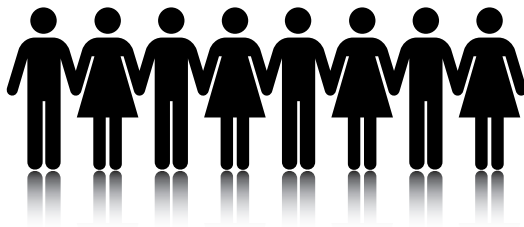




EWING



Managing your most valuable resource—*people*

Editor's note: This is the final in a series of six articles in the Ewing Professional Development Series. STMA and Ewing Irrigation have partnered in this series to bring sports turf industry professional development and career issues to the forefront.

I“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 fatiguing 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.

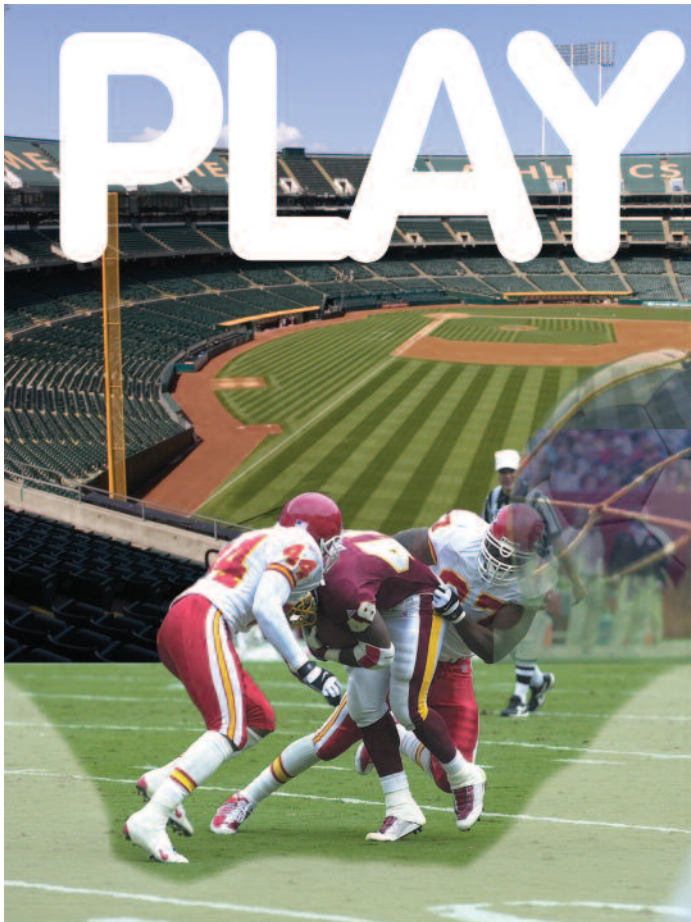
Employee handbook mistakes

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 pro-

cedures 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. ■

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