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BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Turfgrass Producers International

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Leadership—Ways To Improve

When you get 10 or more TPI member/farm owners and managers to sit down for a couple of hours to discuss a topic like "leadership" you just know something good and useable will result. That was certainly the case at the TPI Midwinter Conference Roundtable Forum in Santa Barbara. The following are just a few of the highlights and suggestions that came from that discussion:

Qualities needed in owners: dependability, integrity, courage, knowledge, loyalty, tact, fairness and enthusiasm.

Qualities needed in employees: integrity, intellect, initiative and imagination.

Best aspects for leaders: opportunity to grow; **Worst aspects:** time consuming nature of the business, seasonal fluctuations, and not being able to spend time with the family.

Helpful hints for success: involve supervisors in the decision-making processes; motivate employees by empowering them; create sub-leaders for supervisors; understand the unique personalities of each employee; learn about

employee families through non-work activities; develop trust (from the start) with all employees; challenge every employee to improve and better themselves.

An interesting observation was how difficult "self-evaluation" is for most leaders. Rather than assuming that just being an owner or manager was sufficient to know you're doing the right things, the right way, this group felt it was important (but difficult) to stand back and truly evaluate yourself in an honest attempt to improve.

TPI began conducting Roundtable Forums as a means for members to share information and seek answers from each other, but also as a means to identify issues of importance to the entire organization. At each Summer Convention and Midwinter Conference, a two-plus hour, complimentary lunch time is set aside for this purpose. At the Forum in Santa Barbara nearly 200 members participated, with most staying until the hotel staff insisted that the room be cleared for use by another group!



Someone's Going to Win a New Tractor—Is It You?

Will you be the lucky winner of a New Holland TN75SA deluxe utility "turf special" tractor this summer in Pennsylvania? Someone will, and it could be you.

The International Turf Producers Foundation, (ITPF) is conducting a special fund-raising sweepstakes that will select one lucky winner to own this newly designed 72-horsepower tractor. This is full and out-right ownership of the tractor, not a year's use or some other limited use/ownership scheme.

\$100 Sweepstakes Tickets

The drawing will be conducted July

29 at the TPI Summer Convention in Mannheim, PA, during the demonstration day activities. To be eligible to win, TPI members can either purchase \$100 sweepstakes tickets or (as is required by law) submit a no-cost form that is specified in the official rules. The official rules are available from the ITPF/TPI office or in the most recent issues of *Turf News* magazine.

Proceeds Fund Research

Unlike some sweepstakes, where you're not sure what you're supporting, all of the funds raised by ITPF from this tractor give-away will support sod related research.

TPI Annual Meeting July 30, 2004 At the Summer Convention

The formal TPI Annual Business Meeting will be called to order by President Ed Zuckerman at 10:00 am, Friday, July 30 at the Hilton Harrisburg Hotel, Harrisburg, PA.

In addition to receiving reports on TPI's past year, new leaders will be elected and other items addressed.

All TPI members are encouraged to attend this event, which represents a significant part of determining TPI's direction in the coming year.

Taking Care of Business

By Dawn Josephson
Cameo Publications
Hilton Head Island, SC

Arm Yourself with: Words that Sell!

We all know the English language contains hundreds of thousands of words. But did you know that only 21 of them can easily sell your clients? Yes! It's true. When you know what these proven words are and how to use them to your company's benefit, you'll save both time and money when selling to prospects. In fact, once you master the use of these 21 words, your business will quickly get the results it deserves. *Hint:* this paragraph contains 10 of the 21 words.

What's in a Word?

The exact words you use in your company's marketing materials can make the difference between success and failure. Why spend most of your time convincing prospects to do business with you when you can let strategically written marketing pieces work for you? When it comes to writing marketing pieces, your word choices do matter. Following are the top 10 of the 21 words that sell. Use them wisely and watch your marketing response rates soar.

The Top 10 Words That Sell

#1 You/Your—"You" is the most powerful word in the English language; it's more powerful than the word "money," and even more so than the word "sex." Prospects want to feel as if you're talking to them directly, and the word "you" accomplishes just that. So instead of writing, "Our customers are significantly helping the environment by choosing high quality turfgrass sod," write "You are significantly helping the environment..." Write every sentence in your customers' perspective.

#2 Money—Ask people what they wish they had more of, and chances are they'll say "money." People like to save money just as much as like to earn it. So, if one of the benefits of your products and services is that it saves people money or helps them increase their home value, state it along with a monetary figure people can grasp. For example: "A Gallup Survey reported 62 percent of all U.S. homeowners felt investment in lawns and landscaping was as good or better than other home improvements.

Proper and well-maintained landscaping adds 15 percent to a home's value, according to buyers."

#3 Health/Healthy—The second thing people wish they had more of is good health. People want products that are going to improve their health. For example: "Turf absorbs gaseous pollutants such as carbon dioxide and sulfur dioxide and converts them to oxygen."

#4 Guarantee/Guaranteed—By nature, most people are not risk takers. By giving some type of guarantee, you put customers and prospects at ease. For example: "Let us know right away if any part of your sod delivery is damaged and we'll replace it immediately."

#5 Easy/Easily—Between 40+ hour work weeks and increasing demands at home, people want things that are easy. So always state how easy your company makes their lives. For example: "A properly maintained lawn takes less time and effort than most people think. Let us show you how."

#6 FREE—Everyone loves getting something for nothing. That's why the word "free" continues to be one of the top selling words of all time. Realize that the free offer doesn't have to have a high monetary value, just a high perceived value. Some freebies that work include: "Free consultation," "Free estimate," "Free report," "Free shipping."

#7 Yes—We all like being told "yes." "Yes" means you have permission, you were right or you can get what you want. "Yes" is one of the most pleasing words to the human ear. When talking with your customers and prospects, use the word "yes" often. For example, in your marketing materials, you can ask a series of positive yes/no questions, and then write, "If you answered 'yes' to any of these questions, then XYZ sod is for you."

#8 Quick/Quickly—In today's "immediate gratification" society, people want things now! They want to know they'll see a quick return for their investment now. Although the perception of quick results vary from person to person

and as long as you know that your product or service is quicker than something else, state it. For example: "With sod, compared to seeding or hydroseeding, you have an instant lawn and don't have to put up with muddy footprints tracked inside by kids and pets." Or, "Quality sod gives you an immediate weed-free lawn needing no herbicides for years."

#9 Benefit—Most written marketing pieces state the product or service "benefit"; however, they neglect to actually use the word "benefit." Actually using the word "benefit" subconsciously grabs the customers' attention, making them want to know more. For example, "As an added benefit, sod increases the real estate value of your home."

#10 Customer Name—People like to hear the sound of their own name. Better yet, they like to see it in print. Including the prospect's name in a marketing piece especially in the middle of the sentence boosts attention levels. For example, "As you can see, Steve, sod makes perfect sense for your family's health, safety and recreational needs."

The Remaining 11 Words

The other eleven words that sell are: 1) Love, 2) Results, 3) Safe/safely, 4) Proven, 5) Fun, 6) New, 7) Save, 8) Now, 9) How-to, 10) Solution, and 11) More. While synonyms to these 21 words are acceptable, synonyms are not as powerful as the actual word itself. In order to not appear redundant in your marketing piece, use the appropriate word wisely, but don't overdo it.

As your marketing writing prowess increases, consider combining words that sell in the same sentence. For example, maybe your product works, "quickly, safely and easily." Or, perhaps your product makes lawn care "easy and fun." Because short marketing pieces are more powerful than long ones, make sure every sentence packs a punch.

You can do it, and you're going to love the results. Guaranteed!

For more information, contact Dawn Josephson, president/founder of Cameo Publications, at:
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dawn@cameopublications.com

Marketing Tip

By Dawn DeBuck
DeBuck's Sod Farm
Davison, Michigan

Square Feet vs. Square Yard? Sometimes, It's Just Timing

Just a little background on us and our business. Alan and I have been married for 27 years and have three wonderful children, Michelle (24), Kevin (22) and Diane (20). Alan's family has been in the turfgrass sod producing business since 1956, so Alan's love of farming has been bred into him from early childhood.

The latest thing going on here in Michigan has been converting from selling sod by the sq. yd. to selling sod by the sq. ft. Our office has been promoting this transition since last fall. We mailed out a letter in November 2003 on our letter head to all of our wholesale customers stating, "BUYING SOD JUST GOT EASIER!" The letter went on to state the "new" size of the sod roll, how many pieces are going to be on the pallet and included a sample chart for the new price structure.

This spring we are in the office once again putting together our price sheet with all of the new information. It includes a chart for easy conversion to the square footage of each pallet so our customers will know at a glance just how many pallets they will need to order for the areas they plan to cover.

We tried this sq. ft. approach once

before in Michigan during the late seventies. I recall that not enough of the Michigan turf producers were willing to convert at that time, so it went right back in the "same ol', same ol'."

As a group, Michigan Sod Growers Association has been discussing this for some time. A majority of the members voted to convert to this new structure. From our office's point of view, we are praying for a successful conversion.

There is another piece of information I would like to add to this article, and it has nothing to do with the sq. ft. sod sales conversion in Michigan. It is about what Alan and I saw (or didn't see) these passed two winters driving from Michigan to Las Vegas, NV. Through all of the miles we traveled and considering all of the farms we passed, I was reminded about the value of advertising. I want to stress the importance of placing a sign of some type next to the expressway to let potential customers, as well as other producers like us, know who you are.

We are fortunate enough to be located next to an expressway, and that "smiley-face" tank truck with our name and phone number on it helps sell a lot of sod for us.



Recognize Customers' Top 10 needs

They may never come right out and tell you. But most of your customers want the same basic things from you. Here are the top 10 things they might never say they want from you:

1- Treat me with respect. I am a person and a customer, not an account number.

2- Follow through on your commitments. I do notice the little things, and they make a difference.

3- Communicate with me. I want to hear the good and the bad.

4- Talk to me without interruption. I'd rather hear "I don't know" and a promise to call back, than be put on hold endlessly.

5- Answer the phone quickly. Your

time is valuable, and you can be busy too. But nothing says "respect" like your respect for my time.

6- Offer alternatives—especially when we have a problem.

7- Allow me to talk to someone with the appropriate authority when a serious problem arises.

8- Let me know what I can expect from you. That's the best way to avoid disappointing me.

9- Know everything about your products and services. But don't try to fool me.

10- Be my advocate. Everything you do should tell me: "I'm on your side."

Source: *The Competitive Advantage*, as adapted from *Listen Up, Sales & Customer Service*, David Cottrell & Mark C. Layton, CornerStone Leadership Institute, (888)789-LEAD

Shrewder Computing

Technology Tips

Disaster preparedness. Guard against deliberate internal and external attacks to confidential databases and computer systems. Procedures should be in place for your company to react to and recover quickly and efficiently, if an attack occurs.

(www.uschamber.com/resources/preparedness)

Customer Relationship Management. If your website includes an e-mail address, be sure someone answers inquiries promptly and accurately. Pay attention to spelling, grammar and tone.

(www.ecrmguide.com)

Privacy Policy. If you are collecting personal information on your website, explain what you will—or won't—do with it. Survey data show website customers and visitors feel more comfortable giving contact information and making purchases when a privacy policy is in place

(www.uschamber.com/resources/techtools/privacybook.htm)

Marketing. Include electronic components, such as e-mail and websites, in your marketing plans. Compared to direct mail, radio and TV ads, e-mail can be a cost-effective tool to bring customers back to your website and your business.

(www.clickz.com)

Blogs. Become familiar with the latest technology trends. Although web logs (or blogs) have been around for a while, it's becoming more popular to add them to websites as a way to create new content and drive traffic to your website. Blogs are akin to on-line diaries—websites are updated frequently with short commentaries and can be great collaborative tools.

(www.blogger.com)

ROI on Computers. When considering new computer equipment, be sure to consider return on investment and choose a system adds value to your processes or business. When disposing of old computers, check your state's recycling laws.

(www.uschamber.com/resources/techtools)

TPI Action

Call, E-Mail TPI with Questions, Concerns, Issues

The strength of TPI resides with its members who alertly call or email with information that proves of great importance and keeps TPI ahead of what could be serious problems or issues. Like a worldwide radar screen, TPI members belong to different groups, read different publications and meet with different people. This diversity and range of sources continues to prove highly valuable, but only when members take a minute or two to contact the TPI office and share their knowledge and concerns.

As a result of calls and contacts, TPI is better prepared to identify and address issues that may ultimately become significant to everyone.

Water Issue Resource Reminder

If you have, or think you might have a water-related issue in your market this summer, remember that TPI members have a wealth of information and excellent water-related resources literally at their fingertips

One of the first tools to use would be the ITPF sponsored book, *WATER RIGHT—Conserving Our Water, Preserving Our Environment*. This publication is available free-of-charge to TPI members for distribution to water policy decision makers and others who can have an impact on outdoor water use. You can also visit the TPI website: www.TurfGrassSod.org to view and/or download the complete book.

Another excellent resource is a website: <http://www.wateractionguide.org>, created to assist members of the Irrigation Association, American Nursery and Landscape Association, the Associated Landscape Contractors of America and TPI. This joint effort suggests how local members of these groups can work together to address local water issues.

TPI Membership Renewal Notices 30 Days Out

To receive additional information on any of these items, Contact the TPI Office

Tel: 800/405-8873 or 847/705-9898

Fax: 847/705-8347

e-mail: info@TurfGrassSod.org

Website: <http://www.TurfGrassSod.org>

Water Awareness

Water Pricing

According to the U.S. Department of Interior, Bureau of Reclamation: Water rates (budgeting) are a powerful tool to encourage improved water management. Incentive pricing can be used to encourage efficient use in a flexible and equitable manner. Water rates should be considered in developing any water management plan. Water rates are:

Flexible—The district can change rates to respond to changing conditions. Water rates are a useful tool in the rapidly changing economic and institutional environment, responding to a wide variety of goals and providing a true incentive to improve water management. Water users then make decisions based on their economic circumstances.

Efficient—Compared to other water management measures, costs to implement water rates are low. Costs to water users are within their discretion and in proportion to the benefits gained.

Equitable—Water rates are usually more fair than other fee systems in irrigation districts—an important factor in acceptance. Water rates eliminate subsidy and distribute costs according to benefits gained.

Water rates are exceptionally effective in addressing revenue goals in combination with other goals. In general, the district's revenue goals will fall into one of the following categories: 1) maintain revenues, 2) increase revenues, 3) minimize volatility of revenues.

Business Management

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