

April/May 2006



ISSUE HIGHLIGHTS

Taking Care of Business..... Page 2

Are You Guilty?

Six Foundation Thoughts..... Page 2

Marketing Tip..... Page 3

How to Negotiate Higher Prices

Shrewder Computing..... Page 3

Sales Volume vs. Profit Margin

TPI Action..... Page 4

— *TPI Membership Renewal Form*

Coming to Your Mailbox Soon!

— *ITPF Fundraising Efforts Generates*

Tens of Thousands of Dollars!

— *Getting the Message Out to the*

General Public

— *TPI Continues Involvement with*

Green Industry Organizations

It's Your Association and It's Your Voice That Counts

All TPI members are encouraged to attend in the 2006 TPI Annual Business Meeting where your participation will help determine your association's direction for the coming year and onward. The meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, July 19 from 10:15 am to 11:45 am in The Peabody Memphis hotel during the TPI Summer Convention & Field Days.

In addition to electing new Board Trustees and Officers, attendees will be provided detailed reports of TPI's past year, and new items will be addressed.

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Turfgrass Producers International

www.TurfGrassSod.org

TPI Website Gives Members Access to More Valuable Information than Ever!

If you haven't visited the newly revised TPI website, you're in for a pleasant surprise and valuable experience. Launched prior to the 2006 TPI Midwinter Conference, the site features more information than ever before in addition to the modern, professional look web visitors expect.

Looking for specific information about a warm- or cool-season turf disease, *Turf News* article about nematodes, research about Methyl Bromide? Within the "Members Only" section of the new TPI website you'll have access to Michigan State University's TGIF (Turfgrass Information File) database of more than 100,000 articles and research papers, at no charge. Once you find the

document(s) you're searching for, you can download and print them from your computer.

Anxious to sell a used piece of equipment, your entire farm or hire a farm manager? Just "click" on "Classified Ads" for the most up-to-date listing. (Classified Ads received one month prior to the *Turf News* mailing date are posted on the TPI website).

For current and potential customers looking for a turf producer, or equipment, parts and supply companies is easier than ever because they can select the specific tab right on the TPI website home page.

It is worth the time invested in getting to know the TPI website and the wealth of valuable



Marketing Assumptions that Just Aren't True:

Customers are interested in what I'm selling and what I have to say—actually, they're interested in what you can do for them.

My direct mail recipients always read my message—if you're lucky, five percent read your information and less than two percent order products.

Of course we'll succeed; our sod is the best—if you succeed, it's because your marketing is the best.

It will be easy to market because everyone needs our sod—first, you have to reach "everyone," then you have to educate them about your products. . . and there are costs involved in that degree of marketing.

Build a better mousetrap and the world will beat a path to your door—so much for comic book philosophy; it is more important to focus on effective marketing.

We believe our product is the best deal—join the long line of other "best deals."

ITPF Scholarship Deadline is Fast Approaching!

The May 15, 2006 deadline for submitting ITPF Scholarship applications is just around the corner. Complete information about who is eligible, how to apply and an application form are now available on the TPI

website www.TurfGrassSod.org in the ITPF section under "ITPF Scholarship."

The application has been designed to be downloaded so applicants can key in the required information. Contact the TPI office with any questions.

Are You Guilty?

What's your definition of customer service? What unprofessional behavior irritates you the most when, as a consumer, you are interacting with another company?

Sometimes, customer service that is perceived as rude is not intentional and often is the result of absent-mindedness or carelessness on behalf of an employee. Either way, bad customer service can translate into lower sales and lost business.

Based on our own Telephone Doctor surveys, we've compiled 15 customer service "No Nos." They are listed below, along with the Telephone Doctor's guidelines (in parentheses) on how to do it right. Although there are plenty more, these are at the top of the list.

If your company's customer service managers and front-line employees are guilty of any of these, it's time for some action; otherwise, your company might have an image problem that could sabotage your effort to produce and market great products.

- 1—Your employees are having a bad day and their foul mood carries over in conversations with customers. (Everyone has bad days, but customer service employees need to keep theirs to themselves.)
- 2—Your employees hang up on angry customers. (*Ironclad rule:* Never hang up on anyone. When we hang up, we label ourselves as rude.)
- 3—Phone calls or voice mail messages aren't returned, despite leaving your phone number. (Call customers back as soon as you can, or have calls returned on your behalf.)
- 4—Your employees put callers on hold without asking them first, as a courtesy. (Ask customers politely if you can put them on hold and wait for their response—very few will complain or say, "No way!")
- 5—Your employees put callers on a speaker phone without asking them first if it's OK. (It's the nice thing to do, as a courtesy.)
- 6—Your employees eat, drink or chew

gum while talking with customers on the phone or face-to-face. (A telephone mouthpiece is like a microphone that easily picks up any noise. Employees need to eat their meals away from the phone and away from customers. And save that stick of gum for break time.)

- 7—You have call-waiting on your business lines and your employees frequently interrupt existing calls to take new calls. (One interruption in a call might be excusable; beyond that, you are crossing the "rude" threshold. Do your best to be prepared with enough staff for peak calling times.)
- 8—Your employees refuse or forget to use the words "Please," "Thank you," or "You're welcome." (Use those words generously. *Food for thought:* When a customer says, "Thank you," the best response is "You're welcome," not the slang, "No problem" which we hear so often today and which carries the implication that the customer could have been a problem.)
- 9—Your employees hold side conversations with friends or each other while talking to customers. Or they make personal calls on cell phones. (Don't do either of these.)
- 10—Your employees seem incapable of offering more than one-word answers. (One-word answers come across as rude and uncaring.)
- 11—Your employees do provide more than one-word answers, but a lot of the words are grounded in company or industry jargon that many customers don't understand. (Don't casually drop

in abbreviations or terms such as standard rolls or big rolls without defining them.)

- 12—Your employees request that customers call them back when they aren't so busy. (Customers should never be told to call back; ask for the customer's number instead.)
- 13—Your employees rush customers, forcing them off the phone or out the door at the earliest opportunity. (Rushing threatens customers—take your time.)
- 14—Your employees curtly snap, "What's this in reference to?" effectively humbling customers and belittling their requests. (Screening techniques can be used with a little more warmth and finesse. If a caller has mistakenly come your way, do your best to point him or her in the right direction.)
- 15—Your employees freely admit to customers that they hate their jobs. (This simply makes the entire company look bad and, chances are that such a moment of candor or lapse in judgment will get back to the boss.)

In defense of front-line employees and workers, customers can be rude too. Customer service jobs can often seem thankless with little motivation or incentive to do the job right.

But the challenge here is that life for front-line employees may not be fair. Customers can be rude and get away with it. Employees cannot, if they want to help their companies to succeed and keep their jobs.



Six Foundation Thoughts—by Richard Flint

Two or three times a year, I am invited to speak at a Growth Camp. This is a special time because it allows me to stand in front of serious people—not people who are looking for the "magical formula." I love to share what the real meaning of growth is:

- G — getting control of your fears
- R — resisting the temptation to detour when things get tough
- O — ownership for your life and the choices you have made
- W — willingness to address your life with honesty
- T — taking life at a pace you can manage
- H — having the courage to face yourself even when you don't like you

Question for you: Are those six things the foundation on which you build your life?

Marketing Tip

By Tom Reilly
Tom Reilly Training
www.TomReillyTraining.com

How to Negotiate Higher Prices

When negotiating with customers, do you sometimes feel helpless? Does the situation too often end with the feeling you gave better than you received? You don't have to be a victim in price negotiations. To quote a purchasing agent at Boeing, "If salespeople only understood how powerful they are, they could close us down tomorrow."

Sir Francis Bacon wrote, "Knowledge is power." If that is true, then what we don't know holds great power over us.

I believe that knowledge is empowerment. The more we know, the more empowered we feel. Knowledge of simple negotiating principles will boost your confidence and your competence.

Principle One: It begins with your attitude—Knowing that you desire win-win outcomes and communicating that with your behavior during the negotiation signals to the buyer that manipulation has no place in a relationship built on trust. Your guiding principle must be that if it's not a good deal for one of you, it's not a good deal for either of you. Adopting this guiding principle liberates you from the shackles of the win-at-all-costs mentality that buyers dread. Fear is not the emotion you want buyers feeling when you're asking them for their money.

Principle Two—Use time to your advantage.

Prudently drag your feet when it comes to lowering your prices. Buyers know that if they can get you to make a quick and emotional decision on pricing issues, it will probably benefit them more than you. Professional negotiators will hold their most important request for that moment when the other person sees light at the end of the tunnel, because they know that more concessions are made at the end of a negotiation. Give yourself the advantage of a well-thought-out response to customer requests.

Principle Three—See the game.

If you are dealing with a customer who has a predictable, first-response outrage to any price increase, you can


prepare yourself for the emotional barrage. If you're dealing with someone who always leads with unreasonable demands, the best advice I ever got for this came from my first sales manager who said, "Just sit back and enjoy the floor show. You may see the best, off-Broadway performance of the year."

Principle Four: Balk at the first offer—Be patient. Do not jump too quickly when the other person makes an offer. It could be an opening move to test the water. There may be flexibility in the buyer's negotiating position, but if you are too quick to accept their initial offer, you may not discover areas of flexibility.

Principle Five: Don't split first—Whoever first offers to split the difference will go more than fifty percent of the way. If you are \$2,000 apart from your buyer's stated price and you offer to meet half way, you will likely hear: "That's generous, but we're still \$1,000 higher than my budget. When there is a difference between your price and the price that the buyer wants to pay, ask that person for a suggestion to resolve the issue. The buyer may offer the first split.

Principle Six—Know your walking point.

George Meaney, the great labor negotiator, said, "Never sit down at a negotiating table unless you're willing to stand up and walk away." Unless you know your walking point, you could find yourself making concessions you might later regret. Knowing your walking point builds your confidence and communicates to the buyer that there is a point beyond which you will not go. Remember, you want every opportunity, not necessarily every order.

You have been negotiating your whole life. From infancy through childhood through adulthood, you have been a negotiator. Whether it's at home or at work, you participate in the give-and-take of life. You have within your reach the ability to negotiate win-win outcomes for you and your buyer. 

Shrewder Computing

Sales Volume vs. Profit Margin
Your best profit makers and best sellers might be the same, but do you know for sure? Don't rely on assumptions about what's contributing the most to your bottom line.

Tracking item sales is only one part of learning what makes the most money for your business. You also need to track your total costs for each item or service, including supplies, equipment depreciation and maintenance, labor and other production costs, licensing fees, etc.

There are several types of software suitable for tracking product costs and net profits, including spreadsheet, database, accounting and small business productivity programs. Any of these products can be used to show what to push to increase your net profit margins. The results might reveal hidden gems that you've been neglecting. If you already track your sales and costs closely, a spreadsheet program might be sufficient to indicate the products with the highest margins and those that contribute most to your net profit. Point-of-sale, accounting or business productivity software can help by prompting you for necessary information and automatically generating reports.

When shopping for such software, be sure it can report on a per-product basis and, ideally, compare the amount of profit between products. Analyze everything you sell, including how one item impacts other sales. Is one product with high sales volume that doesn't generate other product sales worth as much as one that sells slower but encourages people to spend more?

Use the proper tools and never assume you know what drives your success until you have hard data to back it up.

Source: US Chamber of Commerce

TPI Action

TPI Membership Renewal Form Coming to Your Mailbox Soon!

On May 1, the annual membership dues billings will be mailed to all members for the 2006-2007 membership year. Please take time to update all of your information on the form, especially your e-mail and other contact information because that is published on the TPI website for current and potential customers to contact you—*note*: If you specify "private e-mail," it will only be used for TPI correspondence, not published on the TPI website.). Another important reason to update your e-mail is that TPI is using it as the primary means to inform members of any new offerings and significant changes that could be of value to your business. Be sure to complete the renewal form and return it right away via fax or postal mail; or if necessary contact the TPI office via phone with your changes and updates so you'll be able to receive all important information.

ITPF Fundraising Efforts Generates Tens of Thousands of Dollars!

During the recent 2006 TPI Midwinter Conference, more than \$40,000 for research and education was raised through a variety of efforts including the ITPF Banquet Balloon Buy, Silent Auction and an unannounced exhibit drawing (see details in the next issue of *Turf News* for details). Those and other efforts will help fund the recently awarded nine research projects which include one continuing study, four general turf-related and four water-use specific projects.

Getting the Message Out to the General Public

Over the last six months, published turf related articles have reached nearly five million readers through newspapers and magazines. This figure doesn't include radio, TV and websites that have carried turfgrass related information. In addition, TPI has been mentioned in assorted trade publications such as *Ground Maintenance*, *Sports Turf*, *Lawn & Landscape*, *Mountain West Turf*, as well as the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Atlanta Journal*.

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

Tel: 800/405-8873 or 847/649-5555

Fax: 847/649-5678

e-mail: info@TurfGrassSod.org

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

TPI Continues Involvement with Green Industry Organizations:

Project Evergreen (PE): PE is promoting Green Spaces and conducting PR work for the Green Industry including turfgrass. As a member of the Board of Project Evergreen, TPI has been actively helping to shape this organization into a voice for turfgrass as a major component of landscapes. PE programs' message to consumers promote green spaces and turf.

Council for Agricultural Science and Technology (CAST)

Turf & Ornamental Communicators Association (TOCA)

Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment (RISE)

TPI Continues to Monitor the Following Issues:

Lawns & The Environment

Methyl Bromide

Labor Issues (NCAE)

Specialty Crop Legislation

Water Restrictions

and many others!

Business Management

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