

YOUR EMPLOYEES: A GOOD INVESTMENT

by Gregory M. Haston

It is hard to find good treemen, let alone keep them in your employ. Why is this true? I will examine this issue in two parts: first, the characteristics of good employees and second, what you as a manager can do to find and retain them.

Good employees do their jobs well and produce high quality work. They can take both verbal and written orders or directions. Their foreman or supervisor does not need to be continually present. They do a good job because they take pride in their work.

Good employees are knowledgeable about trees and tree care. They understand the principles behind various treatments. They take the initiative to learn about new methods or treatments.

Good employees are dependable. They will show up for work on time. If they make a commitment, you can count on them to come through.

Good employees are polite to your clients. They notify homeowners of the crew's presence and intent. They answer questions and explain to clients the procedures to be done and the reasons behind them.

Good employees are neat in appearance. They realize this is comforting to clients.

Good employees take care of the equipment. They do light maintenance on chain saws, check the truck every morning, and keep the vehicles clean inside and out.

Where do you find employees who have these characteristics? Two options will be described.

Students from arboricultural training programs such as the one at Lake City Community College provide an excellent source of green, but eager trainees. Individuals having gone through a training program have made a commitment to arboriculture as a career. They will be professional and take pride in their work. You will not waste time training people who think of tree care as "just another job" and then quit when something else comes along. These trainees have considerable knowledge about the content and methods of tree care and will become proficient more quickly than

those "off the street."

Unfortunately, there are more employment opportunities than graduates. The high demand for these graduates indicates the value of education and training. If trained individuals are unavailable in your area, your second option is to develop your own employees.

Three areas you as a manager should concentrate on in developing and retaining employees are motivation, leadership, and satisfaction. Giving specific feedback about employee performance is one way to help motivate your employees. Employees then know what they did correctly or incorrectly. When they do a good job, a word of praise is appreciated. A pat on the back goes a long way in motivation. Another suggestion is to isolate weaknesses in performance and give employees extra training time to develop their skills.

A reward system can also motivate employees. Some examples of rewards are bonuses, time off, free meals, and gifts such as hats, tee-shirts, hand pruners, and subscriptions to professional periodicals.

A third way to motivate employees is to vary their tasks. This has several advantages. It will add variety to the job; chipping brush all day can really get boring! But more importantly, each employee will develop skills for each task and will learn how the whole job fits together. Another advantage is cross training. For example, if your bucket operator calls in sick, you can still send out the bucket crew.

Setting performance goals is another way to motivate employees. The goals should be specific; avoid generalities, such as, "Do your best." Goals should also be moderately hard to attain, and short term. An example for a line clearance job is to clear a certain amount of line per week. Employees should be able to "see the light at the end of the tunnel" and gauge their work pace.

Leadership or supervision is directly related to employee development and retention. Your

management style is important. It is best not to be autocratic. If you ask your employees for their suggestions and input, they really feel that you care about what they think. You are not losing control by doing this because you still have final authority to make decisions. However, if employees feel that you ask for input and then never use it, this will seem an insincere gesture. Including employees in decision making will develop their abilities for approaching and completing jobs. It also adds meaning to their jobs because they feel that they are making a contribution to the operations of the organization.

Employees who are good performers but cannot be officially promoted can be given discretionary autonomy or asked to fill in occasionally for their immediate supervisor. This makes them more committed to do the job well and they feel as if they have more control over their work. This also helps develop their acceptance of responsibility and improves their decision making ability.

Another difficult but important concern for supervisors is patience, especially with employees who are slower or less motivated. Not everyone develops and learns new tasks at the same rate. For those who are less motivated, you must try to find what interests them and set up a reward system to accommodate these desires.

Treating all employees consistently and fairly leads to a cohesive team. Gripes and complaints

will be reduced. In addition, an open door policy improves communication and solves problems before they get out of hand.

A satisfied employee shows up for work every day because he enjoys his job but this is no guarantee that he will work hard. The reward system and the methods of supervising that you use have a direct influence on satisfaction. You can structure the situation so that employees look forward to coming to work. There will always be employees who do not enjoy the work and who are there just for the paycheck. With these employees, it is best to motivate them to do a good job even if they do not enjoy the work. Even though satisfaction may not necessarily lead to good performance, dissatisfaction leads to absenteeism and turnover. For these reasons, it is important to create a pleasant working atmosphere.

In conclusion, the best way to get good workers is to hire eager employees and concentrate on motivation, leadership and satisfaction. Adapting these suggestions to your local situation will help in developing employees. Investing in your employees will pay off with quality work, a good reputation, and a satisfied work force.

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ABSTRACT

MALONE, R. 1983. **Taking a tree inventory.** *Am. Forests* 89(10): 14-16.

Taking a tree inventory is merely a process for gathering information that will provide the basis for intelligent management of our forest resource, whether it be a small backyard or a large community project. Step one in taking a tree inventory is the preparation of a map of your property. You will need only a few simple tools (pencil, paper, and a ruler or tape measure). Number the trees on the map. When the map is complete, make up an inventory form on another sheet of paper. First on the list will be the pertinent data such as the owner's name, location of property, and date of the inventory. Second, list each tree's number (from the map) on the inventory form. The columns on your inventory form will include the following information: size, date planted, condition, insect, disease, or physical problems, work needed, and action taken or remarks.