

Dec./Jan. 2008



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TPI Honors & Awards Recipients to be Named in Orlando, FL

Recipients of this year's prestigious TPI Honors & Awards will be announced at The Lawn Institute Banquet, Awards & Fundraiser program scheduled Thursday evening, February 7, during the TPI Midwinter Conference. Be sure to sign up for this event to help honor and recognize the TPI Honorary Member(s), Distinguished Service, and Innovator Award recipients.

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BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Turfgrass Producers International

Orlando, Florida—February 4-8, 2008

TPI Midwinter Conference

\$AVE on Early Registration—Value Price Ends December 14, 2007

Be sure to send in your completed registration form for the 2008 TPI Midwinter Conference, by the Value Price Deadline of December 14 to take advantage of the significant savings. Each person fully registered by that date will receive a \$50 discount!

This year's TPI Midwinter Conference features presentations by some of the most outstanding industry professionals ever. During Education Session #1, attendees will experience how turf producers from around the world operate their turfgrass businesses. Presenters include Dave Dymond of H&H Sod in Kenansville, FL; Gary Wilber of Oakwood Sod Farm in Delmar, MD; and Fanus Cloete of Evergreen Turf in Eikenhof, South Africa.

Beginning Education Session #2 will be Mike Kelly of Glenn Rehbein Farms in Blaine, MN, discussing some innovative, thought-provoking new methods of producing and maintaining turfgrass. Dr. James

Beard, Professor Emeritus, Texas A&M University, will share his overview of the turfgrass industry. Dr. Hank Williams, University of Illinois and Dr. Jeff Beasley of Louisiana State University will discuss results from their Foundation-funded studies of rooting turfgrass from sod vs. seed.

Attendees registering for the Roundtable Forum meet to exchange ideas and concerns with peers in an informal environment. TPI Board and staff members will serve as table facilitators, noting any information participants agree should be presented to the Board for further consideration.

The two Exhibit sessions allow attendees quality time with exhibitors in a comfortable environment.

The Conference schedule provides many opportunities to socialize with friends and family during the Early Bird Reception, the Lawn Institute Banquet Awards & Fundraiser, Farm Tour and more!



Why Employees Call in Sick

A new survey from a legal research and analyst firm for human resources finds that two-thirds of American workers who call in sick last minute do so for reasons other than sickness. Reasons given are family issues (22%), personal needs (18%), entitlement mentality (13%) and stress/burn-out (13%). Monday and Friday are the most frequent days people call in sick, followed by holidays and three-day weekend holidays. Employees are often juggling work with family obligations. We need to think of how we can partner with them and be family supportive. Think in terms of helping them get what they need and letting them help you to get what your organization needs—a win-win for both.

Although illness verification and discipline can help lower absenteeism, it can backfire if employees think they must come to work when sick. Educate them about the dangers of coming to work sick, and encour-

age them to stay home until they're well.

Supporting their reasonable life style needs could include flex-scheduling, time off for family health and school problems and possible help with day-care. Paid leave banks/paid time off (a single bank of hours to be used as needed) are one of the most effective absence control programs.

Absenteeism is often tied to employee morale, stress and burn-out. The more unhappy your people are, the more unscheduled days they will take off. Stay close to your people and keep your finger on the pulse of their morale. Remember that what Senior and Boomer generations come to work for is much different than what Gen X and Y come to work for. Why they may take off is often very different as well.

Source: Bob Losyk, MEd., MBA, CSP and author, is and president & CEO of Innovative Training Solutions, www.boblosyk.com

Taking Care of Business

By Laurie Brown
Tel: 877/999-DIFF (3433)
www.thedifference.net

Customer Service from the Inside Out

Jerry loved his job and truly enjoyed helping his clients. His Customer Service Index (CSI) scores were through the roof. Then one day his company was sold. Although he kept his job, his world changed and so did the world of his customers.

Jerry's new managers were changing processes and procedures daily. They openly criticized and corrected him, insisting he spend less time with each customer so that he could be more "productive." His morale plummeted and his customers sensed the negative change. Jerry's attitude was typical of many others in the company as its CSI scores began dropping, leading to a serious decline in business.

The new owners were unaware of the basic truths about keeping loyal customers.

The first thing you can do to ensure your customers are happy and loyal is to make sure you have happy, loyal employees. There is a direct correlation between employee and customer satisfaction. Happy employees are more likely to go the extra mile, taking personal ownership of their customers' experiences. Happy employees are a valuable advertising and goodwill source.

Customer service needs to come from the inside out. Before you begin to elevate your customer satisfaction scores, raise your employees' level of satisfaction by following these suggestions.

Know What They're Thinking

Survey your employees to find out if they are satisfied with their work and work environment. How are current business conditions impacting them? Do they have the tools, training and resources to do their job well? Do they feel empowered to resolve issues? What personal life issues are impacting their work? The proper balance of work and home life is essential for an employee to provide exceptional customer service.

After listening carefully to your employees' ideas, opinions and concerns, it's important to make the changes that will help them please your customers.

Communicate

Communication needs to be a two-way street between you and your employees. Be

sure you have clearly explained your company's goals, policies and procedures. You also need to let employees know about the health of your business, as well as any customer feedback you receive, both good and bad.

Employees shouldn't hear about impending changes through the grapevine.

It is also important that you make it easy for your employees to communicate with you.

Focus on the Good

It is human nature to focus on problems but when you are constantly "putting out fires," you tend to notice only what isn't going well.

Employees can be worn down when they only hear criticism. Criticism rarely inspires employees to be great. When you only see problems, the problems tend to increase.

Instead of only focusing on your employees' shortcomings, focus on what they do right. Though it seems like doing one's job correctly is a basic expectation, people like to be recognized and rewarded. For example, the service manager of a large automotive dealership put up a "Most Wanted" bulletin board to acknowledge employees for going "above and beyond." This effort, combined with an employee appreciation barbeque, helped to elevate the department's Employee Satisfaction Scores.

Recognize and Reward

Remember rewards need to be shaped to the individual. A blanket approach won't work as well as understanding what motivates each of your employees. Some might like a bonus; others may find time off more rewarding; while others simply need an "attaboy" now and again. This isn't to say you shouldn't address problems in performance but be sure even if you have to take corrective action, it's done in a positive way that helps the employee learn and improve.

Train

Employees are much happier when they are trained to do their job well and know what is expected of them. Throwing a new employee into an unfamiliar work environment without adequate training is a recipe

for disaster. So that employees can help each other do better, if at all possible, create a mentoring system.

Get Out of Their Way

Micro-managing never makes for a positive work environment. Simply put, if you hired someone to do a job, get out of the way and let them do it.

If your employees have been properly trained, and you have effectively communicated your policies and procedures to them, it's usually best they be allowed to make their work their own. This can also allow an individual to bring creativity to their work, which will improve your employee's morale, the service provided to your customers and your bottom line.

Empower

For truly happy employees and satisfied customers, your employees must be empowered to do the right thing. Empowerment allows an employee to feel trusted and respected. Being able to take care of a disgruntled customer quickly ensures they will either become or remain a loyal customer.

When an employee tells a customer, "there is nothing I can do about that," you've created a situation in which neither the employee nor the customer is happy.

Make Work Fun

Even the most difficult or sensitive work environment needs to be a fun place to work. Obviously, a beauty salon can be looser with their fun than an oncology clinic, but fun is always essential. Find creative ways to loosen things up, but be careful to include the customer in the fun or keep it apart from the customer's experience altogether. A customer who calls up and hears raucous laughter may be turned off.

Fun can be as simple as letting employees choose their own music or allowing them to have personal pictures at their desk. Make the fun fit your business, your employees and of course your customers.

Focus on doing the things you need to do to create happy, loyal employees, and you can guarantee your customers will be happy and loyal, too.



Safety Management

The Importance of Reporting Close Calls

An employee nearly gets his foot caught in a rapidly rotating power take-off unit (PTO) shaft—but moves back just in the nick of time.

Another worker is poised to jump off a moving forklift, but an employee on the ground yells and the worker returns to his seat.

These two incidents are examples of the many close calls or "near miss" accidents that may be occurring at your sod farm. Yet chances are they aren't being reported. The result is that you're missing out on a good opportunity to step up your safety training or take other measures to reduce the risk that a serious injury or death will occur.

How do you get your workers to report close calls? It isn't easy. Employees typically don't want their managers to know that they made a mistake.

If the situation involves a co-worker, the potential repercussions from "tattling" on that person are usually much worse in the employee's mind than keeping managers apprised. Yet there are steps you can take to increase the chances that you will learn about close calls. The following checklist is designed to assist you.

Close Call Reporting Checklist

- ✓ Assess the status of your overall communication with workers. Do you have an "open door" policy? Do you take the time to regularly ask your employees how they (and their families) are doing—or do they only hear from you after something has gone wrong? Open, positive communication with your employees will increase the chances that they will report close calls or "near misses."
- ✓ Explain to your employees why it's important to report close calls. Let them know it's because you care about their safety, and that addressing any hazards before they become more serious will help ensure that they go home uninjured each night.
- ✓ Strictly prohibit retaliation against workers who report close calls. Clearly explain to employees that in no way will they be "punished" for reporting a close call. In fact, let them know that they will be praised by management for taking steps to make your sod farm safer.
- ✓ Establish an anonymous reporting system. Leave small "safety suggestion" boxes in employee break rooms, in trucks, and anywhere else employees may be able to make safety-related suggestions.
- ✓ Develop a short form for anonymously reporting close calls. Ask only for a brief description of the incident that occurred, where it occurred and the date it occurred. If describing the location could identify either the reporting employee or the person who had the close call, allow workers to instead write down such descriptions as: "Co-worker nearly got his hand caught in a rapidly rotating blade" or "Co-worker jumped off a truck and nearly landed on his back." The point is to get enough information so you can step up your safety training or take other actions to prevent a serious incident from occurring.
- ✓ Praise employees who do provide their names when reporting close calls. Positive incentives (a verbal "thank you" or even a small (\$5 or \$10) gift card to a local merchant) will increase the chances that these employees will come to you with other safety concerns.

Close Call Reporting DO's and DON'Ts

DO:

- ♦ Treat close calls the same as accidents that have occurred. Promptly investigate them and take corrective action.
- ♦ Ask employees to report close calls even if they have taken corrective action themselves. This is important because a close call may indicate a larger safety issue that requires management's attention.
- ♦ Discuss close calls at your next safety meeting. Ask employees if they are aware of any similar hazards that could result in either a close call or a more serious injury accident.

DON'T:

- ♦ Allow your supervisors to reprimand employees who report close calls.
- ♦ Neglect to try to get at the root cause of a close call, just as you would an actual accident that occurred.
- ♦ Fail to take the time to understand why your employees may not be reporting close calls. Is it "peer pressure"? Are they concerned about getting on the bad side of their supervisors? Are there certain cultural issues (such as a strong desire to "please the boss") that may be inhibiting such reporting?

It's the Little Things That Count

In our February/March 2007 issue of Safety Management, we gave you some tips on how to effectively communicate safety to your non-native speaking employees. The more I think about this issue, the more I realize it's the seemingly "little things" that will help you open the door to improved communication with your workers—even when language is a barrier. Here are a few suggestions:

- ✓ Count the number of times you walk by your non-native speaking employees in one week's time and say nothing to them. Waving to them is a start. Even better is shaking their hands and saying "hello" or "good morning" to them by name.
- ✓ Regularly ask your workers how their families (including any children) are doing. Those of us who have been influenced by corporate business practices in the United States have likely had it drilled into us to keep business and personal matters completely separate. But when dealing with workers from other cultures such as the Hispanic/Latino culture it's best to throw these old ideas out the window. "Family" is extremely important in most Hispanic/Latino cultures. Shaking Juan's or Jose's hand at the start of the workday and asking how his wife Maria and their children are doing is one of THE most important things you can do. This will show him that you truly care about him and his family. In return, he is likely to give you the hard work, loyalty and attention to safety practices that you desire.
- ✓ Celebrate workers' holidays. No, this doesn't necessarily mean shutting down that day—or even giving your workers the day off. But, for example, if you employ Mexican workers, recognize that Cinco de Mayo (the Fifth of May in Spanish) is an important holiday in Mexico. Put up banners and bring in Mexican food for all employees to share during their breaks. Better yet, ask your

Mexican workers if they'd be willing to bring in one of their favorite "dishes" so all of your employees can learn more about their culture.

- ✓ Learn at least a few phrases in your workers' native languages. Then use them, even if your pronunciation isn't quite right. This will show your non-native speaking employees that you are at least making the effort—and they, in turn, are likely to make an extra effort for you.
- ✓ Watch your "body language." Know enough about your workers' cultures that you understand whether such actions as a pat on the back, a strong handshake, or even a hug when a worker is grieving are or are not accepted practices within their cultures. Inappropriate body language can negate anything you say, whether

Ten Tips for a Safer Sod Farm

- 1— Make safety a TOP priority. Let your employees know that safety is just as important as quality and getting customers' work done on time.
- 2— Implement a written safety policy. State in it that safety is EVERYONE'S responsibility and that all employees are required to work safely and follow all safety rules.
- 3— Designate specific safety responsibilities. Decide who will be responsible for brief "tailgate" safety training sessions, who will be responsible for safety audits and who will be responsible for enforcing safety rules.
- 4— Implement weekly tailgate training. Tailgate training sessions are five- to 10-minute oral sessions on a single safety topic. Designate trainers and train in a language or languages your employees understand.
- 5— Conduct regularly scheduled safety audits (hazard inspections). See more on hazard inspections in this issue of Safety Management.
- 6— Contact your insurer. Ask that person how he or she can help make your sod farm safer. Ask for monthly written reports with breakdowns on any accidents and claims that have occurred.
- 7— Review all accidents and claims with your supervisors. Do this once a month, if not more frequently. Look for any trends and corrective actions you can take (stepped up safety training, eliminating hazards, etc.).
- 8— Hold your supervisors accountable. If you require them to hold safety training sessions and/or enforce safety rules, discuss what they have done during their performance and pay reviews. Discipline them if you learn from others that they are not fairly and consistently enforcing safety rules.
- 9— Involve ALL of your employees. Just stating that safety is everyone's responsibility isn't enough. Regularly ask your employees how safety at your sod farm can be improved. Require employees to report all close calls, injuries, accidents, hazards and potential hazards.
- 10— Talk about safety on a daily basis. Bring it up at ALL of your meetings—not just at designated safety meetings. Let your employees, customers and vendors know that you are very serious about safety.

it is during a safety training session or in a different forum.

Safety Audits Save Lives

How often do you check your offices, equipment, shop, outdoor property and work sites for hazards and potential hazards? Regularly scheduled safety audits (or hazard inspections) are a key part of a good safety program.

In our October/November issue of Safety Management, we gave you some information on conducting a PTO safety audit. But safety audits need to include much more than solely inspecting your equipment for hazards. Here are some tips to assist you in developing a formal safety audit program:

- ✓ Contact your insurer for assistance. Tell that person that you believe a formal safety audit or hazard inspection program will reduce potential injuries and claims. Ask whether your insurer has any safety audit checklists or other tools to assist you. Invite that person to accompany you on a couple of initial safety audits. Note: A trained person from outside of your operation will likely see things you may miss.
- ✓ Prioritize your safety audits. Determine where the biggest potential for hazards exists (for example, with equipment such as harvesters or forklifts). Then set up a schedule for conducting a formal safety audit (daily, weekly, etc.), based on those potential hazards and the seriousness of injuries that could occur.
- ✓ Decide who will be responsible for conducting your safety audits. Then hold that person or persons accountable. Require written documentation that these were indeed done. Note: One good, non-time consuming way to get this documentation is to have the person sign and date the bottom of any safety audit checklists you provide.
- ✓ Require prompt, follow-up action. Once a hazard is identified, it's important to promptly follow up with corrective action. Such action may include taking a piece of unsafe equipment out for repair, providing certain personal protective equipment (PPE) for employees, or stepping up your safety training in a specific area.
- ✓ Involve ALL of your employees. Ask them to identify hazards or potential hazards they believe could result in serious injury to themselves, a co-worker, a customer or an innocent bystander. For example, do your employees take breaks and leave their equipment unattended at work sites? If so, what if a child from a neighboring property ran onto the work site? Could he or she easily get hurt?



TPI Safety TIPS

- Don't rely on safety training alone.
- Accompany training with the identification and reduction of hazards.
- Provide a means for anonymous safety suggestions.
- Train workers in seasonal safety issues, such as heat stress prevention.
- Provide refresher training for longtime employees.

Think Safety!

Marketing Tip

By Paul Cherry
Performance Based Results
<http://www.pbresults.com>

Watch for Speed Bumps & Avoid 6 Common Sales Mistakes

Even the best salespeople inevitably hit a bump in the road. Maybe you've hit that bump because you unwittingly mishandled a situation or because your customer had conflicting feelings about a sale. Either way, if you want to salvage your hard work and make sure the sale goes through, you must learn to deal with these obstacles to meet your customer's needs.

Here are the six most common mistakes and how to overcome them:

1) Fearing the customer's reaction.

When salespeople are afraid of what a customer might say, they end up losing sales opportunities because they don't find out what the customer really wants. For example, you dread hearing customers say, "Your price is too high." Although it's almost a knee-jerk reaction to offer a lower price, be pro-active and try to uncover what unique buying criteria is important to the customer so the price objection doesn't come up in the first place.

2) Taking it personally. You know that a customer's bad attitude doesn't reflect on your worth as a human being. But our egos get in the way and we internalize the customer's negativity. When your customer brings up a problem, don't become defensive and try to explain the problem away. Not only will the customer probably not be overjoyed with your response, but you will have failed to address the heart of the matter: how to fix your customer's problem.

3) Rushing to judgment. As a salesperson, you should work to focus all of your attention on your customer and his needs. It's too easy to swoop in to present a solution instead of listening to your customer's complaints and the specifics of his situation. In this rush to cut to the chase, you're in danger of coming across as arrogant, and your customer ends up feeling his input is unimportant and unappreciated.

Embrace any information a customer or prospect gives you, whether you believe it's valuable or not. If you don't have time to talk at length with him, request the opportunity to call back when you do have the time. Otherwise, put down your briefcase, close your office door, and listen to him for as long as he needs. Remember, even if you

hear the same story all the time, it is unique and personal for each customer. Instead of interrupting your customer with your standard solution, let him have the floor and explain his problem. Only then can you proceed with the process of finding a solution for whatever ails him.

4) Beating a dead horse. How do you know when, despite your best efforts, your customer relationship is beyond saving and, therefore, taking up more time than it's worth? That customer is demanding, even confrontational, yet provides you with little to no business for all the irritation he's giving you. You hope that if you keep doing business with him, he'll eventually reward you for your loyalty—but let's face it, this is one of those customers you just don't want!

5) Shifting blame. For the past 20 years, organizations have embraced the concept of teamwork. When things go awry, though, it's easy to point fingers to another person or department. Pointing fingers only delays resolving customers' issues. When things go well, everyone should share the glory—and when things go wrong, everyone should take responsibility (share the blame) and resolve the customer issue.

6) Treating all customer complaints with the same one-size-fits-all approach. Some sales people quickly offer to lower their price or automatically throw in product extras, without listening to the reasons the customer is upset. Quick responses to objections with concessions teaches your customers that whenever they complain, they're rewarded, much like giving whiny children toys or treats to quiet them. Having only one approach to resolving customer issues results in two mistakes:

- ♦ You're not addressing your customer's real problem
- ♦ You end up offering more than what your customer really wants

It's better for you and your customer if, instead of giving price cuts to close the deal, you really listen to what your customer tells you, then go from there. Slowing down and listening when you reach business relationship speed bumps works better in the long run than always trying to swerve around them.



Shrewder Computing

Internet Auctions

Thinking of bidding in an on-line auction or selling some of your stuff? Internet auctions are a great resource for shoppers and sellers but you need to watch out for some pitfalls. Here's how:

Evaluate how soon you need to receive the item you're bidding on, and whether you can tolerate it being delivered late or even not delivered. Many complaints about Internet auctions fraud involve late shipments, no shipments or shipments of products that aren't the same quality as advertised.

Whether you're a buyer or a seller, read each auction site's Terms of Use before using it for the first time—sites may charge fees, follow different rules or offer different protections.

Carefully consider your method of payment. Learn what recourse you have if something goes wrong. Don't send cash and don't use a money wiring service.

Don't reply to "phishing" e-mails (messages that look like they've been sent by an auction website or payment service and ask for your password or other personal information).

Know who you're dealing with. Avoid doing business with sellers you can't identify, especially those who try to lure you off the auction site with promises of a better deal. Confirm the seller's telephone number in case you have questions or problems.

Know exactly what you're bidding on. Print a copy of the seller's description of the product and read it carefully, especially the fine print. Save copies of all e-mails you send and receive from the auction site or seller.

Internet auction sites offer buyers a "virtual" flea market with new and used merchandise from around the world; they provide sellers with a global storefront from which to market their goods. But the on-line auction business can be risky business. Learn the on-line auction game before you bid or sell.

Source: United States Federal Trade Commission.

TPI Action

2007-2008 TPI Membership Directory Coming Soon!

Your newly updated *TPI Membership Directory* should arrive in your mailbox soon. Be sure to spend some time looking through this publication to refresh your memory about its wealth of interesting and useful information that goes well beyond listings of contact information for various TPI members. You'll find TPI history, bylaws, Board members, international calling area codes and instructions, green industry associations and a TPI Product ordering form for the many marketing brochures and documents available to TPI members. There's even an additional page for members to use when suggesting changes or corrections.

Credit Collections Program for TPI Members

In the past, TPI members had access to a company that specialized in "bad debt" credit collection. TPI is in the final stages of agreeing to allow another private company to offer its professional credit collection services to TPI members. The success of such efforts depends on several factors, including carefully screening customers up front and in turning them over to the collection service company before it's too late. Complete details and guidelines will be available soon.

Strong Orders Continue for TPI's Booklet *Facts About Artificial Turf and Natural Grass*

Since introducing TPI's new booklet *Facts About Artificial Turf and Natural Grass* last summer, the first 10,000 copies were distributed, another 10,000 were printed and all but about 2,500 of those have been distributed to TPI members and non-members from California to New York and even Australia. Over 1,500 copies have been shipped in the past two months, including 200 copies to a non-member in the landscaping industry who planned to distribute them at an industry conference. Some requested were from homeowners and other concerned individuals trying to help educate their community.

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>

Artificial vs. Natural?

In a 2006 NFLPA (National Football League Players Association) Opinion Survey, players were asked, "Which surface do you think is more likely to shorten your career?" Here are their responses:

Ball Club	Artificial Infilled	Natural Grass	Neither
Arizona Cardinals	64.0%	0.0%	36.0%
Atlanta Falcons	64.4%	0.0%	35.6%
Baltimore Ravens	31.8%	1.8%	31.8%
Buffalo Bills	51.8%	0.0%	46.4%
Carolina Panthers	76.6%	0.0%	23.4%
Chicago Bears	83.8%	0.0%	16.2%
Cincinnati Bengals	58.5%	11.3%	30.2%
Cleveland Browns	66.7%	0.0%	33.3%
Dallas Cowboys	68.9%	2.2%	28.9%
Denver Broncos	73.2%	4.9%	22.0%
Detroit Lions	42.9%	3.6%	53.6%
Green Bay Packers	60.8%	3.9%	35.3%
Houston Texans	83.3%	1.9%	14.8%
Indianapolis Colts	39.5%	2.3%	58.1%
Jacksonville Jaguars	76.2%	0.0%	23.8%
Kansas City Chiefs	83.7%	0.0%	16.3%
Miami Dolphins	75.0%	2.1%	22.9%
Minnesota Vikings	74.4%	2.6%	23.1%
New England Patriots	62.0%	0.0%	38.0%
New Orleans Saints	50.0%	2.2%	47.8%
New York Giants	75.0%	2.3%	22.7%
New York Jets	81.6%	0.0%	18.4%
Oakland Raiders	80.0%	0.0%	20.0%
Philadelphia Eagles	82.1%	3.6%	14.3%
Pittsburgh Steelers	69.4%	0.0%	30.6%
St. Louis Rams	52.0%	6.0%	42.0%
San Diego Chargers	74.5%	2.0%	23.5%
San Francisco 49ers	58.0%	6.0%	36.0%
Seattle Seahawks	49.0%	2.0%	49.0%
Tampa Bay Bucs	69.6%	2.2%	28.3%
Tennessee Titans	61.0%	2.4%	36.6%
Washington Redskins	78.4%	0.0%	21.6%

Business Management

Turfgrass Producers International

2 East Main St., East Dundee, IL 60118

e-mail: info@TurfGrassSod.org

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