

# Keys To Unlocking Motivation In Turfgrass Industry Employees

*By learning and following the 10 keys to unlocking employee motivation, the manager can improve employee work performance and job satisfaction.*

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6

**E**very manager wants to know what specific things can be done to motivate his or her employees. There are many practical things that a turf manager can do every day to create a motivational work environment. Let's look at some specific things you can do to motivate your employees. Think of them as keys to unlocking employee motivation. By learning and following these 10 keys, you can improve employee work performance and job satisfaction.

## Key #1: Provide Praise and Positive Feedback

A turfgrass manager should never underestimate the power of sincere praise and appreciation as a motivator. We all need to be appreciated, needed and valued by others. Sincere appreciation expressed to employees for their accomplishments makes the individual feel good and want to continue to perform at a high level. All too often managers reprimand and provide negative feedback without taking the time and effort to look for the things that employees are doing well and to praise them. The issue of giving employees positive and negative feedback can be viewed as an "emotional bank account." Praise, recognition and feedback represent deposits in the emotional bank account. Conversely, constructive criticism or reprimands can be viewed as withdrawals from the emotional bank account. It is obvious from this analogy that if the supervisor is continually correcting or reprimanding an employee and providing minimal, if any, positive feedback, praise or appreciation, the result is being "overdrawn" on the emotional bank account. Employees can accept reprimands and constructive criticism if they are confident that their work truly is appreciated and that they are making a contribution to the organization.

## Key #2: Delegate Responsibility

The delegation of responsibility and authority in itself is a powerful incentive to produce motivated employees. As a manager's responsibility grows and develops, the use of delegation is critical to accomplish more through people and to provide for employees' personal growth and development. Many managers find delegation difficult for a variety of reasons. The manager has to relinquish some control over how things are done. There is a tendency to feel that if responsibilities are delegated, the manager becomes less important. It is important for turfgrass managers to remember that delegation of power is not a zero-sum game. In other words, if

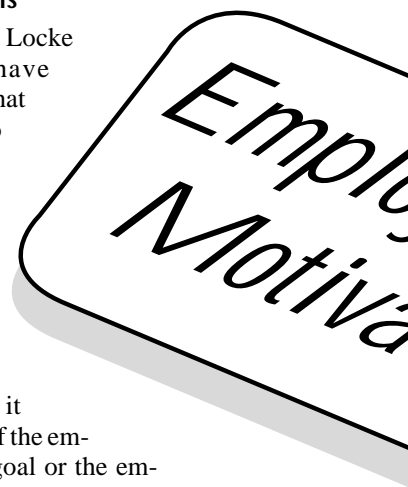
the manager delegates some power to an employee, it doesn't mean that the manager has less; what it really means is that through delegation, the entire organization has more. The more people are empowered to accept responsibility, the greater the potential for unlocking the talent of each individual. Delegation of responsibility and authority to make decisions, however, should not be given lightly. The employee must show the ability and desire to accept new responsibilities and, most importantly, it must be clear to both the manager and the employee that the employee is accountable for carrying out the assigned responsibilities.

## Key #3: Help Employees Set Goals

Researchers Locke and Latham have clearly shown that employees who have work-related goals accomplish more than those employees who do not. Research has also shown that it does not matter if the employer sets the goal or the employee sets his or her own goals, the most important issue in goal setting is that an attainable goal is set. It should also be remembered that, when the employee sets the goals there is usually more commitment to those goals. Another issue in goal setting is that employees tend to set more difficult goals than they can reasonably achieve. Working with employees to set realistic and rewarding goals results in greater motivation. It is the achievement of challenging yet attainable goals that provides the motivation for the next work assignment.

## Key #4: Provide Encouragement

At first, providing encouragement may sound a lot like providing praise and positive feedback. However, there is an important difference. Praise and positive feedback is given after someone has achieved something valuable and worthwhile in their work; in short, after someone has done a good job. Encouragement, on the other hand, comes prior to someone tackling or completing a challenging task. Employees who feel that their supervisor has confidence in them and strongly supports their efforts in completing



a tough assignment are far more likely to have the confidence to complete the assignment than an employee who is not encouraged and supported by his or her supervisor.

#### **Key #5: Make Careful Use of Compensation**

Clearly there are times when increases in pay for good performance or an increase in benefits will be particularly appreciated by an employee, especially in a case where compensation is provided as a reward for performance. Conduct salary surveys of other employers in your area to determine what different positions are paying relative to your own. A salary survey can be as simple as a series of phone calls to help determine what competitors are paying in the current season. After the salary survey is conducted, be sure you are paying competitively.

Once competitive pay rates are established, be sure to provide reasonable raises. Small raises can be demotivating

Employee  
Motivation

if they are seen as insignificant. Also avoid giving equal raises to all employees. Try to vary raises with the performance of individuals or the importance of the job. Above all, try to develop compensation as much as possible as a reward system for good performance.

#### **Key #6: Recognize the Best Employees with Promotion or Advancement**

Some facilities are large enough to provide several steps on a career ladder over time. On other facilities, the maintenance staff is smaller and there is relatively little room for formal job advancement. Regardless of whether the staff is large or small, attempts should be made to offer advancement where it is feasible. In a larger organization, it is often possible to promote a good worker to a better position. In a smaller organization, perhaps the advancement would take the form of skill development. For example, there is a certain amount of prestige and status which comes from operating larger, more advanced mowers and pieces of turf equipment. Training a good performer to operate more expensive and sophisticated pieces of equipment is, in itself, a form of elevation in responsibility and can be a strong motivator.

#### **Key #7: Make the Individual's Job as Meaningful as Possible.**

Mundane, repetitive and simplistic work often leads to monotony and boredom for the person who has to do it. Try to include some new assignments along with the basic routine work. Some managers rotate jobs so an individual is not doing the exact same job every single day. Provide learning opportunities that allow employees to grow and develop a sense of pride in their work. Finally, one of the most important ways to create meaningful work in the turf industry is to clearly let employees know why they are doing a particular job and why it is important to the course and to the people who play the course. Employees who feel that the tasks that they do each day are valued by someone have more pride in their work and greater motivation.

#### **Key #8: Provide the Best Working Conditions Possible**

Working conditions can have a major impact on how happy and satisfied people are in their work. The fact that turfgrass maintenance is outdoor work attracts many people to the job. However, not all aspects of outdoor work are desirable at all times. Weather conditions, for example, can have a major impact on employee morale and productivity. Consider the employee who attempts to do his job during the fifth day of a heat wave in the middle of the summer, or the employee who is only half as productive in rainy weather as he is in good weather. Make adjust-

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7

## Employee Motivation

*continued from page 7*

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***Look for ways that employees can have input in decisions that affect their work. Nobody knows more about how to do the job, or improve it, than the person who does it every day.***

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ments in working conditions whenever and wherever possible to improve employee morale and productivity. Be sure all workers have the protective clothing they need: rain gear, gloves for heavy work or respirators when they are using pesticides or other toxic material. Be sure equipment is in good repair and is easy to operate.

Work hours are also considered a part of working conditions. Allowing employees flexible work times that meet their personal schedules can be a major motivator. Also, allowing for work to start earlier on days of extreme heat or other weather conditions can make a difference. By tuning in to difficult working conditions and trying to make adjustments to improve those conditions, golf course superintendents and supervisors greatly improve staff morale and productivity.

### **Key #9: Involve Employees in Decision Making**

Employee involvement can be a powerful motivational tool. It is not appropriate to involve employees in making every decision regarding turfgrass maintenance; many decisions only the manager can make. For example, major equipment purchases and budget preparation are decisions commonly made by the manager and possibly some supervisory staff members. However, it is important to look for ways that employees can have input in decisions that affect their work. Employee involvement can lead to improvements that management would not have implemented or even thought of on their own. Nobody knows more about how to do the job, or improve it, than the person who does it every day. Create a climate at your facility where comments, feedback and ideas on how to do a better job are encouraged. For example, some employers have even created bonus programs to reward employees for cost cutting or productivity suggestions that are implemented.

### **Key #10: Minimize Weaknesses and Maximize Strengths**

Even the most outstanding employees have weaknesses with which they struggle. They have work that they dislike or do not feel that they do very well. Effective managers become aware of the weaknesses and patiently try to address those weaknesses with the employee slowly over a period of time. At the same time, they continue to emphasize and focus on an employee's strengths, by encouraging and praising the employee based on their strengths. Belittling or focusing unduly on weaknesses can affect self-

esteem and productivity. Most managers have to work at trying not to over-focus on an employee's weaknesses.

### **Summary**

A truly motivated staff is not something that happens by accident. It results from an increased understanding of motivational principles on the part of course superintendents and supervisors. In addition, it requires constant effort and continuing communication with employees.

Today's modern workforce is much more likely to be motivated by the motivation factors identified by Herzberg, including a feeling of personal accomplishment, achievement of increasing responsibility, a sense of importance to the organization, and involvement in decision making.

It is your role as a manager to create this environment where employees will be motivated through considering the wants and needs of your employees, offering praise and encouragement, implementing an effective compensation strategy, and making employees' jobs meaningful. Those who invest the time in understanding and implementing motivational principles receive substantial rewards in the form of employee job satisfaction and productivity.

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