

Preparing for the 1996 SEASON

by ED & AARON WANDTKE

It's January. You're counting the days until the unofficial break of winter is over.

But this winter season is a time when you can improve your skills and learn the latest news from across the green industry.

The traditional focus during the winter season is on equipment repair, vehicle repair or replacement, and employee training to comply with state certification requirements. However, most owners and managers overlook their own needs when continuing education opportunities come around each year.

Sure, you recognize the benefits of having technicians and foremen achieve various levels of technical proficiency and supervisory effectiveness. But you should also recognize the need to focus on your own continued business development. Preparing for 1996 by improving your personal business skills will improve the competency of your entire staff.

The three basic areas of management skill you should become proficient at—whether you're a small businessman, golf course superintendent or grounds manager—are **finance**, **personnel** and **marketing**. Competency in these key areas requires regular education and reinforcement.

So before you start the 1996 season in earnest, you should go through the list of questions attached to this article and make sure you've got all the answers.

Finance: misunderstood?

The most important of the three basic areas of management skill is understanding

finances. Key team members must have a basic understanding of finance and how it contributes to the overall operation of the unit or team.

When people begin to understand the financial picture, they soon find ways to cut costs and re-evaluate how time and money



is spent.

Compare the 1995 budget to the 1996 budget to provide key employees with insight into the consistency of the unit's financial performance. Prepare a budget to identify problem areas and opportunities where costs may be cut or may need adjusting up or down.

Monitor cash flow and budgets to avoid cash crises. To maintain the profitability of the unit, you may have to eliminate costs which are not affordable at a given time. This also requires constant attention.

Personnel: a new twist

Each year, old employees become wiser

and new employees are introduced to the system. The revolving door requires you to be dedicated to improving your skills every year.

Motivating and training are the key components to employee improvement. You must be able to communicate with employees and implement the components, and that takes extensive training because employee personalities are always changing. "People" skills and communication skills are difficult to teach and even tougher to implement.

It's not always easy to find the right incentive to motivate employees. But you can overcome this obstacle if you know their personalities and goals, and then choose incentive plans tailored to the individual worker.

"Training" refers to technical know-how, like weed identification or operating a new piece of equipment. "Education" refers to teaching a new process or increasing an employee's knowledge regarding a certain subject.

If you are investing a lot of time and money in training employees, the costs should be justified through increased knowledge and productivity. If there is none, you should re-evaluate the programs.

An employee may understand all the issues discussed during training, but if he or she doesn't apply the tools, the training is a lost investment.

To judge training effectiveness, assess

*Continuation and Off-Season checklist
on page 29*