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BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Turfgrass Producers International

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Become Involved In Elections

The second Tuesday in November is an important date across the U.S. Elections will be held for the President, one-third of the Senators and all of the Representatives. In addition, a large number of state-level offices will also be on the ballot.

If the turfgrass industry is going to have any lobbying voice stronger than a whisper, it takes more than just voting; it takes active involvement in the entire election process...starting right away.

Here are a few tips to consider to be involved and to be effective, not just in the outcome of the election, but afterwards as well:

- * Make sure you are registered to vote, and encourage your entire family and all of your employees to do the same. Find out where the location of the nearest voter registration desk and either offer a ride or give sufficient time off to your employees to vote.
- * Make a financial contribution to the party or candidate of your choice. Keep in mind that there are federal election contribution limits, but you

don't have to sign over the farm to make a difference.

- * Offer the candidate of your choice your home or office for a meeting, and invite neighbors, friends and family to the event.
- * Offer to make mailings for the candidate or party of your choice.
- * Add supporting yard signs to your home and business landscape...being sure to take them down when the election is over.
- * Attend public rallies for the candidates or party you support.
- * Support the activities of other, like-minded organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce or Independent Federation of Small Businesses.
- * Introduce yourself to party officials to let them know you are an active supporter and that you want to be involved.

Like it or not, the democratic system works because of who you know and who knows you. Make yourself known and be involved.



www.TurfGrassSod.org — A Great Resource

Not all websites are created equal but clearly TPI's official website: www.TurfGrassSod.org is among the best. For regular users, it quickly becomes one of their most valuable membership benefits.

At virtually the speed of light, or the click of a few keys, there before you will be updates of news items or TPI meeting plans. Because the site is frequently updated and expanded, it's a great habit to scan the site frequently to keep abreast of new items of value.

The public (or open) side of the site contains a wide array of news articles for both professional and consumer-oriented turf information. It's a great area to send customers to for quick and easy access to accurate answers.

With an up-to-date (TPI provided) *User Name and Password*, members can dig more deeply into the site, accessing manuals, specifications, artwork and more. Because this portion of the website is intended for "Members Only," we should be careful in distributing the user name and password to non-members.

Back on the public side of the site, one of the most heavily hit areas is "Find A Professional." By entering criteria, anyone can search for farms or product manufacturers who satisfy the criteria. From the search results, a direct link can be made with TPI members who have an established website of their own. This is a great tool for business and generating traffic and it costs TPI members nothing.

Plans are already underway for a sys-

tem that will allow members to update their own membership records listings; however, for the time being, all updates should be sent to the TPI office by e-mail (info@TurfGrassSod.org) or fax: 847-705-8347 or snail mail.



Pay Dues By Sept 1 Or Services Stop

Just days remain for everyone to renew their TPI membership. September 1 is the date all non-renewing members will be dropped from the active roles and all services will stop.

If you have a question about your dues status, contact Terri Berkowitz at 847-705-9898.

Taking Care of Business

Robert Hoffman
Hoffman Sod Farm
Elk River, Minnesota

How I Justify Attending a TPI Conference

When Bob and Robin Hoffman of B&B Hoffman Sod Farm, Elk River, MN attended the TPI Midwinter Conference in Santa Barbara, CA, it was their first. "It was an eye-opener," said Bob, "and we've already signed up for the 2005 event in Cancun, Mexico, and that includes taking our son and daughter who work with us. It's amazing to find out how much these young people can learn there."

The Hoffmans participated in the farm tour, education sessions, Roundtable Forum and, of course, the Banquet. "We still should have done more," said Bob, "and Robin was among a group who got to visit the office at Pacific Sod and found it quite helpful."

"The biggest thing I found intriguing and was most fascinated with was visiting with Randy Graff and his son James."

They have almost the same operation of father, son and daughter that we have. Randy's kids are taking over the farm and running it, just like ours will be doing eventually. The experience and knowledge they shared is priceless. They are very intelligent people, the type I hope our youngsters will follow as an example.

"The 'Show and Tell' sessions, where other turf producers discussed their farms and how they do business, were fascinating. I picked up a lot of ideas. I also heard many of the same methods and techniques we use, like leaving a ventilation hole in the center of a pallet of sod."

When asked how he justifies the cost of attending a TPI Conference or Convention, Bob said, "I can't put a dollar figure on what we got out of the Conference. But the information and

knowledge we picked up in conversations with many other growers from all over the world... well, you just can't put a price tag on what you learn."



Double Your Brain Power

You probably sometimes wish you could think faster, grasp new information quicker and recall more of what you read and hear. Try these tips:

Tackle information you want to commit to your short-term memory in the morning. *Reason:* The brain section that stores short-term memory items performs about 15% better in the morning. But switch to the afternoon for items you want to keep in your long-term memory because that part of your memory bank hits its stride later in the day.

Reverse and rephrase to overcome negative thoughts about your ability to learn something new. *Example:* Instead of "I won't remember what I'm learning," tell your brain "I've already learned to recall many things—names, dates, computer commands. So I can and will remember this."

Plan for an upcoming learning event by selecting a reward you'll give yourself afterward. Pick something you wouldn't usually buy or do. Picture yourself enjoying the reward just before the learning event starts. Repeat the process whenever you feel anxious about learning information. Regardless of how things turn out, give yourself the reward.

Answer these questions after you read something you want to remember: What is it about? What parts of it were most important? What opinions, if any, did it contain? What's my opinion of it? What element makes it unique?

Rely on graphic devices to increase your reading speed and to help you zero in on the main points in printed materials. *Examples:* italics, boldface, underlining, bulleted lists, charts, etc.

Boost Your thinking power by taking the time to consider: What are the key ideas? Does this resemble anything I know? Do I still have a nagging question about this? When I put everything together, what is most important?

Management by Delegation

Do these scenarios sound familiar: 1) As you are walking to the shop, one of your employees stops you to give a play-by-play account of what he's done that day. 2) Then, out of the blue he asks a question like, "We're low on fuel, should I call for more?" It's not only frustrating but makes you wonder why he wasted so much of your time and his, detailing every task, but can't seem to take a bit more responsibility.

Maybe it's not the employee. Maybe you're not delegating effectively. Consider these points:

- ♦ **Stress results, not details.** Make it clear to your employees that you're more concerned about the final outcome, not the day-to-day details.
- ♦ **Don't be sucked in by giving solutions to employee's problems.** When employees come to you with problems, they're probably looking for you to solve them. Don't. Teach them how to solve problems themselves. This, too, can be frustrating because it's time consuming, but in the long run, that will change.
- ♦ **Turn the questions around.** If an employee comes to you with a problem, ask him or her for possible solutions.
- ♦ **Establish measurable and concrete objectives.** With all employees, make your objectives clear and specific. Once this is done, employees will feel more comfortable acting on their own. Think of this plan as a road map—and your employees will too.
- ♦ **Develop reporting systems.** Get your feedback from reporting systems like monthly reports, statistical data or samplings. Or consider weekly employee meetings.
- ♦ **Keep a delegation log.** When you delegate an assignment, jot it down. You'll be able to monitor the progress and take appropriate action.
- ♦ **Give strict and realistic deadlines.** If you don't give clear deadlines, employees won't feel accountable for the completion of their tasks.
- ♦ **Recognize the talents and personalities of your employees.** Being a good delegator is like being a good coach of a baseball team. You have to know what projects each employee can handle and which ones they can't.



Marketing Tip

By John R. Graham
Graham Communications
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Who do We Thank (and curse) for E-Mail?

E-mail may be the most significant communications advance since the telephone, totally changing the way we exchange information. If e-mail were taken away, business would come to an instant halt and catapult us into a world-wide depression.

While e-mail technology deserves endless praise, the abuses are just as notable. Even the delete button is small comfort against all of the junk mail with its dazzling promises such as: "Eliminate your debt," "Burn your own DVD videos," "Stop hair loss this week," "You can own an adult web site and make huge \$\$\$," "FREE Viagra," "Get two FREE airline tickets," and the list goes on. We know all these are too good to be true—but we hope that just maybe this time it is.

At the same time, there's another side to the e-mail frenzy, one that's darker, less friendly and having a negative impact on the business environment. That's why it is important to consider e-mail as a form of business communication.

E-mail tends to encourage interpersonal dueling. Because e-mail messages are often "dashed off" and less well thought out than a letter, they can sound curt or even misleading. One manager received an e-mail from a client who had received the wrong e-mail attachment. "I asked for this last week." Reading between the words, the implication was clear that the sender was somewhat irritated and outraged. While the attachment was incorrect, the sender had "forgotten" that certain work was necessary before the document could be sent.

Because senders tend to use as few words as possible, e-mail tends to encourage abruptness which is usually avoided in person or over the telephone.

E-mail often confuses "action" with "act." Faxing was the beginning of separating the message sender from the recipient, like leaving a note or mailing a letter. Voice-mail escalated the process even further and now e-mail has ratcheted up the process even further.

A by-product of more efficient communication, particularly with e-mail, is

the erroneous belief that sending a message is all that's required. In other words, sending an e-mail message (an act) is confused with resolving a problem (action). When asked about a situation, people often respond, "I sent her an e-mail," as if sending the message absolves them from further responsibility.

E-mail seems to encourage third-rate thinking. Half the messages don't make sense. How many times a day do you hit the "reply" button and ask the sender what he or she meant? If this sounds crazy, just read the e-mails you received yesterday. Be sure to look at the ones you sent also.

E-mail often encourages "dumping" on the people we need to help us. Friday afternoon is the worst, a close second is the end of any day, and the day before a three-day holiday probably results in even more "dumping" (getting it off your desk). No one wants to get caught on Monday with someone saying, "Hey Toni, did you take care of the Anderson job?" And you say, "Yes, I sent it on to Joe." What makes "dumping" insidious is that the messages are often incomplete, inaccurate or just plain wrong and end up taking more time to correct later.

E-mail can depersonalize communication. Face-to-face communication is not always necessary and it often takes up valuable time. However, e-mail seems to change the nature of the communication process in that we say (write) comments in a manner we probably would not use over the phone or face-to-face. It's not uncommon to open an e-mail and discover something like, "I need the job done tomorrow before 9:00 a.m." Generally this type of message involved a complicated task that needs to be discussed or negotiated. The other extreme, being "warm and fuzzy," is not necessary. In fact, being a little less "chatty" is often more effective.

The genius of e-mail is its incredibly effective and efficient form of communication that deserves the same high standards as writing any thoughtful letter or memo. To abuse e-mail is a disservice to those who receive it.



Shrewder Computing

Block Unwanted E-mail (A Primer on Spam)

Currently, the Reduction in Distribution Spam Act of 2003 is awaiting a vote in the House of Representatives and would decrease the harmful impact of spam without stifling companies' ability to reach their customers.

Meanwhile, there are a number of steps you can take to fend off unsolicited e-mail.

The first and most important rule of thumb is don't hand over your e-mail address to websites unless you trust them. Many now have official privacy policies that specify whether your address will be sold to third parties. Read these policies.

Second, never use your personal contact information on your business' home page. Automated web bots can scan these pages and index e-mail addresses within them and then pass lists along to spammers. Create a special address for publicly accessed areas, reserving your primary account for family, friends and co-workers.

The primary tool at your disposal is called e-mail filtering software which scans messages for key words that spam frequently contains, before they arrive in your in-box. Most e-mail programs now include technology and a variety of features that can greatly reduce the amount of spam you receive. The road to a smaller in-box might simply be a matter of taking fuller advantage of programs you already own.

Eudora, Netscape and Outlook programs offer several different layers of protection, including customized filters that search for specific key words or e-mail addresses that users designate. Many experts suggest using these features rather than trying to unsubscribe—replying to spam informs perpetrators your account is active.

Consult your program's help option or user manual to find out how to take advantage of these features.



TPI Action

TPI Award Nominations Close November 1

Nominations for TPI Honorary Membership, Distinguished Service or Innovator awards will remain open until November 1. Winners will be announced at the TPI Midwinter Conference in Cancun. Use the form on page 27 of the July/August *Turf News* to nominate anyone for this special recognition. Prior year nominees who were not selected should be re-submitted for consideration at this time.

2007 Methyl Bromide Application Submitted

On behalf of all TPI members in the U.S., TPI has just submitted a Critical Use Exemption application for 2007 quantities of methyl bromide. The organization's application for 2005 has been approved by the United Nations and the 2006 application is now under review. Without this very affirmative action by TPI, turf producers' use of methyl bromide would be limited to amounts justified under the Quarantine and Pre-Shipment (QPS) regulations, or it would not be available at all. TPI will issue a special report as soon as the USEPA determines how approved quantities will be distributed to farms-in-need.

2005 TPI Study Tour of Italy Takes Shape

Thanks to the efforts of Italian TPI Member Michele Bindi (Bindi Pratoponto S.S., Rome), plans for the 10-day tour (including Rome, Siena, Florence, Pisa-Lucca and Perugia) are coming together. Tentative dates are October 29–November 8, 2005. In addition, an optional four-day tour to Venice and Verona is also in the works. Members attending the TPI Summer Convention received a special flier with some details and a pre-registration reservation form. Complete details and registration materials will be mailed to all TPI members in the near future. It should be noted that while the majority of Study Tour participants have been from North America, members from all locations are welcome and encouraged to participate.

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>

FREE Post-Convention Publicity Possible

All members attending a TPI Convention or Conference have an excellent opportunity for free publicity in their local newspaper, radio or even TV. All that's required is to complete the pre-written, do-it-yourself (DIY) press release available on the TPI website at www.TurfGrassSod.org. Just enter the "Members Only" section and select "Post-Convention DIY Press Release." This is a Microsoft Word file which you can download, fill in the blanks and print on your business letterhead.

Although submitting the completed press release in person to the local news editor is generally the most effective means, don't hesitate to send the release via e-mail, regular mail or Fax to the appropriate editor's attention.

The DIY press release has been carefully crafted to tie in: 1) the value of member participation with the TPI events' global scope; 2) roundtable discussions with other professionals from around the world; 3) internationally renown manufacturers; 4) the latest technology and scientific research; 5) and similar wording developed to attract the attention of editors.

In the next issue of *Turf News*, be sure to read how TPI members Debi and Steve Fleagler used the pre-written TPI press release to gain front-page, lead headline publicity.



Business Management

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