“IF YOU REALLY WANT TO DO SOMETHING, you’ll find a way. If you don’t, you’ll find an excuse.”
Anonymous

Some managers and owners don’t like to confront people who are underperforming. These are the people who are not doing their job up to standard. They are not performing, and can only be labeled as unsatisfactory. The sooner you confront this situation the faster it can be corrected. Don’t let it fester. It just upsets everyone they work with, and brings down the morale and energy of their peers. Those who do perform consistently state that they want their boss to fire the slackers they have to cover for and work with. They also feel that if the standards are not enforced for slackers, then why should they be working so hard?

Think of your employees in three categories: unsatisfactory, satisfactory, and excellent. We spend way too much time, energy, and stress trying to correct those that are not performing, when your energies need to be used for those who are performing. If they are not performing, there needs to be immediate negative consequences or they will continue not to perform. People do things based on consequences, so there must be some negative result for their lack of effort such as warnings, probation, suspension, or termination.

For those that are performing (the satisfactory and excellent employees), your job is to thank and praise them, and recognize and reward them. Positive results followed by positive consequences results in a continuance of that behavior. The excellent people who go above and beyond must get the highest rewards. The most should always go to the best. You can beat your head against the wall trying to change those who won’t change, or you can spend your energy with the good people. The choice is yours.

Managing across cultural and ethnic barriers

I know that some readers have front line employees who are foreign-born. These employees create many challenges, but the biggest one is managing people who have different cultural norms that act as barriers to communication. We can always break down language barriers, but people do not easily give up the cultural norms they grew up with in their native country. It is a blueprint that is embedded within them for life. We have to understand these norms. If we don’t, they easily lead to misinterpretations of the behavior observed.

When a foreign born worker first comes for an interview, don’t expect the firm hand shake and the direct eye contact. It has nothing to do with self-esteem. Many other cultures have a softer handshake. It is also common for people not to maintain eye contact out of respect for the person who is considered in a higher position. They may rarely look you in the eye. They will often smile, especially if they do not understand something you say. Just be aware of these behaviors and don’t read something into them that is not true.

Another frequent misinterpreted behavior is when a foreign-born worker speaks their native language in the work-
place. Americans often think this rude, sneaky, or unprofessional. If you have ever studied a foreign language and tried to speak it in another country you know how difficult it is. Your mind cannot interpret as fast as the language is spoken back to you. It can be stressful. That is the same reason why ethnic workers fall back on their native language. It is stressful and tiring to always attempt English, and easier to speak to another employee from the same language background in their native tongue.

The best way to approach this is to explain to them when they should be speaking English and when they can resort to their language. Let them know that it can make others feel uncomfortable and left out. Be sure you let them know that this is not a prejudice against them or their language. Always explain your expectations and reinforce the proper behavior, but at the same time honor their culture.

Employee handbook mistakes
A poorly written handbook can create legal problems. When was the last time you updated yours? State and federal laws change, and so must your handbooks. I am not giving legal advice, but you should examine your handbook and determine if it contains lots of procedures. Procedures should be in a procedures manual, while policies should be in a policies manual. The two are not the same and it just gets lawyers salivating as they claim “employee confusion.” Make sure your policies are clearly understood, and evenly enforced by all supervisors and managers. If the policy will not be enforced, leave it out. Be sure all policies are consistent with any other organizational documents.

Do not use the word “probation” as a period before permanent hiring. The reason is this may imply that once probation is over, it becomes a permanent, forever job. You eliminate the at-will status. Call this the introductory period. Use probation as the term before suspension or firing. Also, do not use the term “annual salary” because it implies you must keep them for at least a year. Finally, make sure your employees sign documents acknowledging that they can be fired at-will.

Bob Losyk, MEd., M.B.A., C.S.P. is a Certified Speaking Professional, master trainer, author, and President & CEO of Innovative Training Solutions, a Greensboro, NC consulting firm. For more information on Bob’s keynotes, seminars, best practices facilitation, panel discussion leader, and products, please visit his website at www.boblosyk.com or call 1-800-995-0344.
EVERY PROFESSION requires its share of multi-tasking challenges. But leading a perennial powerhouse football team to 40 wins in the past 4 seasons including a 5A state runner-up finish in 2006, directing an athletic program with 12 sports and 24 teams, while growing and maintaining some of the best “coach-kept” athletic turf in the state—simultaneously—can be quite a challenging undertaking to say the least! All three jobs can require full-time attention and commitment. Obviously, in order to meet the demands of all three jobs at once require time management and some very long hours.

What is a typical week like in my world? Let’s pick a week from last August, the time of year when football season is underway, AD duties are numerous, and the growing season is at its peak:

Sunday, 8/24/08:
12:30pm Walk over game field, check for fire ants, mole crickets, weeds etc.
12:45pm Cut game field twice from 2 different directions.

2:00-9:00pm Football staff meeting to evaluate our pre-season game. Install game plan for first game.
9:00pm Turn off irrigation to fields due to a late afternoon shower.

Monday 8/25/08:
7:30am Arrive at EHS. Walk the field.
7:45am Plan practice schedule. Email copies of practice schedules to entire staff. Check emails and phone messages.
8:15am Drive to bus shop for diesel fuel.
8:45am Prepare the weekly football program insert and email it and opponent’s roster to the printer.
10:00am Report for break duty.
10:30am Add students to the eligibility list.
11:50am Report for lunchroom duty.
1:15pm Call to check on injured players not at school today.
1:30pm Call the newspaper for article on Friday’s game. Check emails and phone messages.
2:00pm Athletes report to dressing room. Show film. Lift weights.
3:30pm Practice.
6:00pm Post-practice staff meeting.
6:20pm Mow practice field.

Tuesday 8/26/08:
7:15am Walk game and practice fields. Turn manual irrigation system on for practice field.
7:45am Plan practice schedule. Email copies of practice schedules to entire staff. Check emails and phone messages.
8:15am Mow game field twice from two different directions. Turn off sprinklers on practice field.
10:00am Break duty.
10:30am Prepare for tonight’s booster club meeting. Fill-out purchase orders for miscellaneous equipment and Friday’s pre-game meal.
Call athletic trainer for advice on treatment for injured players.
11:50am Lunchroom duty.
1:15pm Meet with two teachers concerning a player’s behavior/grades. Check emails and phone messages.
2:00pm Athletes report. Film. Position meetings.
3:00pm Practice
5:30pm Staff meeting.
6:00pm Booster club meeting.
7:00pm Spray game and practice fields for fire ants and mole crickets.

**Wednesday 8/27/08:**
7:30am Walk fields. Check for success of last evening’s spraying.
7:45am Plan practice schedule. Email copies of practice schedules to entire staff. Check emails and phone messages.
8:00am Gather equipment and materials to paint the game field.
8:30am Coach Gilmore and I paint all the lines and numbers on the field in preparation for Friday night’s home opener.
8:45am Paint machine will not start. Must go to town to buy a new spark plug.
9:15am Machine starts. We paint.
1:15pm Lunch break
2:00pm Athletes report. Lift weights. Team meeting.
3:00pm Practice
5:30pm Staff meeting.
6:00pm Fertilize practice field and baseball field.
7:00pm Go home for supper.
8:00pm Paint “Tiger Eyes” at midfield and “EUFALA TIGERS” in end zones.
10:45pm Go home!

**Thursday 8/28/08:**
7:30am Walk the fields.
8:00am Go over a game day checklist. Check emails and phone messages.
8:30am Call Coach White at Dothan High School.
8:45am Call Coach at BTW High School to arrange film swap for next week’s game.
9:00am Call Kelly Seed Company for prices on perennial rye-grass seed.
9:15am Complete a grade check for all varsity football players.
10:00am Break duty.
10:30am Talk to college coaches who are recruiting our players.
11:50am Lunchroom duty.
1:15pm Complete insurance claim forms for injured players who have received medical attention. Check emails and phone messages.
2:00pm Athletes report.
2:15pm Conduct walk-through practice on game field.
3:30pm Brief staff meeting.
3:45pm Leave to attend our middle school’s game in Troy.
9:30pm Arrive home.

**Friday 8/29/08:**
7:15am Report, along with players, to First Baptist Church for football prayer breakfast.
8:15am Arrive at school. Make morning announcements over school PA. Check emails and phone messages.
8:30am Meet with offensive and defensive coordinators for last minute game plan details. Watch film on DHS.
10:00am Break duty.
10:30am Check headsets. Call for prices on new DVD/VCR combos to use in film study, and a DVD duplicator. Complete purchase orders for these items.
11:50am Lunchroom duty.
1:15pm Prepare pre-game schedule for players.
2:00pm Players report. Team meeting. Hand out game jerseys and pants.
3:00pm Pep rally in gym.
3:30pm Pre-game meal in lunchroom.
5:00pm Team meeting in weight room.
5:15pm Dress for game.
6:00pm Warm-up.
7:00pm Kick-off.
9:45pm Report score to state office.
10:00pm Staff meeting. Make copies of game for film swap tomorrow. Call radio station for post game comments. Walk field.
1:30am Head home.

**Saturday 8/30/08:**
9:30am Mow game and practice fields.
12:30pm Go home and rest up for another busy week!

The above is a typical week leading up to a home game in the fall. There are obviously many other duties that were not performed during this week. Turf-related chores such as sweeping, aerating, topdressing, overseeding with ryegrass, weed spraying (for both pre and post-emergent weeds, sedges and broadleaf grasses) and fungicide spraying are performed periodically throughout the year. In addition, all turf and irrigation equipment needs periodic service and repair, which I must either schedule or perform myself.

Winning football games on Friday nights in small town south Alabama is important. At times, it seems that the collective mood of the entire town is elevated when the football team is on a roll and unfortunately vice versa! My goal is to not only provide our athletes and community with the very best possible athletic experiences, but also give them the very best in athletic turf from both an aesthetic and playability perspective. I am fortunate to have a coaching staff and school administration that share my vision and provide assistance and resources to make it all come together.

Dan Klages is head football coach, athletic director and field maintenance supervisor for Eufaula High School, Eufaula, AL.
WHAT DO YOU GET when you bring together 40 groundskeepers representing 23 Major League Baseball (MLB) teams? A beautifully renovated ball field!

Each year, the MLB groundskeepers convene in January to discuss industry issues and best practices. The conference, sponsored by The Toro Company, Covermaster and Turface Athletics, concludes with a field day to renovate a youth field in the surrounding community. Sequoia High School in Redwood City, CA was selected as the site for the renovation on January 19.

Groundskeepers from the U.S. and Canada rebuilt the pitcher’s mound, bullpen and batter’s box; mowed and edged the turf; dragged the infield; and incorporated field conditioner into the playing surfaces. “It was great to see all the MLB groundskeepers work together to provide the community and Sequoia High School with a first-class field,” said Boyd Montgomery, CSFM, CSE, and commercial district sales manager for The Toro Company. “It was especially nice to see one of MLB’s own groundskeepers giving back to his old community. Larry DiVito, now head groundskeeper for the Minnesota Twins, grew up in the area, attended Sequoia and played baseball on this very same field.”

Renovation was funded by a $40,000 grant from the Baseball Tomorrow Fund and through equipment, material and labor donations from the MLB groundskeepers, The Toro Company, Turface Athletics, Covermaster, Inc, Colony Landscaping, Barkshire Laser Leveling and West Coast Turf.

“Baseball Tomorrow Fund and its executive director, Cathy Bradley, should be commended for stepping up and supporting this event,” added Montgomery. “And thanks to Luke Yoder, the San Diego Padres’ head groundskeeper, who did an outstanding job coordinating.”
EVERY 2 YEARS the National Football League Players Association surveys its members, asking them to rank the league’s playing fields, best and worst, in both natural grass and synthetic turf categories, as well answer other question regarding their offices—the league’s playing fields.

Seventy-two percent of players prefer playing on natural grass and 15 percent favor infill systems; 11% had no preference and the others didn’t respond. Nearly 62% thought playing on synthetic turf would negatively affect their health after their careers are over. Nearly 93% said playing on artificial turf would shorten their careers; 91% said artificial surfaces cause more soreness and fatigue. And 85% said infill systems were more likely to contribute to injury.

Ninety-two percent of the players said they could tell the difference between softer and firmer infill surfaces but they were not as unanimous when it came to whether they preferred softer or firmer; 57% want softer, 17% firmer, and 27% had no answer.

Grounds crews

Nearly 85% of the players said groundskeepers play a “very significant” role in natural grass field performance and less than 1% said crews’ roles were “not significant”. The numbers were much different for artificial infill fields, where only 25% said the roles were “very significant” and 49% said grounds crews play a “somewhat significant” role in turf performance. Eighteen percent said turf managers were “not significant” in performance of artificial infill systems.

Three in four players “strongly value” the work of ground crews, 21% “somewhat value” that work and less than 1% “do not value” grounds crew efforts. Forty-five percent of respondents attribute the condition of their fields to grounds crews; 28% credit ownership; 15% stadium management; and 5% give all these parties credit for field conditions.

When asked if the top-rated crews should be in charge of turf management for Super Bowls, 87% agreed and 7% said no.

This survey was conducted at NFLPA team meetings September through November 2008. A total of 1565 active NFL players from all 32 teams voluntarily participated.

Player comments

Here are some random comments NFL players made about the league’s turf:

“Coordinate with shoe makers to see what surface/shoe combinations are the safest.”

“Create a universal guideline for both grass and turf fields. Everything else is regulated and this should be as well. Some of these fields are injuries waiting to happen. Having different types of cuts of grass introduces a lot of guesswork for equipment staff and players.”

“Grass is probably preferred by most players, me included. However, our game field is the worst I’ve ever played on. Green sand does not do the job for me like it does for television. I believe our field is extremely dangerous, especially later in the season. Something should be done!”

“I feel that a grass field that is very well maintained is the best field to play on. The best grass field I have ever been on is at Texas A&M University. Artificial infill fields always start out great... but after 2 years of soccer games and concerts, the field is a mess. The maintenance of the field is not good enough and I place the responsibility on the owner.”

“Those franchises that cannot grow grass in November and December should re-sod more frequently or switch to synthetics. Overall the quality of the fields has improved dramatically however!”

“No more games in London!”

“If a cow cannot eat it, we should not be playing on it.”

Best five grass fields
1. Arizona Cardinals
2. Tampa Bay Buccaneers
3. San Diego Chargers
4. Carolina Panthers
5. Jacksonville Jaguars

Worst five grass fields
1. Pittsburgh Steelers
2. Oakland Raiders
3. Miami Dolphins
4. Chicago Bears
5. Green Bay Packers

Best five artificial infill fields
1. Indianapolis Colts (FieldTurf)
2. Seattle Seahawks (FieldTurf)
3. Baltimore Ravens (Sportexe)
4. Atlanta Falcons (FieldTurf)
5. Detroit Lions (FieldTurf)

Worst five artificial infill fields
1. Dallas Cowboys (RealGrass)
2. Minnesota Vikings (FieldTurf)
3. New York Giants/Jets (FieldTurf)
4. St. Louis Rams (FieldTurf)
5. Buffalo Bills (AstroPlay)