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ISSUE HIGHLIGHTS

Taking Care of Business Page 2
What Your Customers Really Want

Safety Management Pages 3-4
– Alcohol & Drug Use—A Major Safety Issue
– Key Steps to a Safe Turfgrass Sod Operation
– Preventing Slip, Trip & Fall Injuries
– TPI Safety Tips

Marketing Tip Page 5
– Part I—Ask the Right Questions
– Part II—Price Objections are the Result of Expectations

Shrewder Computing Page 5
Un-Clutter Your Desktop: Hide Your Shortcut Icons

TPI Action Page 6
– “Facts About Artificial Turf and Natural Grass” Booklet Generates Excellent Response
– Attention Turfgrass Seed & Vegetative Stock Companies
– TPI Membership Farm Profile Survey Easily Accessible on the TPI Website

Did You Receive the TPI E-mail about the \$1,000 Prize Drawing?

If you didn't receive the notice, maybe TPI doesn't have your correct e-mail! Actually, there was no prize drawing; however, if TPI can't contact you (because of an outdated e-mail address or other contact information published in the *TPI Membership Directory* and on the TPI website), potential customers can't contact you.

Please check your listing in the *TPI Membership Directory* and on the TPI website right away. If it's not correct, contact Terri Berkowitz at tberkowitz@TurfGrassSod.org. If you have a private e-mail you do not want published, just let Terri know.

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Turfgrass Producers International

Looking for quick, easier-than-ever access to useful information?

A Fresh Look at the TPI Website

If you haven't opened the TPI website recently, you might be pleasantly surprised at the new information you'll find there. Go ahead and give it a try at www.TurfGrassSod.org. As the home page opens, look at the two shaded boxes on the right side: “Events” and “News.”

The *Events* box provides a “quick-click” for instant access to the latest information about the next TPI Convention or Conference. Select “TPI Summer Convention & Field Days” and you'll find information about the educational and social events, speakers, tours, nearby sights worth visiting, and much more. Depending on your timing, you might also find a “Conference Survey” where attendees can voice their views to TPI—surveys are located in the “Members Only” section.

Below the *Events* box is the *News* box with more important information all members need to be aware of. First is the “Scholarship Application.” Next is the “TPI Membership Farm Profile Survey” which is located in the “Members Only” section. All members are strongly urged to participate in this important information gathering. The survey results are extremely important in helping demonstrate the size and value of the turfgrass industry to state and federal governments, as well as manufacturers, suppliers and scientists in order to attract their interest and support.

The next item listed in the *News* box is the recently released booklet *Facts*

About Artificial Turf and Natural Grass. This section is open to everyone in order to help get the message out to the general public and especially the decision-makers involved in the choice of installing synthetic turf or natural grass. Click on this link and you'll find a printable version of the booklet and an order form to request free copies at the minimal cost of shipping and handling.

The last entry in the shaded *News* box is “View TPI Conference and Convention Photos” that many members have asked for and, finally, technology makes it possible. First, you'll need to enter the “Members Only” section—if you forgot the member *username* and *password*, call TPI. Upon entering the “Members Only” section, select “Photo Gallery” located on the left side, and then select “Click here for TPI Conference & Convention Photos,” located near the top of the center box. Or, you can go to the website www.tpiphotos.smugmug.com



Don't forget to check out these items on the left side of the TPI member page:

- ♦ Surveys
- ♦ TPI Logos
- ♦ Turfgrass Information File (TGIF)
- ♦ Fill In The Blanks Press Release
- ♦ Turf News Back Issues
- ♦ Business Management Newsletter
- ♦ Marketing Brochures & Products
- ♦ Clip Art
- ♦ Photo Gallery

View TPI Conferences and Conventions Photos On-Line!

Members now have direct access to all photos taken at TPI Conferences and Conventions (beginning with 2006 Convention), at the following website www.tpiphotos.smugmug.com



What Your Customers Really Want

While no savvy business person would intentionally treat customers less than special, it is amazing how much we take for granted. The customer's perspective is sometimes quite different from our own. Business trainer and consultant Laurie Brown offers some tips to help business owners and managers gain a better customer perspective of what they want and need to keep coming back to you time and again.

There are seven qualities of customer care that will take a business from the great product or service to the great company that will keep customers coming back for more. Here's what it takes to win and keep your customers.

1— Accessibility

Accessibility begins by making it easy for customers to do business with you. Accessibility includes things such as ample parking, easy-to-use phone systems, returning e-mail the day it is received and a website that is clear and easy to navigate. It means you use language that is clear and easily understood by all. If you have diverse customers, it means providing the information they need to care for and maintain your products.

2— Availability

Are you there when your customers need you? Make sure your business hours are compatible with your clients/customers needs. On days and times when your business is closed, be sure customers have a phone number or e-mail address where they can leave a message and are confident somebody will get back to them in a reasonable time frame, usually the same day. This could be a website, a person on call, or a helpful message on your phone system. Nowadays, people seek information 24/7—make sure they can get what they need when they need it.

3— Affability

Everyone wants to do business with nice, pleasant people. Seems simple, right? But sometimes the simplest of things are the hardest to accomplish. Having to deal with

the realities of life, like traffic, arguments or just not feeling well, can make being pleasant seem impossible. However, making a point of warmly greeting your customers on the phone or in person can have an amazing impact on the success of your business.

Everyone (from the delivery drivers to the bookkeeper) should greet customers warmly. This will help ensure your customers get the treatment they deserve.

4— Agreeability

Customers want to hear "Yes" when they ask you for something. But, how many times do you say "No" to your customers? Perhaps you or your staff hide behind policies and procedures. Do you really think it feels better when your customers hear, "No, sorry it's our policy?"

Obviously you can't say "Yes" every time your customers ask for something. So how do you know when to say "Yes" without it becoming a problem? Put it through a very simple filter. If it isn't illegal, immoral or unethical, say "Yes." Or, at least don't say "No." Instead, stop, take a breath and say, "Let me see what I can do." Then try to find a way around the issue—be creative but show the customers you are doing everything possible to accommodate them.

When you say, "Yes," you are showing your customer that you value their business and that you care about their best interests.

5— Accountability

Take ownership of your customers' needs and issues. Let them know you will do what it takes to make them happy. If there is a problem, be the one who solves it, even if you didn't create the problem. See it through until its resolution. When other people need to be involved, you should still follow-up to make sure the problem was successfully resolved to the customer's satisfaction.

6— Adaptability

Your customers' wants and needs are constantly changing. Make sure you keep up. Adaptability is essential. Don't just wait for their requests; talk to them, ask them about their experience doing business with you.

What do they like about your business? What do they believe needs changing or improving? Then, try to give them what they want.

Beyond just keeping up with customers' needs, make sure you are exceeding their expectations. If you always provide something exceptional, they will grow to expect it, and it ceases to be exceptional. When exceptional becomes the norm, you need to find new ways to surprise and delight them.

7— Ability

It might seem strange that ability comes last on the list. If you do all the things described above successfully, customers will be far more willing to accept that you are not perfect. But this doesn't mean you don't have to strive for continuous improvement.

Customers are getting more and more knowledgeable. The Internet has made it easy for them to gain expertise. You need to do as much research as they do. More than ever, you need to be an expert about your products and services. Take 15 minutes out of your day and learn something new. Read what your customers read; find out what others are saying about your products and services; learn about your competition.

You can truly set yourself apart from the competition when you strive for more knowledge and expertise every day.

Focusing on what is important to your customers allows you to truly set yourself apart from your competition. Strive to embody the seven qualities of customer care and create customers for life.

(About the Author—International trainer and consultant Laurie Brown is author of "The Teleprompter Manual, for Executives, Politicians, Broadcasters and Speakers."



Why Does TPI Need Your Updated E-Mail Address?

TPI doesn't send e-mails to the entire membership often, but when it happens you'll want to have access to the timely information. Otherwise, you might have to wait a week or more for critical information via regular postal mail.

Safety Management

Alcohol and Drug Use: A Major Safety Issue

An employee is driving down the road at a high speed with a load full of sod. Suddenly he swerves, winds up in a ditch and is critically injured. Another employee who is operating a harvester isn't paying attention to where he is going. A child unexpectedly darts out onto the property, and the employee—whose reflexes are slow that day—strikes the child. The child is killed.

These are just two of the many types of incidents that can occur when turfgrass sod workers are under the influence of alcohol or other drugs. Certain prescription medications may also make a person drowsy and impair their ability to safely operate a truck, harvester, forklift, mower or other equipment.

Here are some important facts about alcohol and other drug use and how it can impact the safety of your turfgrass sod operation:

- ✓ Even small amounts of alcohol can reduce a person's field of vision (peripheral vision). Alcohol also interferes with hand-eye coordination and decreases a person's ability to make good judgments and maintain focus. These skills are critical when driving a vehicle or operating other equipment.
- The use of alcohol or other drugs on the job increases the chances of an injury accident. The victim may be the user, a co-worker, customer or innocent bystander.
- ✓ Traffic accidents and falls are two examples of injury accidents common among workplace alcohol and drug users. In addition, incidents of workplace violence (fights, sabotage or other aggressive behaviors) are often linked to alcohol and other drug use.

Workplace Substance Abuse Facts

Drug Using Employees Are:

- 2.2 times more likely (than non-drug using employees) to request early dismissal or time off
- 2.5 times more likely to be absent eight days or more
- 3 times more likely to be late for work
- 3.6 times more likely to be involved in a workplace accident
- 5 times more likely to file an accident-related insurance claim

Full-Time Workers Ages 18-49 Who Report Current Illicit Drug Use Are More Likely To State They Have:

- Worked for three or more employers in the past year
- Taken an unexcused absence from work in the past month
- Voluntarily left their employment in the past year
- Been fired by an employer in the past year

—Laborers And Machine Operators Are Among Those Who Report The Highest Rate Of Illicit Drug Use.

—In The United States Alone, Alcoholism Causes 500 Million Lost Workdays Each Year.

(Source: U.S. Department of Labor)

- ✓ Illicit drug users often steal from their employer in order to support their drug habits.
- ✓ Equipment theft is often perpetrated by drug users, who sell the equipment and use the money to purchase drugs.

Workplace Substance Abuse Prevention Checklist

- ☐ Implement a written policy that strictly prohibits the use of alcohol and other drugs on the job.
- ☐ Prohibit employees *and* managers from showing up at work with the presence of alcohol or other drugs in their systems. Know that certain drugs, such as marijuana, can remain in a person's system for weeks.
- ☐ Require employees to let their supervisors know about any prescription medications they are taking. Some prescription medications can impair a worker's ability to safely perform his or her job.
- ☐ Train supervisors and other managers to recognize the possible signs of alcohol or drug use. Seek assistance from a professional in the alcohol/drug field if needed.
- ☐ Train all employees in the dangers of using alcohol or other drugs on the job. Using alcohol or other drugs is especially dangerous if they are operating harvesters, trucks, truck-trailer combinations or other vehicles or equipment.
- ☐ Implement a confidential system that enables employees with alcohol or drug abuse problems to seek help. Become familiar with the resources in your community that provide alcohol/drug abuse treatment and other professional assistance.
- ☐ Post the names and phone numbers of local alcohol/drug abuse agencies and any free community "hot-lines" on employee bulletin boards and other private locations, such as employee rest rooms.
- ☐ Know that persons who abuse alcohol and other drugs are likely to deny that they have a problem. That is why it is important to encourage employees to confidentially report any concerns about a co-worker to a supervisor or other manager.
- ☐ Strictly prohibit retaliation against any employee who reports suspected alcohol/drug abuse or who seeks help for his or her own alcohol/drug problems.

Key Steps to a Safe Turfgrass Sod Operation

Leading by example is one of the most important steps you can take to ensure a safe turfgrass sod operation. Your employees will look to you—and to their direct supervisor—to see whether safety is *really* a priority from the top on down.

If your employees see you operating equipment with a broken power takeoff (PTO) shield, applying chemicals without wearing chemical-resistant gloves or leaving your earplugs and safety glasses on the dashboard of your truck, it's doubtful they'll take safety seriously.

Here are some tips to help ensure a safe turfgrass sod

operation:

- ✓ Talk about safety with your supervisors, other managers and non-supervisory employees on a daily basis. Let them know how important safety is to you.
- ✓ Speak your employees' *language*. Know what most motivates them. **Example:** Explain to supervisors how the time spent investigating just one serious accident will cut into their production time. Remind them they will be held accountable during performance reviews for getting all customers' jobs done on time. Include safety in performance reviews that impact their future pay increases and/or bonuses. In other words, know that with supervisors, "money talks."
- ✓ Implement a pro-active, written safety program. Include brief, weekly safety training sessions, monthly (or more frequent) safety meetings, and establish safety policies and rules.
- ✓ Review and track the costs of all accidents, including "close calls." Regularly discuss these costs and preventive measures with supervisors and other managers.
- ✓ Implement a written accident investigation policy. Hold supervisors responsible for suggesting and implementing follow-up corrective actions.
- ✓ Implement a formal return-to-work/light duty program, which aims to get injured employees back to work as soon as medically possible. (*Note:* We will give you step-by-step tips on how to do this in our next *Safety Management* column.)
- ✓ Regularly conduct safety audits (or hazard inspections). Ask your insurer for checklists or other tools to assist you.
- ✓ Provide quality personal protective equipment, safety signage and other resources needed for a safe operation.
- ✓ Regularly review your safety program to see where improvements can be made.

Preventing Slip, Trip and Fall Injuries

An employee is laying sod, and the ground is still wet from the night before. He is rushing to get the job done, slips and breaks his leg. The next day, a different worker jumps off of a truck, loses his footing, falls and breaks two vertebrae in his spine.

Unrealistic? Unfortunately, it's not. These are just two of many examples of how slip, trip and fall injuries can occur at your turfgrass sod operation. Incidents such as these can also be very costly. Among these costs are lost production time, the need to hire and train replacement workers, lengthy insurance claims, and potential increases in your insurance premiums. The following tips will help you reduce the risk of slip, trip and fall injuries:

- ✓ Require your supervisors to assess all work sites for potential slip, trip and fall hazards. These may include such hazards as wet, slippery ground; large rocks, sticks or other

debris; holes in the ground; or uneven terrain.

- ✓ Hold brief safety sessions at work sites at the start of each workday. These sessions, which can be just five minutes long, should include the identification of all hazards—especially those that cannot be eliminated before work begins.
- ✓ Ensure that your trucks and other equipment have safe ways for workers to climb on and off. Regularly check the condition of steps and other means of mounting and dismounting for mud, water and debris.

Checklist to Prevent Slip, Trip and Fall Injuries

- ☐ Maintain your turfgrass sod farm in a neat and orderly condition. Regularly inspect your property for slip, trip and fall hazards. Eliminate them whenever possible.
- ☐ Ensure that your written safety rules prohibit running and jumping on and off of trucks and other equipment.
- ☐ Enforce your safety rules. It's doubtful that solely having a written rule prohibiting workers from jumping on and off of equipment will stop it. Supervisors must enforce this rule and "write up" those employees who violate it.
- ☐ Train your employees. Instruct them to be on the constant lookout for new slip, trip and fall hazards (due to such factors as changing weather conditions). Make sure they know how to assess work sites for slip, trip and fall hazards. Remind them that removing these hazards where possible is better than landing in the hospital with a broken arm, leg or neck.
- ☐ Don't forget your office workers. They, too, can slip, trip and fall if "good housekeeping" is not constantly stressed. This includes keeping drawers and cabinet doors closed when not in use, keeping aisles/walkways free of debris, and immediately cleaning up spills.
- ☐ Require appropriate footwear. Sturdy shoes or boots with non-slip soles (good traction) will go a long way toward reducing slips, trips and falls.



TPI Safety TIPS

- Keep all safety guards and shields in place.
- Don't skip safety training during your busiest season(s).
- Recognize employees who exhibit safe practices.
- Maintain equipment in good condition.
- Stress safe driving techniques.
- Identify all potential hazards.
- Keep PTO shafts completely guarded.
- Follow equipment manufacturers' safety guidelines.
- Do NOT bypass start a tractor.
- Set a good safety example.
- Encourage employees to promptly report hazards.
- Train workers in proper lifting techniques.
- Conduct brief, weekly "tailgate" safety training.
- Encourage employees to report "close calls."
- Use "close call" incidents to improve safety training.

Marketing Tip

By Tom Reilly
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Part I—Ask the Right Questions

Part II—Price Objections are the Result of Expectations

Ask the Right Questions

In our recent study of top sales achievers we discovered a not-so-surprising fact: Top salespeople listen more than talk on sales calls. They invest most of their time in the needs analysis stage, discussing buyer needs, wants and concerns. So, it got me thinking. If there was just one question you could ask your customer, what would it be? Here are some of my favorites to add to your list:

- What is the single most important thing you want from a supplier?
- What is the one thing that keeps you awake at night?
- What can we do to make your life easier?
- If you were in my business, what would you offer customers like yourself that no one does?
- What is most critical to your success in this project?
- Considering your needs, how would you describe the ideal supplier?
- Where could we have the most impact on your business?
- What would cause you to buy more from us than any other supplier?
- What would you like us to do for you that we are not currently doing?
- What would you like to be able to do tomorrow that you cannot do today?

You'll notice that the focus of these questions is on the customer. None of these are trial closes like: If we did this would you be interested? These questions are designed to help the customer express where they need the most help. As a value-added salesperson, your job is to identify "root-canal" level pain and make it go away with your solution. This happens when you ask the right questions, listen fully to the buyer's answers, and fashion a solution that mirrors the buyer's needs.

Price Objections Are the Result of Expectations

Buyers expect to get cheaper prices. Why? Because salespeople give them cheaper prices when they ask for them. It's the environment of expectations. And some environments invite greater price sensitivity.

For example, when you buy a car, you expect the salesperson to negotiate the price. It goes with the territory. When you go to a restaurant, you expect to pay the price on the menu. You buy a new television set from a small appliance store and you haggle for free delivery. You go to the dentist and pay his or her price. After all, who wants to bargain with a person who will stick needles in your gums?

You purchase furniture for your home and negotiate the sale price that expired last week. The salesperson pleads with you not to tell your friends of the deal you got. On the way home, you stop at the grocery store and lay out two hundred dollars for groceries without a thought of negotiating. Why?

Some environments are more conducive to negotiating. As a salesperson, you may not be able to dissuade buyers from asking for cheaper prices, but you can influence their expectations for actually receiving cheaper prices. How? Don't be in such a hurry to sell. A lack of pressure to sell—A.K.A.—no urgency—means that you demonstrate patience in the sales process. And this is really hard for salespeople to do. Imagine saying to the buyer, "Go ahead and think about it. I'll get back with you later to hear your decision." Most people reading this will think I have lost my sales trainer's mind. Prudently drag your feet. Time and emotion are your negotiating foes. They cause you to make really bad sales decisions. Slow down the sales process. Get that look off your face that you will starve if you don't make the sale. Buyers know when you're too hungry. Then, they drag their feet and you drop your price.

Hold the line on prices by holding the impulse to react too quickly to price resistance. Change the environment of expectations.

About the author: Tom Reilly is a professional speaker and author of "Value Added Selling." (McGraw-Hill, 2003) and others including his inspirational new release "The Young Eagle"—visit www.youngeagle.com for a preview and additional information.



Shrewder Computing

Un-Clutter Your Desktop: Hide Your Shortcut Icons

There are a number of reasons to remove some or all icons from your desktop without losing the convenient shortcut feature to access different programs. It's really very simple by following these steps.

First, right-click on a desktop icon and select "Properties" in the context menu. Halfway down the little window is "Shortcut key" and a text box with "none" written in it. Put the cursor in the text box and press a letter or number key. Windows will change "none" in the text box to Ctrl/Alt + the letter or number you selected. Key in any letter (that you can remember) such as "M" for mail program or "I" for Internet, or number your programs "1" or "2" or "3"... Click "OK" and you're done. Remember, some keys are already in use with this shortcut combination.

Just press Ctrl/Alt and the letter or number you selected for that program. You only need to press the Ctrl/Alt keys once. You can just keep holding down the Ctrl/Alt keys and press the different keys to open programs without having to press the hot keys, as they're called, for every letter you select.

If you like, right-click on the desktop and select "Arrange Icons by." Then de-select "Show Desktop Icons" and you can look at your background picture without those icons cluttering your view. To get your icons back just select "Show Desktop Icons" again.

I love it. I use it to open my little pet programs when I first boot up. Funny thing, this shortcut has been around since 1998 that I know of and I've just now heard about it. Shows you we're never too old, eh?

Source: Rick, contributing writer for "Our Lighter Side" newsletter

TPI Action

Facts About Artificial Turf and Natural Grass Booklet Generates Excellent Response!

Since announcing the new booklet *Facts About Artificial Turf and Natural Grass*, quantities ranging from 10 to 500 have been sent to numerous members as well as individuals outside the turf industry. In addition to the TPI website, the booklet is also showing up on member and non-industry websites. Be sure to take advantage of the press release and guidelines for how to get the most out of it, included with the initial member mailing.

Attention: Turfgrass Seed & Vegetative Stock Companies

This is a good time to be planning ahead for the July/August Turf News which will feature the "Annual Turfgrass Seed and Vegetative Stock Update." An invitation to participate will be sent to all Turfgrass Seed and Vegetative Stock licensing companies soon.

TPI Membership Farm Profile Survey Easily Accessible on the TPI Website

ALL TPI Class "A" (turf producer) Members are encouraged to participate in the 2007 TPI Membership Farm Profile Survey. For your convenience, you can access the survey in the "Members Only" section of the TPI website www.TurfGrassSod.org. Just look for the special Member Survey link. If you're unable to participate on-line, contact TPI and a hard-copy version will be mailed to you. The survey results provide TPI with greater insight into our membership. It is also a frequently used and highly credible tool for communicating the scope and significance of the turfgrass industry to government officials, news media and your local communities.

To receive additional information on any of these items, contact the TPI Office at Tel: 800/405-8873 or 847/649-5555

Fax: 847/649-5678, or e-mail: info@TurfGrassSod.org

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

Facts About Artificial Turf and Natural Grass

Introduction

The decision of whether to install artificial turf or natural grass is one that requires serious consideration of all related science-based information. Current trends should be put aside in favor of the facts that can have short- and long-term rewards or consequences. Unsubstantiated claims, over-statements, mis-statements or misunderstandings and fads should not be part of the decision making process.

While there are situations when artificial turf might be an appropriate choice, scientific research documents the significant environmental, health and safety benefits of natural grass which logically should be the first consideration. The true costs of proper installation care and maintenance of artificial turf fields varies as widely as those of natural grass. The key word is "proper," as in whatever it takes to maintain high quality fields. The most reliable means for estimating true costs is to request a comprehensive bid proposal from artificial turf and natural turfgrass producers, inclusive of actual costs for pre-installation field preparation, installation, post-installation care and maintenance-including annual and seasonal maintenance and repair for an extended period of time such as five or 10 years.

Business Management

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