

Can You Afford Not to Train Your Personnel?

BY JOHN SAIS

THE TECHNOLOGY IN TODAY'S IRRIGATION SYSTEMS CONTINUES TO ADVANCE. THE SYSTEMS OFFER MORE PRECISE CONTROL AND FEATURES TO OPTIMIZE EFFICIENCY.

It's important to have employees that can understand and maximize the benefits of the investment in these systems. Training can have an appreciable impact on the condition of the course and the bottom line of the business, regardless of the size or type of the facility.

For the employee, training can be a significant benefit, providing them with the knowledge and tools to work with increased efficiency, develop skill sets and improve loyalty. For the facility, training can maximize the investment in the irrigation system, minimize waste and improve employee retention.

When considering management's perspective, there are three questions that usually come to mind. 1) Is the training worth the cost? 2) How will the golf course directly benefit? 3) What are the long-term effects?

When it comes to funding training, the old adage "You get what you pay for," is very applicable. Any training session should be an interactive gathering of subject matter experts and students who can train hands-on with the equipment used on a daily basis.

When considering the value of the training, there are a couple questions to ask:

- 1) Is the training accredited?
- 2) Are Continuing Education Units (CEU's) or Golf Course Superintendent's Association of America education points awarded upon completion of the training?

Top shelf organizations know that good training comes with a price. To see comparative costs, investigate charges of other industry professional eight-hour seminar costs.

There is a cost and benefit to having employee's properly trained. Doing it right the first time will reduce rework and unnecessary costs.

CASE STUDY 1

The superintendent wants to try out a new nozzle configuration on the course to improve water distribution and efficiency. He chooses a fairway to modify, which consists of 20 sprinklers. He asks the new irrigation technician to perform the switch. The irrigation technician heads out with the 20 new nozzle sets. The tech improperly removes the internals and damages the O-ring and internal on each sprinkler. This causes a leak in the sprinkler when it is on. The result is excess water around the sprinkler head. At a minimum, this means "soft" spots around the head, resulting in member complaints about course condition. The cost to correct the problem:

- 20 O-rings = \$100
- Labor time = 20 x 10 minutes = 3.33 hrs x \$12 hr = \$40
- Damage to the internal assembly requiring replacement = \$100+ each

It's also important to understand the functionality of the system. The irrigation controls on a course work differently than an irrigation controller on a residential application. If the employee doesn't understand the system, a costly mistake can be made.

CASE STUDY 2

The irrigation tech is on vacation and the superintendent is involved in a project on the back nine. The superintendent gets call on the radio from a tech on hole No. 4. The tech explains that the grass is looking stressed because of the unusual heat that day. The superintendent is tied up, but asks the tech to have the sprinklers run 16 minutes that night. The tech goes to the controller and programs 16.0 and heads off to the next hole.

The tech normally programs the controllers around the clubhouse, which operate by inputting minutes and seconds...little did the tech know that the irrigation controllers on the course operate on inputting hours/minutes. Imagine the surprise to the superintendent and members when they get to the course in the morning and hole No. 4 is still running because it was

programmed to run 16 hours. This mistake is usually only made once, but the costs are extensive:

- The cost of the wasted water
- The hole is out of play for one to two days
- Member dissatisfaction
- Increased electrical costs
- Parts of the system did not run that night, because there was not enough pump station capacity

Historically, untrained personnel cost organizations enormous sums of money through on-the-job misunderstandings and inefficiencies. Wasted time and materials, associated costs involving the maintenance and repair of equipment, and even accidents that can ultimately lead to higher insurance premiums are the some of the big money wasters on the golf course.

An additional benefit to training is an increase in employee retention. When an employer spends the time and money to get their personnel professionally trained, they are investing in the employee. Employees recognize this and as a result their productivity and the quality of work tend to increase. What also tends to increase is their time with that employer – high retention and low turnover rates equate into lower personnel costs.

There are several intrinsic benefits to employee training. Employees typically want more than to just collect a paycheck. While compensation is an important factor, it's not the only thing to influence employee retention. Growth and advancement are important aspects for many and training plays a major role. Obtaining certifications, licenses, and qualifications can significantly contribute to the long and short-term goals of employees.

Training plays a significant part in the employee's professional development. As the employee's skill sets increase, so does the

potential for them to take on an increase in responsibility and authority, which means an increase in pay, or a different position, or possibly both. The employee benefits from gaining the additional knowledge and working more effectively. The facility benefits by maintaining a pipeline of qualified personnel.

Whether the objective is to make the course run more efficiently or empower personnel, training can accomplish many things for the organization. There are many opportunities to engage employees in training.

- On the job
- Attending a local seminar
- Attending regional irrigation training courses
- Attending an industry trade show and participating in seminars

Comprehensive training encompasses all of these; however, it is just one of the tools in management's toolbox of running the golf course. With the advancing technology and increased cost associated with the operation of the course, investing in employee training can truly provide dividends. **BR**

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