

Feb./Mar. 2004



BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Turfgrass Producers International

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Business Outlook for 2004

In the recent *Turf News* article where 16 individuals shared their forecasts for the year ahead, all were positive about the economic outlook, from the housing industry representatives, to turf producers and equipment manufacturers, to green industry editors and landscape contractors. Turf producers in the northern hemisphere might consider how the following issues could impact their operations in the coming growing season:

Interest Rates—This factor will have a positive impact on housing and other markets if predictions hold true as it seems to be generally expected.

Continuing Water Shortages—The turfgrass industry needs to be vigilant in dealing with this significant issue. Taking a pro-active approach to building local and national coalitions (like the Evergreen Foundation) with other green industry participants can be more effective in combatting residual repercussions from droughts. Increasing the general public's awareness about proper lawn watering techniques and the environmental benefits of well-maintained turfgrass

can help impact water policy decision-makers to use science-based facts in establishing water conservation programs for their communities.

Artificial Turf—Today's newer artificial turf products are superior to earlier versions and are making their way onto sports fields in countries around the world. We need to develop sales strategies to more effectively convey the far greater benefits of natural turf-grass. TPI has set up an artificial grass task force working group to address the many unanswered questions of this issue.

Insurance Costs—There is a crisis situation for employers and employees dealing with skyrocketing insurance rates, from health coverage to general liability. These costs have increased to a significant part of overhead expenses, becoming a major financial burden, up 100 percent in some instances.

As the 2004 growing season gets under way, remaining aware of these issues and being prepared to deal with them can help give turf producers a head start.



Roundtable Forum Lunch Open To Ideas

"Informative," "Innovative," "Lively," "Great use of time," were just some of the comments about last summer's TPI Roundtable Forum Luncheon. This winter's event in Santa Barbara promises to be even better!

Friday, Feb. 20 from 11:30 to 1:30 pm is the time set-aside for the two-hour free-for-all exchange. The luncheon event is open to all registrants of TPI's Midwinter Conference.

Among the topics slated for discussion are: "Insects Are Eating Me Alive," "Selling Yards By The Foot," "More Turf/Less Water," "Better Turf/Fewer Pesticides," "Turf Limiting Landscape Regs," and "GPS—Finds Its Way To Turf."

The format of the session begins with a buffet luncheon and participants finding their way to the table topic of their choice. A TPI Board member or staff person will facilitate discussions, but the objective is for participants to share their points of view, questions, solutions and insights with each other.

In addition to gaining insights and information, participants can also help identify issues they believe need to be further addressed by TPI. One of the topics arising from previous forums is the concern with artificial turfgrass. As a result, TPI created a special task force that is now looking into the matter on behalf of the organization's members.

While this event has some structure, it

also lends itself to going "off-topic" and simply sharing ideas on any subject that is of interest to those present. Plan now to have a great lunch.



TPI Summer Convention & Field Days

July 27-30, 2004

Harrisburg/Hershey, PA

Conveniently located in southern Pennsylvania, Harrisburg/Hershey and Lancaster County are easy to get to from many major cities. Expect beautiful scenery, unique Pennsylvania Dutch culture, numerous enjoyable attractions and excellent accommodations.

Taking Care of Business

By Joyce Weiss, MA, CAP
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Increase Your Bottom Line Without Spending a Penny

In spending countless dollars to gain a competitive edge, some businesses research logo designs, conduct focus groups, and randomly sample customers in an attempt to learn what will set them apart in their clients' eyes. What they fail to realize is their most precious resource—one that will set them apart from competitors—has been with them all along. It's their employees. How employees are motivated and nurtured can make or break their organization.

Why are employees so important to the bottom line? Because their actions have a direct impact on every customer, whether they have face-to-face contact or not. The quality of their work and the speed of their service speak volumes about an operation's overall reputation. When employees are happy and motivated, they're eager to get the job done and increase your bottom line; however, when employees are dwelling on negative emotions and feeling burnt-out and unappreciated, those impressions will show in their work habits and adversely affect customers' perception of your operation.

If your employees are no longer enthusiastic about their jobs and are bringing down other worker's morale, there are ways you can recharge and revitalize your workforce to reap the profits you expect. Deep down, all employees want a sense of hope and enthusiasm in their job, but they may not know how to rekindle that emotion. That's why it's up to you to keep that spark alive and help your employees add value to the company. Here are four ways to increase morale in any organization so your employees will not only work for you, but also with you to create a company with a distinct competitive edge.

Tractor "Pull for ITPF" Sweepstakes

Complete details will be revealed first at the ITPF booth during the TPI Midwinter Conference in Santa Barbara, CA. Don't miss this exciting opportunity!

1—Lead by Example—Motivation and morale start at the top and filter down, not up. That's why owners and managers need to make the first commitment to fostering a positive and nurturing environment. If the managers don't see the value in increasing morale and only attempt "quick fixes" at employee motivation, their efforts won't be long-term. Employees will always imitate what they see their managers doing. If managers simply "talk" the importance of staying positive and focused but don't really set an example, employees will know it's nothing more than lip service. Be a model for everyone in your organization by staying motivated and positive. Most important, truly believe in the benefits your actions will bring.

2—Encourage Straight Talk—Straight talk means being able to communicate without alienation or hurt feelings. When employees are constantly criticized or when they feel they can't openly communicate with their managers and co-workers, morale goes down the drain, and they will be unwilling to exert full effort to each and every task. To encourage straight talk in your organization, meet one-on-one with employees, especially those who are unusually negative or who have lower than normal morale. Reaffirm to these individuals the strengths they bring to the operation, and then carefully cite how their lack of morale could pull others down. Be aware the employee may not be aware of his or her negative attitude or how it's affecting the company and fellow workers. Encourage all employees to use straight talk as well. When employees know they can communicate openly without being criticized, they'll be more apt to offer feedback, ideas and suggestions, and they'll feel more a part of the operation. The result will be a higher work standard and improved customer care.

3—Show You Care—Many employees today complain that while they're expected to care about the company and its profits, they feel that the company pays little regard to them or their feelings. If this is the case in your operation, make an effort to show employees that

you value their input and have a sincere interest in them. Consider providing an informal lunch on a monthly basis. It's during these times employees could feel comfortable enough to air out their true grievances. If you're fortunate enough to have this occur, listen carefully to what your employees are saying and uncover the true problems that may be holding them back from giving their all at work. Attempt to fix any problem you can. If your employees cite problems you can't fix, tell them so, empathize with them, and then tell them why the situation can't be changed. As long as they realize you understand, are truly listening and want to help them, they'll feel appreciated and respected and will work with you to overcome the situation.

4—Offer Diversity—Some employees who are not performing may simply be overwhelmed, exhausted or bored. A great way to overcome any of these emotions is to offer diversity to their workday. Since most people enjoy varying and new activities, initiate job sharing options, new training opportunities or job skills workshops. Consider allowing employees to "shadow" one another in order to learn a new task, offering equipment or other technical training, and conducting informal workshops that teach hands-on skills. Very often, having the opportunity to start over or learn a new task is a liberating experience that encourages creativity. While your employees are learning new skills, make sure they understand that, when learning a new task, mistakes are not only inevitable but okay. Encourage them to learn from their mistakes so they can apply the lessons to their other duties. Encouraging employees to try new things also helps them get a sense of their likes and dislikes, which will help guide them to the most suitable job type for their abilities. When they're not afraid to take risks and try something new, they'll be more apt to let their true talents shine. Ultimately, your company and customers are the ones to benefit.

There's no doubt employees play an integral role in any organization's success. That's why they should be viewed as your most valuable resource.



Marketing Tip

By Marty Grunder
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What Should Your Business Be Doing Now

- ✓ **Selling! Selling! Selling!** Now would be a great time to go through old quotes to see if any can be resubmitted and sold. I did that recently and found 30K worth of work just by mailing out a new quote.
- ✓ **Looking at your banking expenses.** Interest rates are at an all-time low and you should take advantage of this. All it takes is a couple of phone calls and a couple of hours with your banker... it's worth it.
- ✓ **Reviewing your insurance costs.** Many—if not most—insurance companies have raised their rates, partly because of the stock market. Your premiums get invested in other investments with hopes of yielding a nice return. Add to the stock market element the many natural disasters (earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, wild fires, etc.) and insurance companies have taken a bath. You can help your costs by comparison shopping, BUT be careful about switching insurance companies too quickly. First, meet with your agent to look for multiple discounts. Consider having your home and business inspected by the fire department and following their suggestions to make your property safer. At least get fire extinguishers and smoke detectors installed.
- Consider raising your deductible, and be sure you aren't insuring equipment that should not be insured.
- ✓ **Set up lunch with someone who has what you want to have in life or business, and ask him or her what they feel has made them successful.**
- ✓ **Now for a "gutsy" idea:** "Success leaves clues." What better place to learn how to sell a product than from other good sales people. Go to your local Mercedes or Lexis auto dealership, wearing a suit. Ask for their best sales person and tell him you're interested in buying a new car and that you want him to tell you why you should buy from his dealership. Then, sit down and listen carefully, paying attention to the reasons he gives you for buying. I think you'll learn a lot from this exercise and begin to see the difference between benefits.
- Too many of us try to sell our clients on the wrong things. Clean, shiny delivery trucks are nice but that's not reason enough to buy your product or service.
- Some of you will try this; others will probably yawn and say... "what a great idea" and then go back to surfing the web. Oh well, I tried and that's what matters. The question is, "Are you really trying?"



The Five Major Time Wasters

1—Spreading yourself too thin by trying to do too many things at once. *Suggestion:* You must set priorities for each day and, if necessary, each hour. Get the most important things done first.

2—Being afraid to delegate. *Suggestions:* Convince yourself that it's not necessary to do everything yourself. You can still be certain things are being done the way you want them to be when you delegate.

3—Not wanting to say "No" to requests. *Suggestion:* You can't say "Yes" to everything without getting in over your head. Decide what you *must* do—and *want* to do—and say "No" to

all other requests.

4—Being tied to the phone. *Suggestions:* Have others screen your calls. Use an answering machine when you don't want to be disturbed. Schedule a telephone hour to return calls.

5—Procrastinating. *Suggestions:* Get those unpleasant chores done first—if they're important. Divide large tasks into smaller ones. Reward yourself when you accomplish something.

Source: Published in *Communication Briefings*, by Dr. Jan Yager, writing in *Woman's Own*, Harris Publications Inc., 1115 Broadway, New York, NY 10010

Shrewder Computing

Firewalls to Protect Your Computer

A firewall is a system designed to prevent unauthorized access to a private computer or network. A firewall should be the first line of defense against hackers trying to access a business' private information. Its cost, compared to recovering lost data, is inexpensive.

Once installed, all activity between a computer system and the outside travels through it, providing opportunity to monitor suspicious activity. There are two major types of firewalls: hardware and software.

Hardware firewalls are separate pieces of equipment that sit between the internet connection and the company's computer network. The software on the equipment is the firewall that filters traffic. In addition to, or in place of, a hardware firewall, you can use a software firewall which is software loaded into each computer and which screens traffic to and from that particular computer.

Any business that has an always-on connection to the internet should seriously consider purchasing some kind of firewall. Small business firewall equipment can run as low as \$150 and will help do the following:

- ♦ Hide your computer so hackers can't "see" it
- ♦ Block internet attacks and prevent outside users from hijacking your bandwidth without your permission
- ♦ Stop your employees from using non-approved channels such as instant messages, e-mail programs and unauthorized software.

Firewalls can serve as an important auditing function by cataloging internet traffic, even recording information about break-in attempts.

However, firewalls are not a substitute for virus detection software which should be installed regardless of other security measures. And, firewalls can't stop employees from copying sensitive information to a disk.

TPI Action

TPI 'Issues' List Continues To Grow

A major part of TPI's "Mission" is to represent the turfgrass production industry on topics of importance to the growers and manufacturers. As a result of involvement in various coalitions and other special interest groups, TPI is now addressing the following issues:

- Local pesticide-use bans
- Dursban usage on turfgrass sod farms
- Methyl bromide critical use exemption
- Turf limiting landscape ordinances
- USDA turf research initiative
- Seasonal labor availability and affordability
- Artificial turf
- Water use and availability
- Evergreen Foundation development

Producers or groups who are confronting these issues can contact TPI for additional information and TPI would welcome additional input, suggestions and information about any of these items.

Topics that are of interest to producers, but not listed above, should be brought to the attention of the organization, by contacting the TPI office at 847/705-9898 or via email at info@TurfGrassSod.org

Recent Promotion Saves \$61,270

TPI, along with one of its fortunate members, recently received extensive press coverage in the *New York Times*, thereby creating a value of \$61,270, but costing zero! Learn how and why it happened in the next issue of *Turf News*.

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

FREE On-Line Irrigation Calculator Simplifies Irrigation Scheduling

Although proper irrigation can result in up to 50 percent water savings, the calculations required to develop a proper irrigation schedule are generally daunting. "The new on-line irrigation calculator developed by Gaia College makes irrigation scheduling much simpler," says Michael Hermary, developer of the calculator. "All one needs to do is enter the source information, and the calculator will develop the irrigation schedule. A professional multi-zone irrigation schedule can be developed quickly and easily.

"This calculator was developed in support of our on-line education programs. We think it can be of great value not just to students and landscape professionals, but the public at large.

"We are also interested in hearing from organizations who would like us to customize this tool for their own specific applications. We can help them save time and money, and benefit the environment as well."

This unique calculator is accessible through the TPI website www.TurfGrassSod.org (select "Links" then "Water/Irrigation" to connect with the Gaia College Irrigation Calculator.

For more information, contact Heide Hermary, Gaia College Inc.,
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Business Management

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