Dave Coyle

"We started 'quality circle' meetings with workers from the Department of Urban Forestry," notes Coyle. "We saw a 43 percent increase in productivity by just listening to the workers." When an employee presented an idea that would increase morale or productivity, it was implemented immediately—no ifs ands or buts.

Coyle also says that working with appropriate labor unions is a way to avoid extra personnel problems. "We've joined hands with Laborers Union Local 1099 to manage people collectively to do a good job," he notes.

Each of the cemeteries has a supervisor who designs his or her own maintenance program, thus getting field people involved in management tasks and making their job less thankless. "It's worked very well for us," Coyle says. "With that comes pride of ownership. As a result, we have neat, dedicated workers who really enjoy their jobs. And if there's a problem, the supervisor takes care of it immediately."

Coyle notes that this system has also helped foster good relations with the denizens of neighborhoods near the cemeteries.

Some government employees at Coyle's level use "the system" as an excuse for not turning out well-kept landscapes. But Coyle has found the secrets: work within the confines of government; keep your employees' welfare foremost in every decision.

And this system-within-a-system works. Does yours?

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