

Seven Steps To Hiring— And Keeping— A Great Grounds Crew

by Louis Rovner, Ph.D.

Hiring grounds crew employees can be a tricky business. Keeping your best employees can be even trickier. But finding and retaining a top-notch crew is crucially important to a smooth-running operation.

Too many grounds crews have a record of high employee turnover, low morale and hardly any loyalty, and too many superintendents accept this state of affairs as part of the cost of doing business. Fortunately, this does not have to be the case. With a little planning, and just a little effort, you can hire ideal employees who will be with you for years to come.

The grounds crew at Riviera Country Club in Los Angeles is made up of 30 people, some who have worked there for as long as 25 years. I had the pleasure of spending part of an afternoon with Paul Ramina, the golf course superintendent at Riviera. Paul is justifiably proud of his crew, and he is certain that their loyalty, professionalism and longevity on the job are the rewards of careful selection of employees and ongoing programs which recognize his people on almost a daily basis.

The seven steps to hiring and keeping a great grounds crew are a combination of the advice I give to companies in every sector of the economy, as well as some industry-specific tips from Paul Ramina. If you follow these steps faithfully, most of your employee problems will vanish.

1. Look in the right places for new job candidates.

Before you can hire someone, you have to find them. There are several proven ways of finding and attracting new members to your team:

Referrals from other employees:

Everyone now working for you has friends and relatives. When you are in need of a new crewmember, put the word out to your current employees. One or more of them will certainly know someone who they can refer to you. Although not all of these referrals will be appropriate for your crew, one of them might.

Put ads in your local papers: This is a tried-and-true method of finding job applicants. You will save money if you advertise in small neighborhood papers that are relatively close to your facility. Their ad rates are typically much lower than citywide newspapers.

Make up some inexpensive flyers and hand them out to people at locations like unemployment office: For less than a penny a flyer, this is a truly inexpensive way to get the word out.

If all else fails, contact an employment agency: This is your most expensive option, but the right agency may be able to find applicants when you can't. Just be sure that they give you a good guarantee on the people they place with you.

Spend plenty of time on your job interviews

There is nothing that can take the place of a good interview. It gives you the opportunity to determine whether the applicant is the kind of person that you're looking for. Before you begin the interview, it is important that you're clear about the specific qualities you're looking for in an applicant and how to determine if any of your applicants have those qualities. Be certain that you are well-prepared, and use most of the interviewing time to see if your applicant fits your needs and qualifications, rather than spend-

ing time less effectively in "getting a feel for him or her." Most managers want to know if a new person will fit in with the existing crewmembers, whether he or she has a good work ethic, and whether he or she has the type and amount of experience necessary to do the job well. Good questions will lead to plenty of information about the applicant.

Your questions should be developed and written long before an interview begins. Be sure that most questions are open-ended; that is, questions that can't be answered in one or two words. For example, instead of asking an applicant, "Did you like your last job," use an open-ended question, such as, "Please tell me what you liked best about your last job." In this way, the applicant will be doing most of the talking during the interview.

Take some time to make applicants feel comfortable before you get into the meat of the interview. Offer them some coffee or a soft drink. Spend a few minutes making small talk; they will almost certainly be nervous about the interview, and these small things will serve to calm them down a bit. Only then can you truly begin to know them.

It's important to be able to communicate with your people. Be certain that your applicants understand you completely, and that you can easily speak with one another. You will obviously learn this during the interview. This is important since no one can do a good job for you unless he fully understands what you want him to do.

Check your applicants' references

You should personally talk to all of an applicant's supervisors from previous jobs. Ask them about the things that are important to you. For exam-

ple, did the applicant show up for work regularly? Was she always on time? Was he hard-working and honest while on the job?

Provide training

Paul Ramina is big on training. He feels that in order for people to do a good job for him, they must know exactly how he wants that job to be done. Whether you or your assistants are doing the training, be sure that it is presented in ways that are easy to understand.

Demonstrate a skill or technique for your people, and explain to them the reason for doing it in a certain way. Their understanding of the "whys" is important. Watch them while they are performing the task the first few times, and be generous with praise and positive reinforcement. This not only trains your people; it also instills pride in them.

Make sure that your people know the sports that are played at your facility

Paul likes to give his new employees lessons in golf and golf etiquette. Learning about the sport gives them the big picture they need to understand the importance of what they are doing. It also makes them more attentive to, and respectful of, golfers who are using the course. A greater understanding of their part in the overall mission of your facility will instill pride in your crewmembers and will motivate them to do a truly good job.

Show your crew that you respect them

Never forget that your employees are men and women who are working hard for the wages they earn. Like you, they have spouses, children, relatives and friends. They have needs and desires and dreams. Be sure that you treat your crewmembers as equals, and let them know that everything they do is a truly important part of your overall mission. Praise people when they do a good job. Smile at them. Show some interest in them as human beings.

Don't forget the perks

Perks are things that you do for employees that you really don't have to do. They're little extras that make your people feel good, feel special and, most of all, feel glad to be working for you. Many perks cost very little, particularly when you consider the benefits they give you. Paul Ramina provides his crew with muffins and donuts during their breaks. On the last Friday of the month the club puts on a barbecue for the crew at lunchtime. Awards are given to the Employee of the Year, and long-term crewmembers receive 5-, 10-, 15-, 20- and 25-years pins that they wear to work. Slightly more expensive perks include club jackets, uniform laundry service and a Christmas party (complete with door prizes).

Dr. Rovner is a top management consultant in Los Angeles, and the nation's leading authority on hiring and keeping the right people. He may be reached at (818) 340-6963 or by e-mail at BusinessPsych@aol.com.

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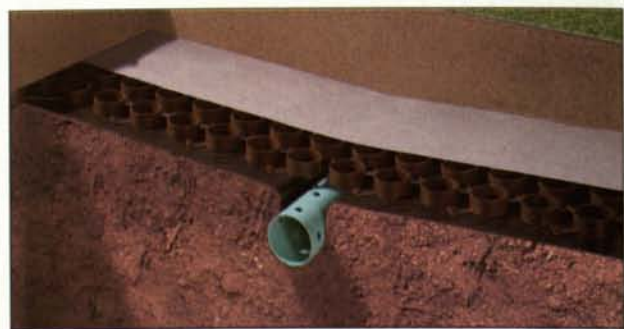
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