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Engaging and Motivating Long Term Employees

They're dependable, experienced, and wise. So it's no surprise that smart golf course operators are looking to long term employees to get the job done right. Long term workers have the ability to spot problems in advance and offer solutions and with many long term employees working longer and postponing retirement there are many good reasons for the golf club industry to take a good look at the skills that their "seasoned veterans" have to offer.

LEADERS IN THE WORKPLACE

For starters, since many long term employees are middle aged or older they are generally experienced and knowledgeable about the job and the organization and often tend to make fewer mistakes than their junior co-workers. They also tend to have a strong work ethic, take pride in their work and are among the most loyal to the organization.

Given the seasonality of many Canadian golf club operations, they have to look to their long term employees for consistency when it comes to availability and creating an attractive workplace environment and culture. Their workforce often spans the four typical generations – millennials or "Gen Y" born after 1980, generation X born between 1965 and 1980, the boomers born between 1946 and 1964 and the veterans or traditionalists born before 1945. In most cases long term workers in the industry will fall mainly within generation X and the boomers – in other words, those who are trying to create a career within the hospitality industry – although it is not uncommon to find members of the two other generations, in particular members of the traditionalists.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

So, do older employees bring an extra challenge when it comes to engagement and motivation? It's actually quite the opposite, according to recent research on employee engagement conducted by Towers Perrin. The research found that

older workers were more motivated to exceed expectations on the job than younger workers. Motivation, it argued, was highly correlated with engagement, and both engagement and motivation often increased with age.

The study also found a strong relationship between employee engagement and financial performance, showing that companies with higher levels of employee engagement tended to outperform those with lower levels of engagement.

“Enhancing retention can result in marginal differences in total cost for the talent pools studied, while experienced people can offer a distinct performance advantage in many key roles,” added Towers Perrin principal Roselyn Feinsod.

MANAGEMENT TOOLKIT

When considering employee engagement and motivation, it is often advisable to look at all four generations and leverage the synergy that each generation brings.

Incentive online columnist Roy Saunderson, author of *Giving the Real Recognition Way*, offers the following advice about motivating your multigenerational workforce:

Learn about the generation culture

Pay attention, familiarize yourself with the icons and trends across the cultures and make sure everyone knows you are a manager who understands them.

Understand what makes them tick

Seniors work for survival, Boomers for fulfillment, Xers work as a means to an end, and Millennials want to develop skills and move on. Know what drives each generation.

Manage each generation right

Seniors work hard at everything, Boomers work 9-to-5 and Millennials get the job done across a 24-hour clock. Respect the differences and draw upon them.

Bridge the natural differences

Educate and share each generation's differences, motives and commonalities through lunch-and-learn sessions. Understanding will instill better working relationships.

Common purpose drives everything

Unite all generations through a clear and meaningful business purpose. Next, spell out the actions each person must perform to fulfill that purpose.

Keep the communications flowing

Use every available medium to inform, inspire and connect the generations. Encourage the long term workers to share their stories about the club's history and culture with the short term seasonal employees.

Make more one-on-one time

Millennials seem to be more expecting of one-on-one feedback, but that's not necessarily a negative. Every generation would benefit from the same treatment of positive supervisory/management and employee relationships.

Dive into social networking

Instant messaging, texting and corporate networking technologies can be used to give instant feedback to all your employees. Recent research by IPSOS-Reid indicates activity on social networks by both Gen X and boomers is increasing. Consider sharing examples of great teamwork across the generations.

Mix and match

Have a Senior mentor a Millennial and watch the transfer of knowledge take on a new shape with the younger perspective. Get people working together to discount negative prejudices. There is a growing trend towards reverse mentoring whereby Millennials mentor Seniors in the latest technology as part of their mentoring relationship.

Link positive actions to recognition

Whether direct or indirect, use generational preferences as recognition opportunities. When sending a Millennial on a development course, state it's because of work they've been doing and the potential seen in them. It is also important not to overlook your long term employees when it comes to training and development; motivation and training go hand-in-hand.

LINES OF COMMUNICATION

To keep a long term workforce motivated and well trained it is important that you talk to middle-aged and older workers to find out what they really want from their jobs at this point in their careers. Their answers will likely vary quite a bit, so listen carefully. What you hear will indicate what the most powerful motivators are for individual employees.

While honest and open dialogue with your staff is a good practice, regardless of the generation to which they belong, regular performance evaluations provide a much more structured approach to understand their career goals and aspirations. They also go a long way to making long term staff feel appreciated and part of the “team”.

There has been much written about the fact that the youngest workforce generation (Gen Y) craves constant feedback – and attention – but don't overlook your long term staff either! This tendency is often perceived by the employee as a lack of interest in both them as an individual as well as their contribution to the organization on the part of management.

In some cases managers feel intimidated by long term or senior workers because of their age and experience when it comes to performance reviews. Yet for the most part, senior workers are looking for the same feedback and opportunities for personal growth and professional development as their junior colleagues. If this is the case, then managers should be given the training and coaching on how to carry out proper performance evaluations. This should not only include how to provide constructive feedback but also an understanding on how to use the dia-

logue around the evaluation as an opportunity to better engage and motivate their staff.

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

One of the reasons some organizations can find their performance below par, is that there is not a focus on encouraging, recognizing and valuing excellence. That is, the culture within the organization migrates towards the normal or average, rather than the exceptional or outstanding.

A good performance management system should differentiate and should be done with purpose, linking with the company's talent management framework. There is little point holding talent management reviews if the views of long term employees are not going to be considered.

When people within your organization know that performance management system outcomes are integrated with talent management, it sends a strong message supporting effective implementation and use of the system. You should also keep providing challenges. Give them their share of interesting, motivating assignments. Don't assume that older workers don't want to be bothered. Give them the chance to excel and earn the recognition they deserve and want.

To leverage their experience and understanding of your club's history and culture, get them involved in training, coaching, and mentoring junior employees. For many experienced and knowledgeable employees, this role is a lot of fun and highly motivating.

VALUABLE ASSETS

The dynamic service culture of the golf industry usually ensures “survival of the fittest”; it is very demanding both mentally and physically. The result is that those who chose to stay for the long term stay are both mentally and physically fit. That being said, managers should keep in mind that older workers may eventually have to be moved to more supervisory roles but this is a win-win situation in an industry based on service excellence.

Having senior long term staff monitor and enforce service quality standards helps ensure customer service excellence while reinforcing their sense of contribution and engagement.

An alternative is to create a “buddy system” whereby older workers are paired with younger workers – often a win-win situation for both. While the junior worker brings the energy of youth, the senior worker brings the tricks of the trade to make them more efficient and effective.

Long term employees are simply one part of a multi-generational workforce and while they are not looking for special attention, it is important not to overlook them simply because they have been around longer. Just like the other generations, they bring unique talents and experience, and just like other generations, they appreciate being recognized and appreciated for what they bring to an organization. Acknowledging and utilizing their talents and experience is a key element of success in your golf club operations.



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