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Plan now for TPI Summer Convention & Field Days

Be sure to check the TPI website www.TurfGrassSod.org and *Turf News* magazine for updates of the 2005 TPI Summer Convention & Field Days.

Here's a brief schedule:

July 25—ITPF Al Gardner Golf Tournament

July 26—Farm Tours, Browning Gun Mfg. Museum Tour, ITPF Banquet

July 27—Annual TPI Business Meeting; Roundtable Forum; Family Fun Fair

July 28—Field Day at Biograss Sod Farm

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Turfgrass Producers International

The Crystal Ball is Becoming Clearer

Outlook for the 2005 Season

As 2005 gets underway, there's every reason for turfgrass producers, specifically, and the green industry in general, to be optimistic for several reasons:

The National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) is projecting continued positive activity in the U.S. housing industry. Although the pace of new residential construction may not be at the same impressive levels of 2004, the industry forecasts new construction will maintain fairly good levels. The National Association of Realtors (NAR) is projecting historically high home sales for the year. Considering the significant market residential properties represent for turf producers and the entire green industry, the outlook is positive.

As for turfgrass producers who cater to golf courses, a high majority have budgeted for 2005 at the same or more than last year. Although new golf course construction is anticipated to be slow in the coming year, current operators have indicated they are committed to maintaining quality conditions on the courses they oversee. Projections are that—barring anything unforeseen—the golf course maintenance market will hold its own, possibly enjoying a modest growth in 2005 and will continue to be a significant market segment for turf producers during the year and beyond.

The positive trend for growth, efficiency and greater productivity becomes clear when considering the housing and golf markets, as well as innovations such as automated irrigation systems designed to conserve water, maximize energy usage and increase labor efficiency, and manufacturers' forecast for sales of turfgrass sod harvesters, installers, forklifts, seeders, tractors and related equipment.

The *Status Report on the Green Industry* forecasts total annual market

dollars will be between \$60 and \$66 billion for the combined landscape construction and maintenance, irrigation installation and repairs, landscape lighting, water features, power equipment, nursery supplies, fertilizer, chemicals, etc. Add to that the estimated sales by mass merchandisers of approximately \$35 million in lawn mowers and other related power equipment, irrigation components, nursery products, etc., and the future looks all the more promising.

In addition, there's an estimated \$15 billion in total sales of power equipment in the commercial marketplace that includes lawn mowers, aerators, edgers, etc. Irrigation & Green Industry projects overall sales are projected to increase as much as five to ten percent in 2005.

All of these indicators in turf related industries provide reasonable insight into the possibilities and promise that lie ahead.

Meanwhile, turf producers will continue to face challenges such as artificial turf's "wild" claims, water shortages, shrinking pesticide options and increased fuel prices. While many of these battles must be fought at the local level through educational efforts, TPI continues to pool members' and other green industry organizations' expertise to address many of these issues at the national and international levels. For example, actions by the TPI Artificial Turf Working Group have created significant awareness at the national and international level, resulting in numerous trade publication articles that seem to be causing many decision-makers to question further their options of surface coverage.

Continuing to work together, we can more effectively raise the awareness of natural grass benefits to the general public and other customers.



Taking Care of Business

By Nancy Friedman
Telephone Doctor®
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How to Handle the Foreign Accent

It's not unusual to talk with people whose enunciation of our language is different from our own. This can include individuals with either international or domestic accents. How many times have you talked with someone from a different part of the U.S. and not understood them?

There is a potential for miscommunication with anyone who is not speaking in a manner that's familiar to our ears. It's important to know how to deal with different accents. It's also important for us to remember that to individuals from another country, it's us who have the foreign accent. The following tips will help us deal more effectively with different enunciations, on the phone and in person.

Taken from our popular video of the same name, *How to Handle the Foreign Accent*, here are five key points to help you work more effectively with someone who is difficult to understand at your job (and in your personal life).

1- Don't Pretend

It's okay to gently explain that you are having a little difficulty understanding the other person. Let's face it, if you have an accent, you know it; it's not a surprise. One of the least effective things you could do when not understanding someone else is to *pretend* you do. Some folks nod or say, "Okay," just to move the conversation along. That's not doing anyone any good. It's perfectly okay to simply and gently say, "I apologize. I'm having a little difficulty understanding you. If you will talk slowly... just a little bit... I'll be able to understand you better." That's the most important thing to the person with the accent; knowing you *want* to help and get his or her message right. They're aware you might be having difficulty. And if you nod yes or pretend you understand, it won't help the situation at all. Your *tone* of voice is international; universal. So keep it at a light, slower pace—and yes, smiling is also universal. Others will hear your smile in any language.

The phrase I mention above is most effective and a key phrase to learn. I know for a fact, it is accepted very warmly. I've had many individuals from

other countries come up and thank me for sharing that technique with the audience. It apologizes, acknowledges, empathizes and creates credibility. It shows you want to help.

2- Don't Rush

Rushing threatens callers. Often there's a tendency to want to really rush someone who speaks with an accent. Not a good idea at all. Rushing threatens the best of us... let alone someone who is not able to express themselves in our own style. Slow down; not to excess, of course, but if you find yourself constantly saying, "Uh huh," over and over in rapid succession, you're probably rushing the customer.

3- Don't Shout

Just because someone has trouble understanding you doesn't mean they are *not* hard of hearing. We usually get a little laugh out of this one. Many a time we subconsciously speak louder or repeat the same word over and over, thinking that will help. It doesn't. People with accents normally hear very well. It's insulting to shout at them. Keep that smile on your face—it'll show that you have the patience to help—and keep trying to let them know that *you are there to help*. It might take time, but it will help.

4-Don't Be Rude

No one really thinks they're rude. But if you've ever said, "Hey, I can't understand you," or even a short, terse, "Huh?" you're being rude and will be perceived that way. Again, go back to # 1 and explain you're having a little difficulty understanding. The other person will often repeat it for you.

If the situation is hopeless and you simply aren't getting anywhere, don't be embarrassed or afraid to call for help. Perhaps another person can better understand what the customer is saying. But remember: being shuffled from one person to another is frustrating to anyone, with or without an accent.

5- Keep a Job Aid Available

Most often, we hear that 80 percent of the phone calls are from a certain area with the same accent. Be it all Hispanic,

Asian or all European. If your job has you working with a large percentage of people with one specific accent, keep a few simple phrases in that language near you. Short phrases that would let the customer know you're trying. If you're in an Hispanic environment, phrases such as "*Un momento por favor*" (One moment please) will help. Even if we mispronounce it, they'll understand. Hopefully, there is someone in your area who is either fluent or well spoken in one particular language and who can help you formulate an effective work aid.

And remember what we said earlier—your smile is universal. Use it early and often, no matter who you're talking to!

Nancy Friedman is president of Telephone Doctor Customer Service Training, St. Louis, MO. To receive your own FREE Telephone Doctor's monthly e-mails and "Friendly Voice" newsletter, send your name, company, address and phone number to:
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Tel: 314/291-1012



Questions to Aid in Delegating

Answering these questions will help you separate the jobs you should keep doing, from those you can give to employees:

- * **What do I do?** List all tasks and duties that are your responsibility (by day, week or month).
- * **Does everything on my list require my personal attention?** To answer this, ask yourself: 1) What skills are needed? 2) Is this confidential? 3) Am I the only one knowledgeable enough to do the job?
- * **Which of my responsibilities can my employees handle?** Would it be worthwhile to train employees to tackle some of these jobs?

Note: Review your list for repetitive tasks. In most cases, the time it takes to train employees to do such tasks will pay off many times over. Source: *Egos & Eggshells: Managing for Success in Today's Workplace*, by Margot Robinson, Stanton & Harper Books, Reidsville, NC.

Marketing Tip

By Mohammad Al Amleh
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Farmers versus the Business of Farming

While professional methods would differ when selling one turf product or another, the basics remain the same. We have similar production processes with similar specialized equipment which produce many undifferentiable products. We operate in the same type of highly competitive market, and we face the same daily challenges; yet, we grow differently. Some of us succeed while others go astray.

Reasons for business success and failure are numerous, one of which is how we define our vision and goals. The definition can be summed up in a very imperative question: Am I a farmer or business manager? Although, the difference is subtle, it shapes how we evolve our businesses. Issues such as business location, hiring and training people, production systems and marketing strategies would be addressed differently, depending on how we view ourselves.

At the initial stage of establishing our businesses, the business manager's first concerns are the office location, furniture selection, paper system and contact information. Those with the farmer's mindset are more concerned firstly with the farm location and suitability. Thus, as farmers, the seeding stage is bound to location, therefore, limiting business contacts and interaction with the turfgrass market including suppliers, competitors, buyers and the general public.

The approach to hiring employees also varies between the business manager and the farmer. The business manager analyzes each job, structures value-adding functions and places employees accordingly. In contrast, the farmer's first choice of employees will be family members, thus often deterring experienced and specialized help as well as reducing the business' growth potential.

Furthermore, emotional connection to the farms is nullified by business man-

agers, as opposed to farmers. Business managers consider farms as production units that can be developed or closed, based on the unit's profit and efficiency.

Farmers, in contrast, become emotionally connected to their farms and thus any relocation or closing decision will be based on unbearable financial losses.

There are also differences in how the two different mind-sets make equipment choices. Business managers consider maneuverability and ease-of-use, often selecting medium size equipment that is quick and easy to transport between production units and requires lower investment and maintenance costs. Farmers tend to invest in large equipment, hoping to reduce production labor costs.

At the marketing stage, positioning, market segmentation, channeling and targeted buyers differ, too. Business managers try to reach every potential buyer, even the small ones, having already established a point of communication and distribution to accommodate any customer order. Over time, they establish a business image and solidify their cash cycle.

Farmers, on the other hand, often find themselves strained to deal with limited number of large buyers at lower prices, hoping to salvage production expenses. The result is a hindered cash cycle and reduced production quantity and quality.

Businesses are like any plant in that their successful growth depends on their seeding stage. Rooting will be vigorous and leaves will be greener if the seeding stage is prepared for carefully and given the time to grow. The plant will grow and reseed if it grows apart from the planter. In the same manner, we farmers must separate ourselves from our operations by every means possible to enhance our businesses' growth and prosperity, for us and for our children.



Shrewder Computing

Picking the Right Password

Selecting the right password is a tricky business. It has to be easy to remember, yet not obvious to everyone who knows you. If others are using business computers, make sure they realize the need for strong passwords when they are hired.

Below is a list of important tips for use in selecting a password.

Change Your Password Frequently—For each computer and account you use, you should have a unique password. Therefore, if one password is cracked, the entire system will not be compromised. Also, don't use your log-in name.

Don't Share Your Password—You should not write down your password or share it with anyone. If you need to write it down, store the paper in a secure location such as a locked file cabinet, not under your keyboard where anyone can find it.

Be Unique—Do not use dictionary words, common names or birthdays. Consider using a combination of letters (both uppercase and lowercase), numbers, and punctuation marks. Otherwise, your system will be vulnerable to programs designed by hackers who can automate entry of every word in the dictionary.

Be Careful—Reversing, capitalizing or doubling a piece of easily identifiable personal information may sound like a clever plan but it's all too common. As a result, it won't trip up anyone dead set on penetrating your computer system.

Make It Long—Password lengths can vary but the longer, the better. Construct the password using a pattern so you can remember it without having to write it down to jog your memory.

Passwords also can be set to expire after a certain time period, requiring you to change them routinely.

Source: the U.S. Chamber's new guide to cyber security, designed for small business owners. Visit: www.cyberpartnership.org

Examples of Less Words to Express More

If it feels like you're writing too much, you probably are, according to *USA Today* research. Consider how many words are used in each of the following:

Gettysburg Address.....272
Bag of Lay's Potato Chips.....401
IRA Form 1040 EZ.....418
Average *USA Today* cover story..1,200

TPI Action

Final Ruling on Methyl Bromide—

The EPA issued its final ruling for the allocation of approved amounts of methyl bromide for 2005 under the Critical Use Exemption (CUE). The result is that the paperwork and other efforts from TPI members working together, has paid off because: the turfgrass sod allocations of methyl bromide under the CUE ruling will be available *only* to TPI members.

Non-TPI member farms will not have access to these allocations of methyl bromide. TPI will continue to monitor information about the procedures CUE requires for purchasing and applying methyl bromide.

TPI Public Relations Update—

"S.O.D. One Acronym We Must Live Without"

In December, 2004, TPI drafted an "open letter" to extension agents, county and state agencies, research organizations, universities and representatives of the media requesting they discontinue the use of the acronym S.O.D. (with or without periods) to describe Sudden Oak Death (*Phytophthora ramorum*).

As a result of our efforts, the USDA's Plant Protection & Quarantine Division notified all agency personnel that they are to discontinue using the acronym "SOD" when describing the disease. TPI wishes to express our sincere appreciation to the USDA and the media for their immediate response to our request

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>

Environmental Benefits Artificial Turf vs. Natural Grass

The following is a brief review of the scientifically proven benefits that humanity receives from natural turfgrass, compared to fake grass:

| Benefits | Artificial Turf | Natural Grass |
|--|--------------------|------------------|
| Generates Oxygen | | ✓ |
| Cools the Air | | ✓ |
| Soil Erosion Control | | ✓ |
| Water Filter/Purifier | | ✓ |
| Rain Water Entrapment for Ground Recharge | | ✓ |
| Air Pollution Control | | ✓ |
| Glare Reduction | | ✓ |
| Temperature Reduction | | ✓ |
| Dust Prevention | | ✓ |
| Dissipates Solar Heat | | ✓ |
| Fire Prevention | | ✓ |
| Environmental Protection | | ✓ |
| Low-Cost Surface | | ✓ |
| Safety Cushion | | ✓ |
| Increased Property Value | | ✓ |
| All Natural | | ✓ |
| Healthy for Humans | | ✓ |

Business Management

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