Trust, but verify

Golf courses aren't safe from the reality of employee theft.

Kent R. Davies

No golf course is immune from the growing epidemic of employee theft. In spite of substantial contrary evidence, many superintendents believe they are protected because their crew is like family. Unfortunately, believing they are invulnerable is a mistake. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce estimates that 75 percent of employees steal at least once, with half of them stealing multiple times to the tune of $50 billion a year.

Employee theft is not only a costly insider problem but, in fact, can seriously damage the trust between a course and its players. When the duffer grapevine or the media start reporting multiple thefts from golf cars and bags on your course, your club has a major public relations problem. The recent arrest of a course operations assistant with 22 years' employment at one of America's busiest courses illustrates the point. She and her accomplice allegedly pocketed up to $35,000 a year setting up a "dollars for tee times" operation. In addition, some of their "customers" also faced jail when video surveillance recorded them offering bribes.

When subordinates work on maintenance projects without direct visual supervision, crimes of opportunity become tempting. Giovanni Coratolo, director of small business policy at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in Was sold theft is 90 percent opportunity and 10 percent intent. Eliminating these opportunities reduces theft. "You may be your employees and their good buddies use your repair shop alone after hours or by assigning one employee sole and delivery check-in.

"Thievery starts when equipment and supplies are not being properly accounted for, and small thefts go undetected. Southern California international security consultant for 32 years, who is known as The Crime Doctor. "It is import product, supplies and equipment are inventoried on a regular basis, and everyone is made aware of the audits. P close to the shop, and no one, unless necessary, should possess keys to the supply shed. Reduce temptation," or replacing locks and installing alarm systems on structures housing expensive tools, equipment and portable su

Cultivate employee loyalty

Proactively treating every employee as a key member of your team is your best crime deterrent. You unwittingly c see little reason beyond a paycheck to show up to work. "Money does not guarantee job satisfaction. Disgruntled nailed down by rationalizing their need for extra compensation. Employees like to feel they are part of a team," M
Get professional advice

Trying to uncover and deal with employee theft is perilous when you don't know the legal ramifications. According to Lanard Law (www.lanardlaw.com) in suburban Philadelphia, "An attorney can counsel the small business owner in what is perilous advice on ways to mitigate the potential for defamation of character and wrongful discharge claims."

Crime-prevention specialists like Kathy Ojeda of the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department are also great resources to combat employee theft. "If a business owner expects employee theft," Ojeda states, "he can expect suggestions from the authority." Law enforcement's know-how negates your making expensive investigation mistakes.

"Some employees' theft can be deterred or curtailed," Ojeda emphasizes, "by having a crime prevention specialist offer suggestions at an employee meeting." For seasonal operators, this could be especially effective the first morning thinking about committing a crime can be deterred by knowing the topic is openly acknowledged. Zero-tolerance policies from the leadership may in fact hand the employee a real interest in deterring or stopping the activity." She cautions, "In conclusion, confrontation, then the business owner is wise to seek assistance from the services of reputable private security agencies. Bringing in the services of reputable private security agencies is expensive, but the credible ones maintain confidentiality and expertise.

Protect your interests

Lanard, who focuses her 20 years of national legal practice on representing small-to-medium-size businesses, says a business so that the employer's interests are protected while not violating anyone's constitutional rights.

"In order to be apprised of the best manner to protect his or her interests, an employer who suspects theft by one immediately consult the company's counsel for advice," says Lanard. "Alternatively, the employer may wish to file a criminal action. If the prosecutor is willing to pursue the case, the employer can seek restitution through a criminal prosecution. If a criminal action cannot be maintained, then the employer should file a civil action against the former employee for stolen items."
Protect employee rights

Employees have rights. Confronting employees without actionable evidence easily backfires. You must have con-

The methods used to produce evidence must be appropriate and legal. "For example, the small business
owner," Lanard says, "can maintain workplace video surveillance of employees. However, the video
surveillance cannot have sound. Surveillance using sound recording has been found to be violative of an
individual's right to privacy. Video surveillance must be limited to areas that are not inherently private in
nature, such as a dressing room or a bathroom."

Maintain confidentiality

"Not maintaining strict confidentiality is the biggest mistake companies can make when conducting
investigations," Lanard maintains. "It is also important to document all interviews when investigating the
claimed theft so that there is adequate and substantial evidence to supply to the prosecutor in any action
against the accused as well as to your insurance company.

"Prior to terminating an employee found to have stolen from the company," Lanard says, "the company
should make sure the investigation is handled discretely. An employer should interview the accused
employee in the presence of a witness. If the company maintains fiduciary bond or employee dishonesty insuran-
cance company immediately upon discovering the loss."

It's not personal

Employee thefts are not personal. Although not justifiable, numerous circumstances can cause otherwise good e-
substance abuse, family medical emergencies or crushing financial setbacks can lead otherwise good employees
your attorney, an appropriate response to an otherwise great employee's thievery may be determining the crime's
immediately addressed. Clarify that subsequent thievery will definitely result in criminal charges.

Best crime deterrent

Nothing contributes to an enterprise's long-term success like loyal and trusting employees. In trusting atmosphere
a peer's thievery because they know he is also stealing their future. This often stops thieves cold in their tracks or

Trust is a two-way street — you and your team must respect and believe in each other. "Golf course workers get
"so building trust is key." Your demonstrated commitment to your team reinforces their dedication to you. "Employ
tells them how they measure up. Criminal opportunities become less tempting when thieves realize that they will t

"The best action employers can take," Ojeda says, "is to run a tight ship; have adequate policies and procedures,
documented warning or disciplinary procedures, an active involvement with day-to-day operations; and be observ
business."

Remember: Expect the best, plan for the worst and implement preventive measures sooner rather than later.
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