

June/July 2004



BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Turfgrass Producers International

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Roundtable Forum - July 28

Leading Issues On The Table

TPI has found an innovative way to bring kitchen-table discussions between friends and neighbors into its meetings with the Roundtable Forums.

Fortunately for those members attending the Summer Convention in Pennsylvania, the topics selected for this session promise to be every bit as informative and innovative as previous sessions.

Lunch time (12:30 noon to 2:30 pm) Wednesday, July 28 will see the Harrisburg Hilton's main ballroom filled to over-flowing with TPI members talking to each other about the following issues:


- ♦ Family Estate Planning
- ♦ Women in the Turf Business
- ♦ Turf Pathology
- ♦ Turf Farm Innovations
- ♦ Artificial Turf—A Real Threat?
- ♦ TPI Benefits for International Members
- ♦ Transporting Turf—Problems and Solutions
- ♦ Marketing Tips & Tricks

- ♦ Diversifying Your Turf Operation
- ♦ Conventions & Conferences
- ♦ Corporate vs. Family Farming
- ♦ TPI Standards for Quality Seed
- ♦ More Turf / Less Water
- ♦ How To Improve TPI

Leaders and lunch

Each of the topic tables will be hosted by a TPI member who will encourage an open exchange of ideas and involvement by all attendees. They will also be responsible for taking information, suggestions and potential program ideas back to the Board of Trustees for consideration and possible action.

Individual members will have an opportunity to share their insights and experiences, as well as ask questions and raise concerns. Because of the free-flowing nature of the event, moving between the various topic tables is also encouraged.

A complimentary buffet lunch will be offered for all participants so the discussions can begin right away. 

TPI Summer Convention & Field Days

Register by July 1, 2004 for reduced rates and a new TPI cap!

Convention Highlights:

July 26

ITPF Summer Golf Tournament

July 27

Pre-Tour of Ford-New Holland Summer Banquet

July 28

Farm/Ag Tour
Roundtable Forum & Lunch
Family Fun Fair Evening

July 29

Field Day—Equipment Demos & Open Exhibits

July 30

TPI Annual Business Meeting

Future TPI Events

2005:

Feb. 2-4: Midwinter Conference, Cancun Mexico
July 26-29: Summer Convention, Salt Lake City, UT
Fall: TPI Study Tour of Italy

2006

Midwinter Conference, Savannah, GA
Summer Convention, Memphis, TN

2007:

Midwinter Conference, Australia (with pre & post tours)
Summer Convention, Madison, WI

2008

Midwinter Conference, Tampa, FL
Summer Convention, Calgary, BC

Tractor "Pull for ITPF" Sweepstakes Ends Soon!

There's still time to enter the ITPF fund-raising sweepstakes in which the lucky winner will own the newly designed 72-hp New Holland TN75SA deluxe utility "turf special" tractor!

The drawing will be conducted July 29 at the TPI Summer Convention & Field Days in Mannheim, PA. Winner need not be present.

To enter, TPI members can either purchase \$100 sweepstakes tickets or (as required by law) submit a no-cost form specified in the sweepstakes rules.

Funds raised by this ITPF tractor give-away will support sod related research to benefit all TPI Members.

Taking Care of Business

By Peter Rauwerda
Greenhorizons-Hamilton Sod
Mt. Hope, Ontario, CANADA

Hiring and Motivating Seasonal Employees

I began working for Hamilton Sod, a division of Greenhorizons, in 1989 when I was still in high school. I quickly fell in love with the diversity of the turfgrass sod business and, while studying accounting at college, decided that I wanted to work in this industry. One of the things that attracted me to the turf business was the atmosphere created by Steve Schiedel at Hamilton Sod.

Currently, I am the operations manager for Hamilton Sod which has approximately 90 employees. Of these people, there are only seven who work year-round. The others work anywhere from eight weeks to nine months a year. None of our people have been off-shore labor. I have found the hiring and motivating of seasonal employees to be an enjoyable challenge.

Here are some things I do to help motivate our employees. First, the best thing I have learned working on a sod farm is that whether seasonal or otherwise, each individual employee has some unique characteristics. I ask myself, "Why do they work at a seasonal job instead of finding a full-time job?" Every person has different reasons—

some like to travel in the winter, others just like the few months off to catch up on things, and still others like the change of pace they get from a winter job of snow plowing or delivering furnace oil.

Of these who like time off in the winter, there are some who are more challenging than others. We ask these employees to give it their all during the working season with us so they can sit at home or do whatever they prefer the remainder of the year.

Understanding and utilizing the strengths of each employee is critical. One employee may be a little slower than another but more willing to work later, maybe delivering a last-minute load of sod in the evening to satisfy customers' needs.

Knowing what motivates an employee is important. Some people are motivated by money. Generally, that type of employee doesn't fit with our atmosphere and may soon find another sod farm down the road that offers a little more money, and on and on.

We promote a friendly family atmosphere because when we work the amount

of hours that we do on the sod farm, we know it's very important for our employees to have the support of their spouses and children. With that in mind, we have a golf tournament and family barbeque every year, inviting all of our employees and their families. We also organize a Sunday theme park day at Canada's Wonderland near Toronto for all employees and their families and friends. And we provide an annual Christmas dinner which is catered at a banquet hall where employees and spouses are invited.

One of the key elements I find that helps motivate employees is to acknowledge them as individuals by greeting them first thing in the morning, preferable by name, and throughout the day when we have contact. It's also important to touch base with them before they go home and find out how everything is going. If any employees have had a bad day, I want to talk about it with them before they go home. I prefer to resolve any concerns instead of taking problems home.

OTPI

The kinder, Gentler Approach

Are you tired of talking without getting through to your staff? Some managers speak so forcefully they intimidate and alienate staffers. Perhaps you need to soften your style so employees don't tune you out. Here's how:

- ♦ Watch your language. You may use metaphors to offer something your employees can relate to but don't rely on battle metaphors like, "Let's conduct guerrilla warfare...!" Such language reinforces cutthroat, rather than collaborative, behavior. Use clear, positive language and straight forward sincerity to foster shared understanding and earn the support of your group.

- ♦ Follow through. Failure to follow through can result in cynicism. If you make a promise, act on it, or explain why the promise can't be enacted.

- ♦ Connect personally with employees. Sincere face-to-face interaction is vital, giving more weight to communications that take place between private meetings.

Source: *Communication Briefings*

A Misstep Every Leader Must Avoid

An important goal is to be the kind of leader who reinforces the right behaviors in his people. Do this well and your employees will perform above your expectations because they want to.

You can limit, even cut off, this enthusiasm by committing one crucial communications misstep: Making liberal use of "Great, but..." statements. Consider these examples:

- "You did a great job organizing the celebration with our key customers, but I had really expected more of them to attend."
- "Your department's performance during the first two months were on target and on budget, but I'm not sure we'll be able to keep it up."

Some managers use "great, but..." statements because they don't want to misrepresent a situation. Others don't want to leave their people thinking that everything is all right. No matter the rea-

son, these statements demoralize employees.

You can get around a "great, but..." statement by separating your feedback with time. If that's not possible, then separate your statements. Notice how the same examples, slightly reworded, remain spurs to achievement:

- "You did a great job organizing the celebration with our key customers. I was please with the way it turned out. Did you expect more attendees?"

- "Your department's performance was great. The next two months are going to be rough. Everyone's maximum efforts will be needed to hit our numbers. How are you all feeling about it?"

It takes thought and practice to remove those "... buts" from your statements. Do it. The effort pays enormous dividends in morale.

From Leslie W. Braksick's "Unlock Behavior, Unleash Profits."

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Marketing Tip

By Matt Hoffman
Kowal Associates, Inc.
Boston, Massachusetts

Get Feedback that Benefits Your Business

Although your business may appear to be doing well today, that can change quickly. That's why you need some means for measuring your company's pulse at all times. The best way is through customer and employee feedback. If your company doesn't have satisfied, loyal and long-term customers and employees, it's time to make some changes because they are the key to your company's success. Here are some pointers to help you get the information you need.

Customer Feedback

Involve your employees in listening closely to what customers say and in asking their opinions such as, "Is there anything else we can help you with?"

Customer surveys that are short and easy-to-fill-out are also good for collecting customer information and for demonstrating to customers that you care about their opinion. Whether your surveys are mailed or conducted over phone by an employee, be sure you include at least one question that allows an opportunity to give specific feedback (both good and bad) with comments.

Pay attention to the customers' questions. If the same question is asked frequently, such as why prices have increased, you might want to school your employees on a response that answers the question and helps manage their expectations. For instance, "Our prices have increased because of the additional time and higher quality grass seeds required to produce the more disease-free, drought-tolerant sod most customers demand. In addition to the many environmental benefits of any well-maintained turf, our blend is even more so because it requires less water and pesticides." Anticipating your customer's needs helps build relationships by showing them you're aware of those needs.

Using Customer Feedback to Your Advantage

While collecting customer comments regarding pricing, quality, service, etc., look for the top positive responses to determine what's really working. Next, look at the most negative responses

about why customers are disappointed so you can begin remedying it. Be sure to follow-up with all dissatisfied customers to resolve their issues.

Customer feedback also can be a useful tool for evaluating employee performance. Ask customers specific questions about the employees such as, "Was the person who helped you knowledgeable, polite and friendly?" You'll soon know who is performing well and who needs more guidance and training.

Front-Line Feedback About Customers

Because of the frequent direct contact that drivers and office staff often have with customers, they can be an invaluable source of information by giving you both general and specific observations. Letting them know you depend on and value their opinions not only results in more information but confirms your respect and appreciation of them.

Regular weekly or monthly employee meetings can also provide a good way to generate employee feedback about any new or developing concerns. If handled properly, these meetings allow employees to vent and voice their opinions without being accused of "whining" about the many issues that affect their jobs, whether customer related or otherwise. Being able to act on employees' comments, where possible, or explaining why not, confirms the importance of their comments, serving as a catalyst for their continued input.

Institute a Feedback Policy Today

The best way to know what your employees and customers want and need is to ask them. Decide what information you need and develop a plan for gathering feedback. Analyze the data you receive and put it to good use. Only then will you have the inside information you need to keep your company strong and profitable for years to come.

For more information, visit www.kowalassociates.com or contact Consultant and Quality Assurance Manager Matthew Hoffman at Tel: 617/892-9000



Shrewder Computing

Back Up Your Computer

Recovering or reproducing lost, stolen or damaged business files can be time-consuming and costly. The most important files to back up are those you may be legally required to maintain and those that, if lost, would directly cause your business to lose money or customers.

If your business uses more than one computer, having the computers use a shared network drive for file storage will make back-ups easier. Also, if you use computers in more than one location, be sure to back up your files on those machines as well.

There are two primary kinds of media used for backing up computer files:

CD-R (recordable) and CD-RW (Re-Writeable) discs are inexpensive and hold up to 700 MB of data, more than enough space for typical business documents.

CD-R discs allow one-time back-ups that cannot be modified. This feature, and the fact CD-R discs have a longer life span than CD-RW discs, makes CD-R discs more suitable for long-term archiving.

CD-RW discs allow you to re-use the same disc repeatedly and are best suited for regular back-ups of frequently changing files. Their shorter life spans and ability to delete or write over previously saved information make them unsuitable for long-term archiving.

If you're not backing up highly sensitive or specialized files, you probably don't need a tape drive or special back-up software. Using the CD creation software that comes with your CD burner is sufficient in most cases. You may, however, want to buy one of the many consumer and small business programs available at moderate price to automate the process and to identify files you may have overlooked.

A few last tips: Test your back-ups periodically. At a minimum, you should have a separate back-up media for each day of the week. Always store back-ups in a separate location.

TPI Action

UN Grants TPI Methyl Bromide for 2005

By remaining consistent in its representation of turfgrass producers' need for methyl bromide, TPI has been successful in receiving a "critical use exemption" (CUE) for 2005, although the total quantity was considerably reduced. However, the final chapter has yet to be written by the USEPA. In the coming months, TPI will remain engaged with the process to ensure an equitable and transparent methyl bromide "farm-level" allocation process.

TPI's CUE application for calendar year 2006 has been filed with the EPA, and the 2007 application will be completed by this coming August. Had TPI not taken this extraordinary action for its members, only those producers who could prove a need for quarantine and pre-shipment quantities of MB could have had access to the fumigant.

TPI Bylaw Amendment to be Reintroduced

A Bylaws amendment enabling Class B (manufacturer/supplier) members the right to vote and hold Board positions will be reintroduced at the July 30 TPI Annual Business meeting. The mail-ballot failed to pass by just 6 votes; however in subsequent discussions with many members, the Board concluded that insufficient information had been presented to the membership. Details will be contained in the formal notice of the meeting, along with a proxy vote that can be authorized by members not able to participate in the meeting.

Renew TPI Membership Now

Membership renewals for 2004-05 are flooding into the TPI office from all over the world. If your company has not received a renewal form, please contact TPI immediately to avoid any break in benefits and services. Renewal must have been completed to receive member registration rates at the Summer Convention in Pennsylvania.

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>

Brain Teaser

World's Easiest Quiz?

Not everything is as it appears, even when it seems obvious. For instance, try the following questions to find out how much we take for granted.

- 1- How Long did the Hundred Years War Last?
- 2- Which country makes Panama hats?
- 3- From which animal do we get catgut?
- 4- In which month do the Russians celebrate the October Revolution?
- 5- What is a camel's hair brush made of?
- 6- The Canary Islands in the Pacific are named after what animal?
- 7- What was King George VI's first name?
- 8- What color is the purple finch?
- 9- Where are Chinese gooseberries from?
- 10- How long did the Thirty Years War last?

Answers:

1- 116 years (from 1337 to 1453)
 2- Ecuador; 3- Catgut came from sheep and
 horses; 4- November, the Russian calendar
 was 13 days behind ours; 5- A camel's hair
 brush is made from squirrel fur; 6- Canary
 comes from the Latin phrase "Insularia
 Canaria" (Island of Dogs); 7- Albert, who
 took the throne in 1936, respected the wish of
 Queen Victoria that no future king be called
 "Albert"; 8- A definite crimson; 9- New
 Zealand; 10- 30 years, of course, from 1618
 to 1648.

Business Management

Turfgrass Producers International

1855-A Hicks Road, Rolling Meadows, IL 60008

e-mail: info@TurfGrassSod.org



James Beard
 1812 Shadowood
 College Station, TX 77840

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