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BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Turfgrass Producers International

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Weed Control Options for Commercial Sod Production

—Ron Calhoun, Dept. Crop & Soil Sciences, Michigan State University

Heat Tolerant Bluegrasses, a New Option for Sod Production

—Travis Teuton, Div. of Plant Sciences, University of Missouri

Environmental Impact of Lawns: Science & Perception—John Stier, Dept. of Horticulture, University of Wisconsin

Topic to be announced

—Chris Williamson, Dept. Entomology, University of Wisconsin

Excerpted from TPI President's "2007 Industry Perspective"

Business Outlook for 2007

The general consensus is that the U.S. housing downswing is still underway but it might be stabilizing; the real gross domestic product (GDP) will likely grow by 2.7 to 3.0 percent; core inflation will increase a tolerable 2.2 to 2.5 percent; the next rate adjustment by the federal government likely will level off in 2007, and the administration expects unemployment to hold steady at around 4.6 percent.

Inflation, energy prices, interest rates, new home construction, retail sales indicators, employment, unemployment, GDP and manufacturing production impact all of us, regardless of our business or income source. As for turfgrass sod producers, we also have other issues that can influence how the year ahead might unfold.

Water issues will continue to be an increasing factor impacting economic health and sales. Water conservation isn't just impacting regions within the U.S.; Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and many other countries have begun to expand their water conservation practices and implement stringent watering restrictions.

Will this have a long term negative impact on the turfgrass industry? Extensive turfgrass research and the introduction of new turfgrasses, equipment and other product innovations including weather-based irrigation controllers, soil-moisture sensors and public education about proper irrigation will all have a positive impact on water conservation. Communicating the numerous environmental benefits of turfgrass sod to legislatures and the general public will be helpful.

Despite past challenges, the turfgrass industry continues to prosper year after year. Turf producers continue to learn and apply new technologies, streamline and manage their businesses for greater cost-efficiency. Although the housing market is in a decline in the U.S., most every new home (1.3 - 1.5 million units projected in 2007) translates into a new lawn. Housing prices in Australia and the United Kingdom continue to creep up, indicating the playing field for turf producers varies internationally, as well as regionally.

Although U.S. residential construction is expected to slow during the next several quarters, it might be offset by gains in commercial development. Construction of office buildings and retail space has strengthened considerably over the past few years, according to Wachovia Corp. Economics Group, and we are now beginning to see strong gains in industrial development as well. That's good news for turf producers.

This year will have a similar look and feel of 2006, based on the recent TPI member farm equipment survey which indicated turfgrass sod farms are expanding in size, and there is an increase in the land devoted to turfgrass production. The survey also revealed that producers not only plan to purchase new equipment, they also plan to invest more in the maintenance, repair and updating of their existing equipment.

In preparation for the coming year, turf producers and others in the green industry should develop a 2007 business plan that identifies potential problems, and assign appropriate solutions before they occur.



Behavioral Interviewing

Increasing numbers of employers are using behavior-based interviewing methods to screen job candidates. Behavior-based interviewing is estimated to be 55 percent predictive of future on-the-job behavior—compared to traditional interviewing's 10 percent—and it focuses on candidates' past job-related experiences, behaviors, attitudes, personal skills and capacities. Behavior-based interviewing is based on the belief that past behavior and performance predict future behavior and performance.

We suggest focusing on job related performance as much as possible.

Behavioral Interviewing

Questions. This is the key to matching behavioral interviewing questions with specific personal skills or competencies. Below is a short list of the top 10 competencies with their definitions, suggestions for effective interviewing hints and a sample question for each.

1– Conflict Management:

Addressing and resolving conflict constructively.

▲ Listen for proactive identification and resolution of concerns and issues.

▲ Sample question: "Describe the most difficult conflict you've ever had to manage."

2– Interpersonal Skills: *Effectively communicating, building rapport and relating well to all kinds of people.*

▲ Listen for self-awareness, understanding and an ability to communicate effectively with others, regardless of differences.

▲ Sample question: "Describe the most difficult working relationship you've had with an individual."

3– Teamwork: *Working effectively and productively with others.*

▲ Listen for a strong commitment and contributions to team members working towards a specific goal.

▲ Sample question: "Give me an example of one of the most significant contributions you made as a team."

icant contributions you made as a team."

4– Self-Management:

Demonstrating self-control and an ability to manage time and priorities.

▲ Listen for composure, assertiveness and emotional stability.

▲ Sample question: "Give me an example of when you were able to meet the personal and professional demands in your life, yet still maintained a healthy balance."

5– Planning/Organizing: *Utilizing logical, systematic and orderly procedures to meet objectives.*

▲ Listen for logical, organized and systematic approaches.

▲ Sample question: "Describe the most complex assignment or project you've worked on."

6– Customer Service: *Anticipating, meeting and/or exceeding customer needs, wants and expectations.*

▲ Listen for extraordinary efforts in responding to customer needs and wants to insure satisfaction.

▲ Sample question: "Give me an example of when you went out of your way for a customer."

7– Goal Orientation: *Energetically focusing efforts on meeting a goal, mission or objective.*

▲ Listen for the ability to maintain direction despite obstacles in the way.

▲ Sample question: "Give me an example of the most significant professional goal you have met."

8– Problem Solving: *Anticipating, analyzing, diagnosing and resolving problems.*

▲ Listen for an analytical and disciplined approach to solving problems.

▲ Sample question: "Describe a situation when you anticipated a problem."

9– Leadership: *Achieving extraordinary business results through people.*

dinary business results through people.

▲ Listen for an ability to obtain the trust, commitment and motivation of others to achieve goals and objectives.

▲ Sample question: "If you have held a leadership position in the past, draw the organizational chart above and below your position to illustrate the scope of your leadership responsibilities."

10– Decision Making: *Utilizing effective processes to make decisions.*

▲ Listen for an ability to make timely decisions under difficult circumstances.

▲ Sample question: "Give me an example of when you had to make a quick decision when the risk of making an error was high."

Be sure to probe for as many details and specifics as possible such as names, dates and other verifiable information. Skilled interviewers will also ask candidates for their thoughts or feelings about a situation to gain further insight.

How do I Prepare to Conduct a Behavioral Interview?

If the job could talk; what would it say about:

▲ The behaviors of the person who will always be able to deliver superior performance?


▲ The attitudes of the people doing the job?

▲ The attributes or personal skills needed for superior performance?

Job benchmarking reveals why, how and what an individual can contribute to a job. It identifies a complete hierarchy of competencies or personal skills. It allows you to clarify any position issues. It prioritizes and validates the competencies required. This can be done for any:

▲ Hourly non-exempt position

▲ Leadership/management exempt position

▲ Professional exempt position 

Safety Management

TPI's Newest Safety Benefit Begins

TPI's new member benefit—two pages of practical, ready-to-use safety information—begins with this issue of *Business Management*. Geared specifically to our industry, this information is being prepared by Barbara Mulhern, former editor of the *Gempler's ALERT* newsletter. Barb, an agricultural/horticultural writer and safety consultant, worked closely with TPI staff and our members for nearly nine years.

The safety information Barb is providing is meant to be used as a guideline to help you improve your safety program. Following the tips, checklists and other information provided will not put you in full compliance with all safety-related laws and regulations. It will, however, give you a good start in your efforts to reduce injuries, accidents and their related costs. The rest of the work needed to have a safe operation is up to you.

Welcome back, Barb—TPI is pleased to again have you on our "team"!

Safety Saves Both Money and Lives

The thought process of many turf producers is, "It's the start of the busy spring season, and taking time for an extra safety meeting is NOT in my plans. I must get that turfgrass sod delivered to my customers on time, keep close tabs on my costs and make sure I have enough workers to get all of the scheduled jobs done." While it's understandable, the failure to make safety a top management priority can be very costly. Here is just one example:

A forklift operator is in a hurry to get the job done. So he fails to slow down, use his horn or carefully watch where he is going. He runs into a co-worker, who is severely injured. What are the potential costs of this injury to your business?

- ✓ Lost production time
- ✓ Increased management time (spent interviewing workers, filling out accident and insurance reports, etc.)
- ✓ The costs of recruiting and training a replacement worker
- ✓ A potentially lengthy and costly insurance claim
- ✓ Possible increases in your insurance premium
- ✓ Equipment repair costs
- ✓ Legal fees and/or potential government fines
- ✓ HUMAN costs (the injured worker's pain and suffering, upset family members and co-workers, fear by the injured employee that he may no longer be able to work)
- ✓ Potential loss of customers (due to negative publicity and/or failure to get the job done on time)

As you can readily see, the costs of a single injury accident go way beyond the medical costs. Would a five- to 10-minute "refresher" safety session for your forklift operators have made a difference? While no one can say for certain, it likely could have saved a significant amount of money, time, pain and suffering, and—in the future—even lives.

Communicating Safety to Non-Native Speaking Employees

Have you ever been in this situation? You trained your employees in the hazards of the equipment they use. You told them to steer clear of all moving parts on harvesters, to make sure the tractor's PTO shaft has completely stopped rotating before getting near it, and to know that a forklift operator's view is often blocked by the load. Yet one day, a serious accident occurs—and you're struggling to determine exactly what went wrong.

It could very well be that the worker involved in the accident doesn't speak your language. Or, if he does, his literacy level (and ability to comprehend

instructions) is low. Add to that certain "cultural" barriers that may exist, and it's no wonder an accident occurred. Here is some important information:

- ✓ Make NO assumptions about your workers. If a worker's native language is different than your own, try to find a bilingual co-worker or other party to assist in your safety training.
- ✓ Don't assume that a worker can read and write, even in his own native language. Pride (or fear of losing his job) is likely to keep him from admitting it. Good ways to work around this are to conduct all safety training orally, use as many "hands-on" demonstrations as possible, and ensure that all safety signage includes pictures or symbols.
- ✓ Learn about your workers' cultures. Why is this so important? Here is an example: In many Hispanic/Latino cultures, it is considered disrespectful to question persons in "authority." So a supervisor may train a Hispanic/Latino employee, ask him if he understands, and the worker will nod his head "yes." In fact, though, he may not have understood at all—but doesn't want to appear disrespectful by asking any questions.

The following checklist will give you more tips.

Checklist for Good Safety Communication

- ☐ Understand your workers' cultures, and what is most important to them. Then frame your safety messages to reflect those values. Example: "Family" is an important value within Hispanic/Latino cultures. End each training session with Hispanic/Latino workers by saying that you want them to be safe so they can continue to provide for their families in the future.
- ☐ Use "visual" aids (such as photos or illustrations) along with oral training. Conduct equipment training

right next to the harvester, forklift, mower or skid-steer loader, and have one of the workers SHOW everyone else exactly what you just discussed.

- ❑ Don't rely on videotapes alone. Be sure that someone who understands the topic watches the videotape with your employees and is available for further explanation.
- ❑ Watch your body language. Understand that acceptable body language (standing a certain distance from another person, even grasping a person's hand for a handshake) varies in different cultures. Using the "wrong" body language can make an entire safety presentation ineffective.
- ❑ Translate key safety policies and rules into your employees' native language(s). Be sure, however, to have someone who reads that language also review them orally.
- ❑ Do not rely on written safety "tests." If you want to test your workers to gauge their understanding, do it orally. This is especially important if you are uncertain about some employees' literacy levels.
- ❑ "Engage" employees in your safety training. Active participation will greatly increase the chances of retention.
- ❑ Keep it SIMPLE. Talk about one safety concept at a time. Don't use big words, words that may be unfamiliar, or jargon. Don't try to cram too much into one safety session.

Prevent Office Worker Injuries

Office workers are often overlooked when setting up a safety program. Yet their health and safety is important, too. What would you do without your receptionist—or without your bookkeeper—especially during those very hectic times?

Here are some tips to help keep your office workers safe:

- ✓ INSIST on "good housekeeping."

That means keeping cabinet and desk drawers closed, not stacking boxes or other debris on the floor, immediately cleaning up spills, and keeping entrances, exits and aisles clear.

- ✓ Evaluate all workstations. Office workers who spend long periods of time at a computer may wind up with carpal tunnel syndrome or other repetitive motion injuries. These injuries can result in costly insurance claims. An excellent Web site to assist you with your evaluation is: www.osha.gov/SLTC/etools/computerworkstations. From there, you can link to both a workstation evaluation checklist and a checklist to evaluate new computer-related purchases.
- ✓ Train your office workers in the basics of ergonomically correct computer use. This includes making sure that: The top of the monitor is at or just below eye level. Head and neck are balanced and in line with the torso. Shoulders are relaxed. Elbows are close to the body and supported. Lower back is supported. Wrists and hands are in line with forearms. Feet are flat on the floor. Room is adequate for the keyboard and the mouse.
- ✓ Encourage your office workers to take short breaks. Many short stretching exercises are available for hands, wrists, shoulders, and other parts of the body. Check with your local health care clinic, a physical therapist or occupational medicine specialist, or with your insurer.

Bypassing Safety Devices

It only takes a split second for an accident to occur. One of your tractor drivers learned that when he bypass started (ground started) his tractor and it suddenly lurched forward, nearly running him over. TPI members' dramatic increase in average equipment investment (a 262 percent hike from 2001 to 2006, according to the 2006

TPI Membership Turfgrass Sod Farm Equipment Survey) reinforces the need to strictly prohibit bypassing, disabling, or removing safety devices.

What else can you do?

- 1) Make this prohibition a separate written company safety rule.
- 2) Have all employees sign off on receipt of this and other safety rules. (Note: Remember to orally review all safety rules with your employees. If you aren't sure all of your workers can read and write, add this language to your safety rules "sign-off" sheet: These safety rules were reviewed with me in a language I understand. Then leave space for a witness to sign his or her name next to an "x" by any employee who is unable to write.)
- 3) Periodically review the dangers of bypassing, disabling, or removing safety devices. This can be done in a brief five- to ten-minute safety training session.
- 4) Use "close calls" or actual incidents/injuries to reinforce the importance of this rule.
- 5) Know that your longtime employees may be your worst offenders. Longtime workers (including supervisors) often think they can take shortcuts without getting hurt because they have done the job so many years. Be aware of this, and be sure to include them in all safety sessions, even if they have been trained in the past.



TPI Safety TIPS

- Train your employees to be safe at all times.
- Use oral training for low-literacy level workers.
- Demonstrate safe practices.
- Know the potential hazards of the equipment you use.
- NEVER disable or bypass a safety device.

Marketing Tip

By Paul Endress
Maximum Advantage Intn'l
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How to Communicate Your Sales Message For Total Understanding

Have you ever wondered why one person reacts to your sales materials favorably while another thinks you completely missed the mark? The answer lies in how each person views the world. We all have a unique set of values, beliefs and past experiences that color how we interpret events. These three factors constitute our "model of the world." And no matter how similar a group of people might appear, their models of the world likely are very different.

For example, even though two children grow up in the same household and experience the same events, their models of the world are different. World models are like fingerprints—no two are the same.

Most people tend to communicate via their own model of the world, and not that of the person they're talking to. As a result, the listener never truly understands what the speaker is saying, and everyone is left scratching their heads and wondering, "Why don't they get it?" People can finally "get it" when you communicate using their model of the world. Here are some guidelines to help.

Know Your Own Model.

Everyone's model develops over time with many factors contributing to it including experiences, the media, friends, conscious decision and upbringing. While no one can pinpoint exactly what their model is, they can have a rough idea.

For example, in your marketing materials, are there certain things you always stress, such as low prices, geographic location, years of experience, etc? If you see a theme in what you're communicating to people, chances are that's a part of your model. If you've ever said to yourself, "Why aren't people buying this product?" you're likely communicating via your model of what's important and not what's important to your customers. Once you identify how your perceptions are shaping your communications, you can begin to change.

Identify the Other Person's Model.

To determine someone else's model, you need to ask two key questions: 1) What is important to you about _____?; and 2) How do you know if _____? For example, when selling sod, rather than lead the discussion by talking about price or variety, simply ask, "What is most important to you about buying sod?" Then be quiet and listen. The potential customer might say, "service" or "on-time delivery" or "quality." The message is an indication of his or her model.

So let's suppose the customer said that service is most important. Your next question to ask is, "How do you judge good service?" You'll uncover what rules the person uses to match information received against his model. He might say, "Knowing it will arrive on time, be off-loaded where it makes sense, etc." With the new information, you can now lead the discussion with other factors that denote service, as your main selling points. Those are important factors to the customer, and that is what your communication must focus on.

Communicate According to Your Customers' Models.

After you do a sampling of your customers, asking the two key questions just discussed, you will have a good idea of what's important to your customer base. You can phrase your marketing materials to address the specific issues the majority of your customers reveal, and you can use other factors to sway those who are "on the fence."

If you have different market segments, apply the same guidelines to each and you'll have less confusion and greater results.

Get It? Got It! Good!

Keep all of your communications geared towards your customers' model of the world, and they will finally "get it."



Shrewder Computing

Practical Cyber-security Advice for Small Businesses—Part I

If your small business is like many, it is extremely dependent upon technology and electronically stored data. Many of the steps you need to take to secure your information infrastructure won't cost your business money, or even much time.

Here are some practical considerations and security precautions to maintain the security of your information assets.

Be alert when browsing the Web—To avoid potential exposure to unnecessary threats, enable the security settings on your Web browser—usually found in the "preferences" menu. Do not enable "file sharing" which can open the door to viruses and intrusion.

You should also be very cautious when giving out personal information on-line. If a website claims to be secure, you should see a small padlock or key icon in the toolbar, and the page's URL should begin with "https:" (instead of "http:"); otherwise, do not provide any sensitive information because the page is not secure and the information you provide will not be encrypted and thus vulnerable to interception. And do not click on any pop-up advertisements.

Use Anti-virus software—Anti-virus software is still the best protection against today's viruses, worms and Trojan horses. Anti-virus software should be installed on all servers, desktops and laptops, including devices used to make remote connections to your network.

Remember, just having the anti-virus installed is not maximum protection. Check for new virus definitions daily, and perform weekly system scans.

Source: www.emitsolutions.com
Tel: 800/399-CMIT

TPI Action

ALL TPI Conference/Convention Photos Available On-Line

At www.tpiphotos.smugmug.com, TPI members have FREE and easy Internet access to all photos taken at TPI Conferences and Conventions, beginning with the 2006 TPI Summer Convention & Field Days! You can view the photos by main event (i.e., 2006 TPI Summer Convention & Field Days) and individual sub-events (Field Day, Banquet, Roundtable Forum, etc.). The photos are high-resolution JPG format for viewing, downloading and printing from your computer, or, you can order prints on-line.

Facts About Artificial Turf and Natural Grass Booklet Will Be Sent to All TPI members

All TPI members will soon receive the 28-page booklet *Facts About Artificial Turf and Natural Grass*, representing numerous hours of effort by the TPI Artificial Turf Working Group. The new booklet presents an objective and realistic comparison of artificial turf and natural grass. Each member will be sent one copy, along with a form to order as many as needed for distribution to your local target audiences, at the cost of shipping and handling charges, only. TPI will also send copies to the green industry trade publications and other groups.

Comprehensive TPI Membership Survey Coming Soon

The 2007 TPI Membership Farm Profile Survey notice will arrive in your postal mailbox soon. Members are urged to participate in this effort because of its significant benefit to all. Because of the traditionally high rate of member participation, the resulting data have established valid documentation of the industry's economic impact for federal, state and local issues. The results provide TPI needed marketing and market-share information. In addition to the farm profile details, the "Member Needs" portion of the survey will help identify new programs and define improvements.

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>

Of Grass and Nature

(Quotes from the TPI booklet *Facts About Artificial Turf and Natural Grass* booklet, coming soon!)

*Until man duplicates a blade of grass,
nature can laugh at his so called scientific knowledge.*

—Thomas Edison

*I would never like to see artificial turf.
I'm very happy with what we have.*

—Bill Cowher, Steelers coach

*Nature never did betray The Heart that
Loved her.*

—William Wordsworth

*If a horse can't eat it, I don't want to
play on it...*

—Dick Allen, former MLB player
(Phillies & White Sox)

*To waste, to destroy our natural
resources, to skin and exhaust the land
instead of using it so as to increase its
usefulness, will result in undermining
in the days of our children the very
prosperity which we ought by right to
hand down to them amplified and
developed.*

—Theodore Roosevelt

*The Supreme Reality of Our Time is...
the Vulnerability of our Planet.*

—John F. Kennedy

Business Management

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