

“If you’re a mechanic, you’re a mechanic,” Paul Williams says like it’s the most obvious thing in the world.

But today’s green industry demands so much more of maintenance shop managers and chief mechanics like Williams. It demands organizational skills. Managerial skills. But, most of all, it demands that they realize that their customers are their co-workers. These co-workers are the people that count on them to provide safe and properly op-

erating vehicles and equipment.

For this reason, shop managers/mechanics aren’t usually judged by how cleverly they can patch up equipment. A more important measure of their worth is how effectively they keep mowers and other production equipment on the job; and service delivery trucks on the road. It goes without saying that all of this machinery must be operating safely and dependably.

Few golf courses or landscape companies can count on a shop manager/mechanic with the experience of Paul Williams. He runs the shop for Greenscapes, a growing landscape maintenance company in Naples, FL. The lines on his face and the strength of his grip describe, much better than words, a lifetime of maintaining and repairing equipment, most of it big stuff. He’s worked from Mexico to Argentina; from Kenya to The Republic of Congo. And now in south Florida.

Since Greenscapes has a thriving landscape maintenance business and a separate sod division it relies on equipment as varied as semi tractors, professional mowers and gas-powered string trimmers. Williams says that almost all of the maintenance and repair of Greenscapes’ vehicles and other machinery are done in-house. He usually works six days a week.

Williams knows that he must maintain cooperative relationships with the people in his company who daily use Greenscapes’ vehicles and equipment.

“If you don’t have good communications, you’re dead,” he says. In his case that means speaking Spanish, which he does fluently. Greenscapes’ work force is mostly Mexican-born.

“It would be almost impossible for me to do

Miracle workers?

The green industry demands that its mechanics be repairmen, managers, and, yes, sometimes even diplomats and trainers.

By RON HALL, managing editor

A golf course maintenance shop may contain well over \$100,000 worth of precision mowers and related equipment. It takes a skilled individual to manage this.

(far right) Experienced mechanics, like Greenscapes’ Paul Williams, say communication with production workers crucial to maintenance.



what I do if I didn't understand Spanish," he explains.

Williams says one of his main goals is to keep the production workers reporting to him about the condition and any needed repairs of their equipment.

"You can chew a guy out and give him a rough time because he did something, but that doesn't do any good. I would much rather the person come to me and tell me if something's broke," says Williams. "Then we can fix it. Being diplomatic never hurts in any situation."

Include inter-personal people skills in the list of things today's shop manager must bring to his career.

"What the industry needs now is intelligent, management-oriented mechanics," says Jon Piersol, whose Lake City Community College (Fla.) Turf Equipment program is one of the best in the nation.

"These guys have to be 50 percent mechanics and 50 percent managers. In the golf industry this means somebody who can help design the maintenance facility for you," says Piersol. "Somebody who can set up a parts room. Somebody who knows how to order parts properly, how to read manuals, how to set up PM (preventive maintenance) programs."

Piersol ranks the development of effective PM programs as the biggest need in the maintenance shops of golf courses and landscape companies.

"Many mechanics don't understand preventive maintenance. They are fix-it-after-it-breaks mechanics," says Piersol. "But, in most cases, the equipment shouldn't have broken in the first place if they had read the manuals and followed what the manuals told them to do."

Mark Neidich, a former maintenance manager who now operates Cincinnati-based Fleet Consultants, says that every golf course or landscape company maintenance shop should have "a system" for PM. The system doesn't have to be elaborate. But it should be written down, and it has to be workable.

"As a fleet grows you can't keep track of all the different pieces of equipment and when you need to service them," says Neidich. "You need to be able to plan ahead and schedule the service."

That system should be tied to a calendar of maintenance or repair events, broken down to what a shop manager wants to accomplish by the year, month, and week.

In Paul William's case, it's a simple system. He performs preventive maintenance according to equipment manufacturers' guidelines. And, when repairs are needed, employees fill out a short form

NEED SHOP HELP?

For information concerning turf equipment training programs contact:

- ▶ Delhi SUNY, Delhi, NY, 800/963-3544
- ▶ Horry-Georgetown Technical College, 803/347-3186
- ▶ Lake City Community College, Lake City, Fla., 904/752-1822

Fleet or shop management consultants familiar with the green industry:

- ▶ Mark Neidich, Fleet Consultants, Cincinnati, Ohio, 513/231-9540
- ▶ Ron Turley, Turley Transportation Consultants, Phoenix, Ariz., 602/581-2447.

(below) Lake City Community College in Lake City, Fla, is one of several colleges in the United States offering formal training for turf equipment technicians. Shown here is Lake City's veteran staff.



describing the problem, and place it in its proper hanging folder in the shop. The employee keeps one copy of the form; each morning Paul gathers up and assesses the others to determine which repairs must be done immediately, and which can wait.

"The equipment operator is where it all starts," agrees Neidich. "The operator makes the initial visual inspection on the machine. He runs the machine every day. He knows how it should operate, how it should perform," says Neidich. "He should know how to check the oil, check the cooling system, and how to do a basic inspection daily." **LM**