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On-Line Registration for 2008 TPI Summer Convention Available Soon

Members will be able to register for this year's TPI Summer Convention and all future TPI events on-line. The security "firewall" has been installed, soon to be followed by the software that allows secure on-line registration, sometime in April. To find the TPI Summer Convention & Field Days schedule of events, visit www.TurfGrassSod.org.

Note: For permission to reproduce and distribute any part of the *Business Management* newsletter, contact the publication's Editor Bob O'Quinn at 847/649-5555 or roquinn@TurfGrassSod.org

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Turfgrass Producers International

Tough Attitudes For Tough Times

Doing business in tough times requires a tough attitude. Half of the battle is in your head, and the other half is on the streets. Customers object to price—that's what they do. First, they test your price; then, they test your resolve. Being prepared to sell in tough times is the mental game of success. Positive thoughts provide the mental fuel you need for your journey. Positive behavior results from these positive thoughts. These tips will help you move in a positive direction in tough times.

Increase calling by twenty-five percent.

A study of purchasing agents found that salespeople reduce face time by 38 percent in tough times. They call at 62 percent the rate they call in good times. Increase your calling by 25 percent and you effectively double your coverage vis-à-vis the competition.

Increase your penetration. If you have twenty percent market share it means eighty percent of the market is not buying from you. This is an incredible opportunity! Expand your calling to include areas where you currently do not get the business. This includes existing customers where you share the business with the competition. Get greedy. Expand the depth and breadth of what you sell to existing customers. Are there other locations, branches or satellite

operations of an account you can call? The tough times attitude you must embrace is that unless you have all the business, you have an opportunity to grow—even in tough times.

I spoke at a national sales meeting where the president of the company told his sales force that there may be rumors of tough times in their industry, but they will not participate. His optimism was greeted with thunderous applause. His sales force wants to thrive in tough times, not just survive. Of course, they are the type of company that will prevail in tough times—their collective psyche is positive.

Some will fail in tough times; some will survive; some will thrive. Which will you do?

Source: Tom Reilly, author of *How To Sell and Manage in Tough Times and Tough Markets* (Motivation Press).



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

Membership Renewal Notices Coming Soon

Renewal notices for your TPI Membership are being mailed the first week of May. If you have not received your notice by the end of May, contact TPI right away so you'll be included in the free contact listings of the *TPI Membership Directory* and on the TPI website. For your convenience, TPI accepts checks, credit card or wire transfer payments.

When you receive your membership renewal notice, please read it through thoroughly for accuracy before returning it to TPI along with your payment.

The information you return to TPI will be the information that current and potential customers find on the TPI website; it is also the same information published in the *TPI Membership Directory*. So please check over all of your contact information (address, phone, fax, e-mail, turf or other product information) so customers and friends can find you easily.

With today's global electronic communications, it's especially important that your e-mail and website listings are accurate.

Taking Care of Business

By Joe Takash
Tel: 888/918-3999
www.joetakash.com

What's in a Name . . . Everything! —Five Rules to Help You Remember

At a well-known Ivy League school, a new, prestigious science building was to be built on the north end of campus. The price: \$260 million dollars.

Three major construction companies were bidding neck and neck to win the job, make a large profit and add this esteemed institution to their client list. The decision would come down to the sales presentation.

The primary decision maker for Ivy U, Dr. Alice Dvorak, made an unusual request. She asked all contractors to sit through each other's presentations and address the selection committee in front of one another. Securing the business could mean many years of Ivy U projects, so each of them complied.

The first two presentations went fine with each contractor discussing the construction logistics and how their "unique" approach to building was better than the rest. Then, the general manager for the third contractor began his presentation, "Dr. Dvorak, Mr. Avery, President Chambers, Vice President Allen and Madam Jameson, my name is Robert Small and on behalf of Elliott Construction Company, we are honored to be considered for the Leonard T. Abraham School of Sciences' project."

At that moment, the energy changed. There was a warmth in Robert Small's approach. He smiled, had a friendly, confident tone and looked each committee member in the eyes. But the difference was that Robert Small (who became very tall) addressed everyone, as well as the project itself, by their name.

How are you at remembering people's names?

- ☐ A— Fantastic
- ☐ B— Not so hot
- ☐ C— Embarrassingly bad

If you are like most people, you've checked off either "B" or "C." What typically comes next is a litany of excuses like, "I'm good with faces but not names," or "I just have a mental block and I'll never be good."

So why is it that you can meet someone, learn his or her name and four seconds later, smile at them while thinking to yourself, "I have no idea what your name is."?

Or why is it you'd rather yell out a ran-

dom nickname like "Hey Big Shooter!" instead of saying, "I'm sorry, please tell me your name again," when you forget a person's name?

There are a plethora of reasons why we forget names but the truth is that none of them matter. Your connection with the people whose names you can't recall are far weaker than with those whose names you do remember.

The following are five tips to help you remember names. They are simple in theory, but require practice, commitment and repetition. The results are well worth it for your business and your career.

Rule # 1: Ask People for Their Names.

How many times have you been to the same church, bar or gym, see the same people and never bother to introduce yourself? Think of the personal connections and professional opportunities you could be passing up! When it comes to asking people's names, simply think, "jump in the water it's not that cold." Be an initiator and approach others with courage on the outside, no matter how you feel inside.

Rule # 2: Spell and Pronounce Their Names Correctly.

These are paired together because they require similar efforts in clarifying (not assuming) for accuracy. I was once introduced to speak to five hundred people in the following manner: "Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Mr. Joe Takass" (instead of Takash). This is not a lie. Taking time to assure the correct spelling and pronunciation is something to attend to in fine detail.

Rule # 3: Ask Again when You Forget.

This may be the best but most underused tool. Chances are, all of us forget names immediately 80 percent of the time. By asking people again and again, you are simply demonstrating respect for them and their name is an attachment to that respect. If the person gets upset simply tell him or her, "I apologize but it's important that we show our respect to you by getting your name correct."

It's difficult to argue with that logic.

Rule # 4: Remember!

To lock names into your memory, use all of the tools possible. This can include rhymes like "Dan the man" or associations like "Rhonda from Reno."

Remembering requires an eclectic effort. Write names down, repeat them out loud, repeat them to yourself. Work hard and you will get in better "name shape."

Rule #5: Use Them or Lose Them.

In writing, on the phone or in person, use people's names. When your name is called as someone who contributed to the success of a great team effort, it just feels great. When your son's or daughter's name is on the Dean's List, it looks like a work of art. Knowing names increases your confidence, makes others feel appreciated and is a competitive advantage in business.

In the case of Robert Small's presentation to Ivy U, names have been changed to protect confidentiality. However, I know a construction person who bid on a very similarly priced project with a very similar approach. Now, it is unrealistic that using people's names could win a \$260 million dollar project. Clearly, experience, knowledge and professional pedigrees must apply. However, a week after the presentation, he received a formally written letter that read, "Dear Robert, congratulations! All competitors were very impressive and capable of building this project but we've selected Elliott Construction because we believe your personal connection and sense of team is what will make this a highly successful partnership."

So, what's in a name? Everything!



Memorable Quote

"Keep away from people who try to belittle your ambitions. Small people always do that, but the really great people make you feel that you too can become great."

Mark Twain

Safety Management

A Written Safety Policy Can Save You Time and Trouble

Does your turfgrass sod farm have a written safety policy? There are a number of reasons why this is important, even if you have only a few employees. A written safety policy provides a record of your key safety-related expectations for employees, such as promptly reporting hazards and following company safety rules. It also shows employees that top management is serious about safety and expects all employees to do their part. Finally, a written policy can help show your "good faith effort" regarding safety should you ever face a safety-related inspection by a government agency or other authority.

Below is a sample Turfgrass Sod Farm Safety Policy that you can use or customize to fit the needs of your own operation.

Turfgrass Sod Farm Safety Policy

The goal of _____ (Name of Company) is to provide a safe working environment for all of our employees, customers, suppliers and visitors. Top management is dedicated to safety and believes that all employees are responsible for their own safety and for that of their co-workers. As part of our commitment to safety, we provide high quality tools, equipment and personal protective equipment (PPE). We train our employees in safe working procedures, including the safe operation of vehicles and equipment. We also expect employees to follow our company's safety rules and to promptly report any injuries, hazards or potential hazards to a supervisor or other manager. It is only by working together that we can achieve the highest level of safety at our company.

(Signature of Company Owner or President)

(Date)

This safety policy was explained to me in a language and manner I understand.

(Employee's Signature or Witnessed "X")

(Date)

Interviewing Witnesses to an Accident – Part 1

Editor's note: This is the first in a two-part series of articles on how to effectively interview witnesses during an accident investigation.

Your cell phone rings and one of your worst nightmares comes true: An employee delivering a large load of sod to a customer has been involved in a serious accident. Before you rush to the scene, it's important to think about how you will approach any witnesses.

In our February-March 2008 issue of *Safety Management*, we provided some tips on conducting an overall accident investigation. Here are some suggestions on where to begin when interviewing witnesses:

- Immediately make a list (with contact information) of all witnesses to the accident, including any injured persons. If some witnesses have already left the scene, determine who was there first and determine if that person knows who else was present.
- Let witnesses know that you want to talk to them in order to deter-

mine the facts—and that their assistance is needed to help prevent a similar incident from occurring in the future.

- Begin interviews as soon as possible. This is important because witnesses' memories will still be fresh. If a witness was too severely injured to talk or is too upset, arrange a time and day to call or visit the person as soon as possible.

Good interviewing techniques are critical in order to get factual information on what occurred. Don't go into an interview looking for someone to blame. Keep your opinions to yourself, and don't try to "lead" a witness by asking such questions as: "Don't you think the other party was following too closely?" or "Our employee has an excellent driving record. You don't think the accident was his fault, do you?"

Interviewing witnesses is not only an objective gathering of facts but also a good way to understand the entire incident. "Like a journalist, ask who, what, when, where, why and how. When the interview is over, you should be able to reconstruct the entire incident from memory," says Bill Cook of Human Resource Associates in Manassas, VA. The following checklist was prepared with Cook's assistance.

Checklist for Interviewing Witnesses

- ✓ Make sure all of the basic information you have is correct. Is this the right person who witnessed the accident you are investigating? Double check names, dates, location, etc.
- ✓ Start the interview on time and arrange to conduct it uninterrupted. Turn off cell phones and, if necessary, put up a "Do Not Disturb" sign. If you don't take the matter seriously, neither will the witness.
- ✓ Compile a list of questions in advance. Start with some easy questions. Move on to more complex questions after a comfortable pace is established. Remember, though, that in general, too many "yes" or "no" questions mean you are leading the person.
- ✓ Be courteous and treat the person with respect. Try not to make the witness uncomfortable. Staying objective during the interview is one good way of not making a witness hostile or feeling like he or she must support your position.
- ✓ Pay close attention to the person's demeanor. Does the witness seem angry or not wanting to get involved? Does the person appear to be holding back information? If so, the individual may not be a credible witness.
- ✓ Avoid questions of a personal nature that are not related to the investigation.
- ✓ If you are taping the interview, ask the person for his or her permission first.
- ✓ Make sure you have identified every piece of equipment and any tools, structures and/or fixtures that were involved in the accident.
- ✓ Take good written notes. Do this without distracting the person.
- ✓ If necessary, show the person sketches or diagrams of the accident in order to assist him/her.
- ✓ Ask the person why the accident happened, what contributed to it, and what could have been done to prevent it.
- ✓ Ask whether any other parties were injured that you might not

know about.

- ✓ Find out whether the witness or anyone else took any corrective action—and if so, what.
- ✓ Ask whether the person is aware of any imminent or continuing danger or safety concerns.
- ✓ Understand the person's limitations. For example, if the witness was some distance away or had his/her view blocked, it may be difficult for that person to describe what happened. Be on the lookout for information that appears to go beyond what the witness could have observed.
- ✓ Have the witness write down his or her account of what occurred, if possible. If this isn't possible, write down what the person said. Then verbally repeat it back to the person to ensure that you recorded it correctly.
- ✓ Have the witness sign and date the witness statement (his or her account of what occurred). Then keep this statement with your overall accident investigation report.
- ✓ Find out whether the person has any complaints about how any part of the investigation is being handled.
- ✓ Assure the person there will be no retaliation for any information given or for participating in the accident investigation.

What Causes Truck Crashes?

Do you pay close attention to your drivers' past records and current driving behaviors? Both of these can be very good indicators of the likelihood of a crash or accident.

Research by both the American Transportation Research Institute and the Federal (U.S.) Motor Carrier Safety Association has found that a driver's past or current behaviors are major predictors of a future accident. Among the findings:

- ♦ Action or inaction by the driver of either a truck or other vehicle was the main cause of 88 percent of 967 fatal and injury crashes investigated in one study in 17 states.
- ♦ Speeding, fatigue and the use of prescription or over-the-counter drugs are important factors for both drivers in crashes involving trucks and passenger vehicles.
- ♦ In one study of accidents involving large trucks, drivers with past violations of reckless driving and improper turns were the most likely to be involved in a future crash. (See "Summary of Crash Likelihood" below.) Note: Although this particular study looked at large trucks, it's important for turfgrass sod producers to check records for similar types of violations no matter what type of vehicle your drivers are operating.

Summary of Crash Likelihood

(Source: American Transportation Research Institute)

If a Driver Had:	Crash Likelihood Increases:
– A Reckless-Driving Violation	325%
– An Improper-Turn Violation	105%
– An Improper-or-Erratic-Lane Change Conviction	100%
– A Failure-to-Yield-Right-of-Way Conviction	97%
– An Improper-Turn Conviction	94%

- A Failure-to-Maintain-Proper-Lane Conviction 91%
- A Past Crash 87%
- An Improper-Lane-Change Violation 78%
- A Failure-to-Yield-Right-of-Way Violation 70%
- A Driving-Too-Fast-for-Conditions Conviction 62%

Turfgrass Sod Producers' Safety Q&A – No. 2

Editor's note: The correct answer to each question in this Safety Q&A will appear in our next issue of *Safety Management*.

When training your workers in emergency response, it's a good idea to:

- a) Only allow one authorized person in your company to call for professional emergency medical assistance.
- b) Identify an employee who will take all first aid kits home every few weeks to restock them.
- c) Provide employees with the names and contact information for all staff members who have been trained in first aid and CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation).
- d) Prohibit employees from ever leaving an injured person alone, even to get help.

Safety signage should be provided:

- a) Without symbols, since symbols can be confusing.
- b) Only in locations where accidents have occurred.
- c) In the predominant language spoken in your country but not in other languages.
- d) Wherever a hazard or potential hazard exists.

When designating safety trainers, be sure to:

- a) Encourage trainers to do whatever they can to get trainees involved.
- b) Have the same trainer lead "tailgate" safety sessions for at least for a year.
- c) Have only outside "experts" such as your insurer or equipment dealers conduct safety training sessions.
- d) Choose trainers who have the highest literacy levels.

Answers to Turfgrass Sod Producers' Safety Q&A – No. 1

Editor's note: The following are the correct answers to our first Safety Q&A, which appeared in the February-March 2008 issue of *Safety Management*.

When a tractor is equipped with a rollover protective structure (ROPS), you should:

- c) Wear the seat belt when the ROPS is in the upright and locked position.

When an accident occurs, the very first thing you should do is:

- d) Get help for any injured persons.

When training a non-native speaking employee in safety, the best thing to do is:

- b) Use "visual" examples, and have the worker demonstrate what you just showed him or her.



Think Safety!

Marketing Tip

By Patrick Astre, CFP
Astre Planning, Inc.
patrick_ast@msn.com

Recession Survival Guide for Businesses

The constant sine wave of business cycles makes recessions as inevitable as surging booms. Businesses and consumers alike should be prepared and plan for them. Here's a guide for businesses to handle recessions and the inevitable boom that follows.

Handling recessions, or any kind of business slowdown, consists of three basic actions:

- 1- Cutting expenses as much as possible without affecting sales and income
- 2- Maintaining sales and income as much as possible in the current environment
- 3- Having and properly using an emergency fund to help weather the storm

Recognizing the basics and actually implementing a plan can be two different things. Begin by understanding the financial ebb and flow of your business. You should be using a modern, computerized accounting system such as Quickbooks. On-line courses, as well as classroom training, is available for you to learn how to use software.

Your primary tools are found in the company financials, sales and customers sections and with Quickbooks, you'll use three primary tools:

1) Profit & Loss Statements (P&L).

The P&L statement allows you to see all of your expenses and income—categorized—and shows if you've made a profit or suffered a loss during specific time periods. Run the P&L as far back as you can—five or 10 years if possible—for each quarter and annually. You'll find which period of time is most profitable, when expenses rise, what the expenses are, when income increases and in what categories.

2) Sales and Representatives. If you have a sales force, this section of Quickbooks shows sales details by individual reps.

3) Customers & Receivables. This section of Quickbooks shows open invoices and accounts receivables' aging details. This is crucial since the amount of time it takes you to collect has a direct impact on cash flow.

Once you have this information at your fingertips, you're ready to begin recession-proofing your business.

Cut expenses. Trim only the fat and beware of cutting services that bring in rev-

enue. The first step is to scrutinize the expenses part of your P&L statement. Take steps to reduce obvious expenses such as energy costs, superfluous purchases, eliminating inventory or services that aren't profitable.

The rest is more difficult, especially in these areas:

♦ **Advertising:** Be very careful to differentiate between advertising that brings in business and that which doesn't. Offer coupons that must be brought in so you know the advertising source that brings in customers.

♦ **Sales representatives.** Use your sales records to determine who needs help to increase their achievements if you can, cut them if you must.

♦ **Employees.** Laying off people is tough. In a recession you may be forced to retain only key employees. Be prepared by making the decisions ahead of time and hope the day never happens.

Watch your cash flow, even in good times when business is good and the money seems to pour in. Why get crazy, right? Even when collections are behind and expenses are too high, and profits are still good, why bother? There are many dangers of financial complacency, and when economic slowdowns occur, the business is blindsided. Straighten it out during the good times, when you think you don't need to.

Set up an emergency fund. This is crucial. Start putting 10 percent of gross in a ready, liquid fund tied to your business. Use a good steady bond fund like Vanguard Intermediate-Term Tax Free Municipal Fund, or ING Direct. Make believe this is another expense, and it is—it's an expense that might save your business some day.

Keep going until you have at least six months worth of your business' gross income. In addition, have a ready source of credit in case a deep recession comes along and you need more cash. Be a miser with your expenses and a hog with your savings. Put it away till it hurts. It'll pull your bacon out of the fire in a recession.

Doing this will improve every aspect of the business.



Shrewder Computing

Selecting a Computer Monitor—CRT or LCD

When shopping for a new computer system, you will find two types of monitor technologies available: *cathode-ray tubes* (CRT) and *liquid crystal display* (LCD). Each has advantages and disadvantages.

While both types of monitors provide bright, vibrant color display, LCDs cannot display the maximum color range of a CRT. When an LCD is running at its native resolution the picture quality is perfectly sharp, whereas on a CRT the sharpness of the picture can be blemished by soft edges or a flawed focus.

A CRT monitor can be viewed from almost any angle, but with an LCD this is often a problem. When you use an LCD, your view changes as you move different angles and distances away from the monitor. At some odd angles, you may notice the picture fade, and possibly look as if it will disappear from view.

When you purchase a 17-in. CRT monitor, you usually get 16.1 in. of actual viewing area. If you purchase a 17-in. LCD monitor, you actually get a full 17-in. viewable area.

CRT monitors are big, bulky and heavy. An LCD monitor is small, compact and lightweight. An average 17-in. CRT monitor could weigh upwards of 40 lbs. compared to a 17-in. LCD which weighs around 15 lbs.

An initial purchase of a LCD monitor is more expensive; however, because of their longer life span, they are cheaper in the long run and consume less power.

Another suggestion: buy monitors with built-in speakers that don't require additional power supply blocks. Better yet, when you replace computers, buy laptops (they use less electrical power than a desktop computer, by far).

Another energy saving tip: You should unplug your phone charger when not in use because it continues to draw and waste electricity.

TPI Action

TPI Adds On-Line Registration for Conference & Conventions

By mid-April, members should be able to register for the 2008 TPI Summer Convention & Field Days on-line at the TPI website www.TurfGrassSod.org. This effort has been in the works for some time and should save members and TPI staff a lot of time. The new electronic TPI registration form will be easier to complete as you scroll down and simply indicate the specific activities and events you wish to participate in.

The Lawn Institute Media Kit

Every spring, a CD containing information about turfgrass, its benefits, care and maintenance and other related topics is mailed to the industry's trade and a variety of consumer publications. This media kit, although developed for the news media, includes a wide range of articles and other useful information TPI members can include in their customer newsletters, as envelope stuffers and to reaffirm their credibility as "the preferred source" for their local news media to contact for information about turfgrass and its benefits and advantages. A few minutes spent browsing through the CD could spark lots of ideas for using this material to help promote a positive image of your operation.

"TPI Members' Needs" Survey to Help Refine Member Benefits

Every five years, TPI conducts a survey to determine which member benefits are most valued, which need improvement and what additional benefits would serve the overall membership well. The survey will be available on-line in the near future. Participating in TPI surveys is one of several ways you can make your voice heard and help direct TPI to meet your needs.

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>

Business Management

Turfgrass Producers International

2 East Main St., East Dundee, IL 60118
e-mail: info@TurfGrassSod.org

Spotlight on Member Benefits

Insurance Program for TPI Members

Mass Marketing Insurance Consultants (MMIC) offer TPI members major medical, life insurance, optional disability and dental coverage programs. MMIC will analyze your health insurance needs and provide objective advice about how to improve coverage and reduce costs.

To find out more contact a MMIC consultants at Tel: 800/349-1039 or e-mail quotes@mmicinsurance.com or visit www.mmicinsurance.com/TPI

Payment Processing Solutions

TPI has teamed with National Processing Company (NPC) to create a payment processing solution that allows TPI members to take advantage of lower credit/debit card processing rates, in addition to special pricing on electronic check guarantee service. For more information, call 877/296-4671 or e-mail tpi@npc.net or visit www.npc.net

Accounts Receivable Management Program

To help members deal more effectively with collecting past-due accounts, TPI has added a quality accounts receivable management program from I.C. System. I.C. System delivers effective and ethical solutions for collecting debts and improving cash flow. TPI members receive special pricing for I.C. System's services. For more details, call 800/279-3511 or visit www.icsystem.com/associations/tpi.htm

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