

# Where is Your LOYALTY?

*Superintendents and course officials alike  
have lost their sense of loyalty to each other.*

by MIKE HUCK

**LOYALTY:** faithful adherence to a person, government, cause, duty, etc. — *Webster's New World Dictionary, Third Edition.*

GONE ARE THE DAYS when employee/employer relationships are built on long-term trust and loyalty. There are occasional exceptions, like the following story I read several years ago. A textile factory in Massachusetts was gutted by fire a month prior to Christmas. Several hundred employees were suddenly put out of work, or so they thought. The employees feared that the owner (a single owner, not a corporation) would choose not to rebuild the company, but just close the doors and collect the insurance settlement.

Twenty-four hours following the fire, owner Aaron Feuerstein surprised employees by announcing that he planned to rebuild the plant immediately, with portions to be completed and operational in 90 days or less. Not only did Mr. Feuerstein begin immediate reconstruction of the plant, but he continued paying all 1,400 employees their full wages for the next 30 days and provided 90 days of insurance coverage. He said it was his responsibility to both his employees and the community because *they had been responsible for his success*. This gentleman showed a tremendous amount of loyalty to his employees, above and beyond what many current day entrepreneurs and corporations consider reasonable.

Except in rare cases like this, loyalty between employees and employers is at an all-time low. Employees no longer are rewarded with job security for

many years of faithful service. Salary increases and benefits that coincide with long-term employment are often looked upon negatively by upper management. Such rewards are considered too damaging to the bottom line. This attitude seems to be found throughout the entire business world. Everyone is looking out for *number one* with a survival-of-the-fittest mentality.

Tenure and experience seem to mean little these days because there are many up-and-coming turf professionals willing to work countless hours for less pay. They get a nice increase in salary compared to their prior assistant's position, but very often nowhere near the pay level of the experienced superintendent. The course "saved money" by this move, or at least that was the justification used by management — a corporate downsizing philosophy, I suppose.

I have seen a number of older, very good golf course superintendents released over the years, replaced by a younger person with a college education and maybe two or three years of experience as an assistant. Does this cost-cutting move make up for many years of experience and local knowledge of a property? I don't think so.

In reality, the overall financial position may not have improved other than in the *Superintendent's Salary* line item category. A careful look at the entire budget in subsequent years might reveal that overall spending increased while course conditioning remained the same. How could this happen? Could the previous superintendent's many years of experience have paid off in more cost-effective management and fewer mistakes? Equal golf course conditioning at less expense? It is possible.

I am not implying that all young turf managers are incompetent or wasteful, but remember the old adage "you get what you pay for," and this goes for work experience also.

It is not just employers who have forgotten the meaning of loyalty. Superintendents, both young and old, are also guilty of changing jobs at the drop of a hat. Superintendents will jump ship for a small increase in salary, or make a lateral move for the chance to manage a more prestigious course. This quite commonly is justified as required to *move up the ladder*.

We all need to stop and think about the good and the bad times we've had over the years. Course officials must ask themselves who it was who stuck by them when the going was rough. Who was there during the lean years when there wasn't money in the budget to perform needed course improvements or purchase new equipment? Who spent their nights babysitting an unreliable pump station to get the course watered? Or, as a superintendent, perhaps the course officials stood by you in a time of serious need such as a personal family problem or serious illness?

If you are fortunate enough to have a trusting and loyal working relationship with your employee or employer, do you really want to throw it away and risk what you have for a few more dollars in your paycheck or budget? Loyal working relationships don't just happen; they must be developed. Once developed, they need to be appreciated by both employees and employers.

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