

## The Human Dimension

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## **Building Loyalty Reduces Employee Turnover**

igh turnover is a costly issue for most employers and turf managers are no exception. In fact, for those turf industry managers in the northern climates, the seasonal nature of the work often increases the potential of high turnover. Many turf managers have a very small year-round crew, and then a larger seasonal crew. To be successful, many managers try to keep the very best year-round crew, and then keep as many quality seasonal employees coming back year after year as they possibly can.

There is a great financial incentive to keep turnover low. It costs hundreds—if not thousands—of dollars in advertising costs, interview costs, training time, and other expenses every time an employee decides to leave your business. The key to low turnover in many cases is the amount of time the employer has spent being sensitive to employee needs and building loyalty. In short, those employers who create a work environment where employees want to stay, usually are successful keeping turnover rates low.

To reduce turnover and keep a satisfied, productive work force, here are six steps to increase employee loyalty:

1. Design jobs with employees in mind. It is hard to sustain interest in tasks that are difficult, repetitive and boring. While the assignment of difficult tasks is inevitable at times, job variety is the key to keeping employees fresh and enthusiastic about what they are doing. Rotate jobs so that the most difficult tasks get distributed among a number of people.

In addition, try to fit the employee's interests to the tasks that they are assigned to. If, for example, an employee has a particular aptitude for working with equipment or for organizing tasks and projects, matching the employee's interests with specific jobs will enhance employee motivation.

Working conditions are also an important part of job design. Proper equipment, including safety equipment and clothing that will protect them from various weather conditions will enable your employees to do a job safely and effectively.

2. Create performance expectations and goals. Employees want to know what their job

is and what specifically is expected of them. Management research clearly indicates that employees who set goals accomplish more than employees who don't. Effective managers work with employees to establish job goals and expectations. To the greatest extent possible, goals should be in writing so that they can be referred to from time to time and evaluated. Above all, goals and accomplishments expected should be realistic.

If an employee views his or her goals as unattainable, chances are the individual won't even try to achieve them. Likewise, if the goals are too easy to attain, performance will suffer. A good set of performance goals provides an opportunity for ongoing performance discussions between manager and employee. In addition, the accomplishment of performance goals can provide employees with a great deal of job satisfaction and motivation.

3. Provide ongoing support and feedback. By providing coaching and feedback, managers put themselves in the position to support top performance in their employees. Effective managers also provide encouragement when needed. Higher levels of performance can be achieved when the employee knows that the manager has confidence in him or her, and that the manager will help them succeed at a difficult task.

By receiving continuous feedback, employees know how they are doing and what corrections they can make to proceed in their work more effectively. Employees also want to know why a job is being done a particular way or why a specific procedure is important to success. Explaining why a job is important and letting employees know that good performance is appreciated, will help you build employee loyalty.

4. Listen. Listening is perhaps the most important aspect of communication for a manager or supervisor. Effective managers make it clear that they want their employees' feedback and that their comments about the workplace and job performance are welcome any time.

Listening is an important way to show respect for employees' contributions, abilities and ideas. Managers who put priority on taking the time to listen are more likely to identify improvements in job design and performance.

square feet of turf at 0.4 ounces per thousand square feet. This would deliver about 32 ounces of material. Also, labor for scouting would be reduced, timing is less critical, the material is considered "softer" on the environment, etc. Why not just treat preventatively if it applies less total material to eight times the area?

This is an important question and one that is not easy to answer. Widespread use of a material with fewer environmental effects could be better than targeted use of a material that poses a greater risk to environmental quality. Also, the preventative approach virtually assures success with minimal technical knowledge beyond application technique.

In fact, a hybrid approach might be the best solution. In areas with a history of problems, treat preventatively; and in areas that have not had trouble, monitor for a curative strategy. This represents a full implementation of IPM with consideration of pest pressure, turf quality thresholds and environmental quality.

## **Driving Reduction**

In the end, we'd all like to think it is more than just a numbers game: manipulate the numbers to make them say what you want them to. Yet, it appears there are a few issues that remain obstacles to meaningful pesticide reduction.

First, consumer expectations for high quality turf is not likely to change and will continue to drive inputs higher. Second, understanding pest biology and ecology that allows for more targeted prevention, rather than widespread prophylactic approaches, must be implemented. Finally, by improving our understanding of pest issues and maximizing good growing conditions, alternatives to chemicals (or at least to the instant gratification of chemical use) will become available.

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## **Building Loyalty**

continued from page 8 • • • • •

Effective managers recognize that no one knows more about a job and the challenges of doing a job than the individual who performs that job every day.

5. Provide training and development opportunities. Generally speaking, people want to become more than they are today. They want to grow, learn and become more valuable to themselves as well as to a current and future employer. In addition, employees enjoy doing what they do well. An ongoing process of training and development for each employee will reap big dividends.

Training can be conducted internally or offsite. Many effective turf managers have made very good use of video tapes and other teaching materials at the workplace to give employees the skills they need to do a job effectively. Regardless of how training is done, it is important to reinforce training on the job on a daily and weekly basis until the employee has mastered a particular skill. Some managers fail to get the best results from their training dollars because there is no follow-up to reinforce training. 6. View your compensation package as a total reward system. Nonmonetary compensation includes benefits that do not have tangible value: job security, flexible hours, opportunity for growth, recognition, and friendship. Monetary compensation includes wages and benefits such as insurance, retirement programs, paid leave, etc.

The challenge for any manager is to come up with the right combination of monetary and nonmonetary forms of compensation to create an environment where employees will be motivated. Selecting the compensation elements that motivate both seasonal and year-round employees and provide an attractive work environment is the key to building loyalty and retaining the best employees.

A stable work environment, where turnover is not excessive, benefits the manager and the organization and lowers the direct costs of filling positions. Employers who are constantly building the loyalty of their work force will ultimately lower their turnover costs and create the opportunity to build a productive and satisfied work force over the long term.

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