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BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Turfgrass Producers International

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2009 TPI Midwinter Conference
(Point Clear, AL, February 9-13)

Monday—Working Group & Committee Meetings

Tuesday—Prayer Breakfast
Mobile City Tour
The Lawn Institute Golf Tournament
Early Bird Reception

Wednesday—Women's Forum
Seminar: (Credit & Collections)
Exhibit Reception

Thursday—Education Session #1
Exhibit Lunch
The Lawn Institute Banquet (Casino Night & Karaoke)

Friday—Education Session #2
Roundtable Forum
Farm Tour

Saturday—Field Day with Alabama Turfgrass Association

Some Thoughts for Management to Consider

Google as a Screening Tool

As employers increase their use of social networking sites and search engines to find out more about job applicants, they can run into some legal problems. Be careful. If you Google only minorities, you can have a problem. If you reject people because of the way they look, you can have a problem (i.e., race, or in a wheelchair). You want to avoid discrimination lawsuits.

So what can you do? This is not legal advice, and some of it is common sense. First of all make sure you have the right person. Many people have the same names, even rare names. If you find something troubling or questionable about an applicant on-line, give him or her a chance to refute what you have found.

The second element is your consistency. Just as you would not check references or backgrounds for only a few people, you would not want to Google only certain people. To avoid discrimination charges based on age, sex, gender or disability, you might want to consider using the search engines or networking sites for every applicant.

Work/Life Balance

A recent study by authors Hewlett and Luce, as quoted in the Harvard Business Review, backs up what I have been saying for years. A third of workers under 44 years of age who work 60 or more hours per week are likely to quit within the next couple of

years. Only 19 percent of workers older than that were ready to leave. In my own research, I have found that the younger employees are, the more extra hours are a big turnoff. Generation Y (28 and under) often make a job decision based on the hours they must work vs. the amount of hours they have available to play. Balance is a key to their lives. Look at the positive side: workers who are less stressed and fatigued are more productive while at work.

Ways to have Fun and Boost Morale

Having fun at work may seem like a time waster but research shows the opposite is true. Humor and fun clears the mind and enables the brain to function better. It relieves boredom and makes people think better. It also boosts morale and makes work more meaningful and satisfying. When your people are happy, they make customers happy and improve your bottom line.

According to Dr. William Fry of Stanford Medical School, laughter enhances cardiovascular fitness by lowering our blood pressure and pulse. It reduces stress hormones and has a positive effect on our creativity and productivity.

Here are some things you can do to keep things light that won't break the bank. Put up a Humor Bulletin Board. This costs very little and gives you a great return on your investment. Have people bring in cartoons, funny pictures and jokes to post there. Put up humorous slogans and greeting cards. The guess-the-baby/child-photo contest never gets old. Remember, it's O.K. for the boss to have fun too!

Source: Bob Losyk, President & CEO of Innovative Training Solutions. Visit www.boblosyk.com or Tel: 800/995-0344.

Why Consider a Contribution to The Lawn Institute?

As the year draws to a close, now is as good of a time as any to think about writing a check to The Lawn Institute.

As one member said, "I can either contribute to The Institute or I can pay more taxes... I'd rather spend the money where I know it will do some good... with our Foundation, The Lawn Institute."

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Taking Care of Business

By John Baker
READY Thinking, LLC
www.ReadyThinking.com

Business Plans are Nothing—Business Planning is Everything

Dwight Eisenhower, when contemplating the Herculean effort to plan for Operation Overlord (the code name for the invasion of Normandy and northwest Europe during WWII) said, "Plans are nothing. Planning is everything."

His considered view was that while both are necessary, plans by their very nature are nothing but static documents, yet planning is a responsive and dynamic action that brings focus to uncertainty.

Consider a pilot flying a 747 from Los Angeles to Japan. The plan is to land at the Narita International airport. Once airborne though, unexpected winds, other aircraft traffic, mid-ocean storms, even solar flare activity affect and alter the airplane's course.

Unmanaged, the pilot would just as likely land the plane in Seoul rather than in Tokyo. The flight plan sets an initial course and a final destination, but the process of planning ensures that the pilot takes the appropriate corrective action to get the airplane where it needs to go.

In business, planning is just as vital, especially when things are rapidly changing and the economy seems to be in constant flux. With the market in less-than-perfect shape and so much uncertainty in the air, many business leaders forego the discipline of establishing a business plan under the assumption that it is a waste of time. This is a mistake. The most essential reason to write a business plan isn't to set a course of action, but to provide a management tool to use in the present, as well as the future.

Business planning is fraught with misconceptions; the biggest is assuming that the planning process needs to be complicated and burdensome. A sound business plan only needs to address four questions:

1. Where are we?

The plan should clearly define the financial, environmental and market realities facing the business. This should not be addressed in the overly technical language of an MBA, but rather with straightforward words that uncompromisingly define the business' health and competitive position. It is imperative that the plan has its foundation in what is real, not something once assumed

or "hoped for." Someone reading this section of the plan should, with clarity, understand the strengths and weaknesses of the business, and have a sense of the company's potential given the current reality.

Hint: The best way to lose any enthusiasm in your business plan is to make this section a complex, statistical death by numbers dissertation. Readers care nothing about your plunging ROI, but care intensely about what that means to your business. Use only those financial matrices—pick three to five—that truly explain how your business is performing.

2. Where are we going?

The plan should spell out the intentions for the business in the coming years; what does the organization want to accomplish?

This section of the plan is a statement of business aspiration, balanced by the reality set forth in section one of the plan. This creates a reasonable prediction of the momentum needed to achieve the business' future goals. It is folly to state an aspiration that is no more than a pipe dream. Blind hope is an irresponsible strategy; aspirations need to be tied to reality. This section of the plan allows the reader to understand the potential of the business in three ways:

- **Financially:** Why should one invest in us?
- **Externally:** Why should clients and prospects do businesses with us?
- **Internally:** Why should employees work here?

Hint: Abstract vision statements are as credible as Britney Spears speaking at a parenting conference. The best plans are insightful because they balance bold market aspirations with common sense business acumen.

3. How will we get there?

The plan should set forth the imperatives of the business; the tasks that are absolutely non-negotiable in terms of achieving success. By definition, this section not only defines a critical path for the business. It also identifies the important but non-essential objectives. By doing this, leaders define where they are willing to fail in order to secure the critical path. The plan sets a con-

text for decision making around competing goals—for example, delaying an important product launch in order to ensure an imperative goal of achieving bottomline results. After reading this section of the plan, the reader should know not only what keeps the leaders of the business up at night (i.e. achieving their imperatives) but also what lengths they are willing to go to for a good night's sleep.

Hint: Want to break down organizational silos? Make sure each employee knows where his or her job fits within the critical path outlined in this section. If not, he or she is not fully part of the team.

4. Are we on track?

The plan needs to define what success looks like and how it is measured. The plan should clearly define who is accountable for which measure, when measurements will be taken (i.e. monthly, quarterly, etc.) and the corrective actions to be taken in the event of a deviation from the plan.

A sure way to add frustration into your life is to create a business plan that sits on the shelf unopened, with an expiration date of one year. The best business plans are evergreen; they are constantly referenced and regularly amended. You should understand how success is defined and measured.

Hint: This section should flow directly into the formulation of team and individual goal documents. It provides a uniform template that ensures everyone has goals and measures aligned to organizational vitality.

During uncertain times, key business constituencies—clients, prospects, shareholders, and employees—need to receive heightened levels of information. The business plan provides an excellent communication tool. It sets forth a clear path of action that can be referenced—almost as a company's Rosetta Stone—in unclear circumstances. This, in turn, generates comfort and confidence in the business, its leaders and the planning that has been engaged in.

John Baker has more than 20 years senior executive experience with companies like American Express and Ameriprise. Visit www.ReadyThinking.com for more info.



Safety Management

Reduce Your Risk of Noise-Induced Hearing Loss

You're a turfgrass sod producer who has operated tractors, harvesters and other noisy farm equipment for years. You know that your hearing is getting worse, but you laugh it off and attribute it to "age"—never realizing that you likely could have prevented the hearing loss from occurring many years ago.

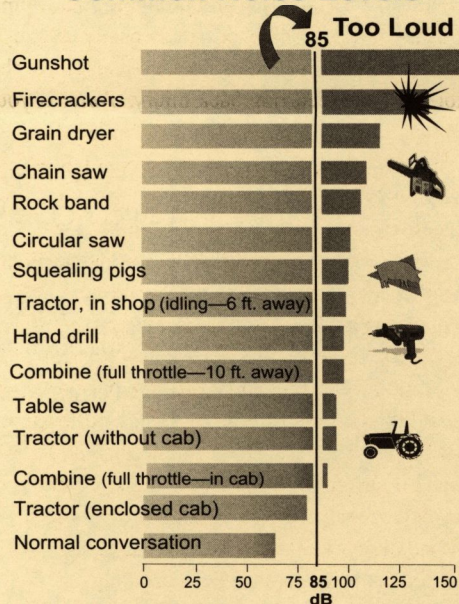
Farmers are at high risk of noise-induced hearing loss—permanent hearing damage that results from prolonged and frequent exposure to noise levels above 85 decibels. Research has shown that farmers have significantly higher rates of hearing loss than the general population. One study in Wisconsin found that approximately 25 percent of the male farmers surveyed reported hearing-related communication difficulties by the age of 30. And, a University of Iowa study showed that hearing loss puts farmers at increased risk of injury on the job.

Young turfgrass sod producers typically think of hearing loss as something that happens to people who are much older—if at all. They don't realize that permanent hearing loss may already be occurring. They often fail to take steps to protect their hearing now.

Here are some important facts about noise-induced hearing loss:

- ♦ Permanent hearing loss can result from exposure to a single, nearby shotgun blast, dynamite blast or other loud noise.
- ♦ It can also result from working around noisy farm equipment without using hearing protection. Among the types of tools and equipment that often have decibel levels of 85 or higher are tractors without cabs (as well as tractors *with* cabs when the doors and windows are not kept shut), chain saws, circular saws, hand drills and table saws. (See accompanying chart.)
- ♦ Noise-induced hearing loss can also occur from exposure to such non-farm noises as loud concerts or from listening to loud music through the headphones of an iPod.

Common Noise Levels



A "decibel" is the unit to measure the loudness of sound. Decibel levels for each item shown in the graph may vary.

If you need to raise your voice to be heard an arm's length away, the noise is probably loud enough to damage your hearing.

Source: National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health.

- ♦ One of the first signs of hearing loss may be trouble communicating with a co-worker, family member or friend—especially when using a cell phone. In general, if you need to raise your voice to be heard an arm's length away, the noise is probably loud enough to damage your hearing.
- ♦ Another early sign of hearing loss is often a "ringing" in the ears. This is called "tinnitus." Tinnitus may also present itself as hissing, roaring, whistling, chirping or clicking sounds in the ears.

Again, once your hearing is gone, it cannot be restored. While a good hearing aid can help amplify sounds, it will not restore lost hearing.

Checklist to Reduce the Risk of Noise-Induced Hearing Loss

- ✓ Assess all of the tasks and equipment on your farm. Determine which tasks, tools, machinery and equipment produce noise that may be harmful to your hearing. **Note:** Don't forget to also identify loud noises in your shop.
- ✓ Keep equipment well lubricated and maintained. Replace worn, loose or unbalanced machine parts. Don't wait to replace loud mufflers on your tractor or other farm equipment.
- ✓ Limit your exposure to loud noise. If you don't have to be near it, stay away. If you operate tractors with cabs, be sure to keep the cab doors and windows closed.
- ✓ Use hearing protection whenever you are exposed to loud noise. Insist that your employees do the same. Remember that hearing loss may already be occurring before you are even aware of it. **Note:** Don't let employees balk about using hearing protection. Hundreds of different styles of hearing protectors are available on the market today.
- ✓ Keep hearing protection in a readily accessible, convenient location. Hang protective earmuffs or canal caps (earplugs attached to a band) on the steering wheel of your tractor. Put earplugs in your pockets when you first start out in the morning.
- ✓ Have your hearing tested by a health care provider if you or anyone else detects a hearing problem.

Free Hearing Protection Resources

Editor's note: Although all of these resources are based in the United States, they include excellent information that can be used by turfgrass sod producers throughout the world.

- ♦ The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health's (NIOSH) Noise and Hearing Loss Prevention webpage is www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/noise.
- ♦ Two new NIOSH brochures aimed specifically at young farmers—*They're Your Ears: Protect Them—Hearing Loss Caused by Farm Noise is Preventable* and *Have You Heard? Hearing Loss Caused by Farm Noise is Preventable: Young Farmers' Guide for Selecting and Using Hearing Protection*: www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/noise/pubs/no_pubs.html. For printed single or bulk copies, e-mail: farm.noise@cdc.gov
- ♦ Dangerous Decibels: www.dangerousdecibels.org
- ♦ American Tinnitus Association: www.ata.org

- ♦ National Hearing Conservation Association:
www.hearingconservation.org
- ♦ National Agricultural Safety Database: Hearing Conservation:
www.cdc.gov/nasd/menu/topic/hearing.html

Forklift Safety Checklist – Part 2

Editor's note: This is the second part of a two-part checklist distributed at a recent OSHA 10-hour course in Wisconsin. Part 1 of this checklist ran in our August/September 2008 issue of "Safety Management." Be sure to pass this checklist on to all of your forklift operators.

Unloading a Forklift

- ✓ Turn the forklift slowly into position.
- ✓ Go straight into trailers.
- ✓ If unloading onto a truck, be sure its rear wheels are chocked, the brakes are locked and the dock plate is secure. Then position the load, tilt it forward and release it.
- ✓ If unloading onto a rack or stack, check the maximum safe stack height. Then raise and position the load to the correct height and move it slowly into position. Tilt the load forward, lower it onto the rack or stack, then pull the forks back slowly. Back out slowly, looking over your shoulder.

Parking a Forklift

- ✓ Select a flat parking surface, away from traffic and not blocking aisles, doors or exits.
- ✓ When leaving the truck unattended (or if you'll be 25 or more feet away from it), fully lower the load-engaging means, neutralize the controls, shut off the power, set the brakes and remove the key. Block the wheels if parked on an incline.

Forklift Refueling and Maintenance

- ✓ Turn off the engine.
- ✓ Refuel in an assigned, ventilated area containing nothing that could cause a fire or explosion.
- ✓ Have fire extinguishers and clean-up materials available.
- ✓ Do not smoke while refueling.
- ✓ Pour acid into water—not water into acid.
- ✓ Follow the manufacturer's instructions for gas or propane fueling.
- ✓ Do not use an open flame to check the fuel level.
- ✓ Try to prevent spills. Clean up any spills promptly, and replace the cap on the tank before starting the truck.
- ✓ Take empty propane tanks outside and open the valve to let leftover propane escape.
- ✓ Use acid-resistant material handling equipment and wear corrosion-resistant personal protective equipment (PPE) during battery changing.
- ✓ Remove the battery cap slowly and leave it open.

Turfgrass Sod Producers' Safety Q&A – No. 3

Editor's note: The one correct answer to each of the following questions will appear in our next issue of "Safety Management."

I should report a minor accident to our company's insurer:

- A – Only if I am certain it will result in a claim.
- B – Never, because it may cause our insurance rates to increase.
- C – In most cases because our insurer may be able to help investigate the incident.
- D – Only if the minor accident results in a lawsuit.

One of the best ways to get to the root cause of an incident is:

- A – Continue to "grill" the parties involved, especially anyone who was injured.
- B – Keep asking "why" and don't accept surface causes as the root cause.
- C – Place all of the employees involved on probation until the investigation is done.
- D – Don't be concerned about the root cause because there may not be one.

When conducting "tailgate" safety training:

- A – Train in the language you know best, despite others' native languages.
- B – Don't take time for questions if the training has exceeded 10 minutes.
- C – Only train in winter when there is less work to get done.
- D – Train orally and use "visual" aids to assist in the training.

More Low-Cost Safety Ideas You Can Use

Editor's note: This is the fourth in a series of articles on free or low-cost safety ideas you can use.

- ✓ **Start out each day with safety.** Consider implementing at least a few minutes of "warm-up, stretching" exercises—especially for those who will be lifting, hauling and/or laying sod. Remember that overexertion injuries can be extremely costly and anything you can do to help prevent them could save you tens of thousands of dollars for even one recurring back injury. **Note:** If you do have your workers get together for a few minutes at the start of the day, use the opportunity to briefly discuss any recent injuries that have occurred and how they can be prevented in the future.
- ✓ **Save damaged personal protective equipment.** Dented safety glasses, damaged respirators and other torn or damaged protective equipment can be a great training tool for your next PPE (personal protective equipment) safety session. For example, use badly dented safety glasses to make the point that if the stone or other debris responsible for the dent had struck the person's eye instead, the worker could have lost his or her eyesight—or even an eye.
- ✓ **Develop dashboard stickers.** These should include short phrases and should go on the dashboards of your trucks. Among the phrases that may be included are: "Don't jump on and off of trucks." "Regularly check the load you are hauling." "Do not speed." "Do not drive if you have been drinking." "Remember to use your PPE."

Think Safety!

Marketing Tip

By Voss Graham
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Become a Sales Superstar—10 Critical Areas to Master

Becoming a sales superstar is all about the choices you make as a salesperson. What got you here today will not necessarily make you a sales superstar tomorrow; however, you can be a sales superstar if you begin making choices today.

Sales superstars design their paths to superdom using hard work and thinking about their choices all the time. To become a sales superstar, you must decide to improve your skills in these ten critical areas:

1— Learning

Sales superstars have one thing in common—they are always learning. They learn about their customers, so they can understand the current and future situations they will face. They are also readers. They read about selling, business trends, economic trends, industry trends and leadership issues.

2— Business Acumen

In the modern world of selling, salespeople must be able to speak in terms that are important to customers. These terms are revenue growth, cost of goods sold, gross margin, related costs, turnover ratios, velocity and net income.

3— Preparedness

Top salespeople research their customers before meeting with them. When talking with your customers, your knowledge about them, their customers, trends and such demonstrates to the customers that you respect their time.

4— Industry Knowledge

Knowing the industry helps you to understand trends, cycles, what is old or new, best practices and who your customers are. Knowing the little secrets of success and, most importantly, being able to anticipate industry trends helps you to guide your customers to better decisions about their businesses.

5— Questioning Skills

Most sales people talk too much and bore their customers with opinions. Why? Because the customers believe their thoughts over yours! Good sales people use questions

to uncover these biases and guide or educate the customer. The key is to focus on the customer, not boasting.

6— Listening

Closely related to the questioning skills is the ability to actively listen to the customer. Listen for things that are not clearly defined by the customer and then gently probe for specifics in order to understand of the situation. A side effect of listening to the customer is: they like you more!

7— Think like an Owner

When completing the sale, does the customer feel satisfied or does doubt and frustration rule? Take time to think about customer satisfaction and what it takes to insure success with each customer.

8— Creative Problem Solving

The key here is "creative." It is about looking at the different ways to solve the customer's problem, and choosing the one idea that will create the most effective solution for the customer and your company.

9— Practice, Practice, Practice

Sales superstars do not practice a new or improved technique on a critical customer. Using video in the practice sessions is the fastest method to gain immediate improvement in selling skills, yet it is the least used due to egos and fear of failure.

10— Self Confidence

This final factor is critical as both a means and an end to succeeding in the prior nine factors. Customers want to work with confident sales people. If you do the first nine, confidence will come.

The world of sales is changing rapidly. As a sales person, you need to decide if you want to stay in sales for the long term or do something else. Those are strong words, yet, truthful words based upon the change that has already started in many industries.

Make a decision today to become a sales superstar and master the 10 critical factors of success.

Shrewder Computing

Quick Facts to Participating in 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 be alert 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 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" emails (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 and read a copy of the seller's description of the product closely, especially the fine print. Save copies of all e-mails you send and receive from the auction site or seller, also.

Internet auction sites give buyers a "virtual" flea market with new and used merchandise from around the world; they give sellers a global storefront from which to market their goods.



TPI Action

New TPI Booklet Comparing Artificial Turf and Natural Grass Being Sent to All Members!

After reading about the newly revised TPI booklet comparing artificial turf to natural grass, many TPI members have already ordered multiple copies for distribution in their market areas. All members will receive a copy of the *Natural Grass and Artificial Turf: Separating Myths and Facts* booklet via postal mail. Accompanying the booklet will be a cover letter explaining how members can use it to help educate the decision-makers in their market about the significantly beneficial advantages of natural grass, compared to artificial turf. Also included will be a press release for members to submit to their local news media, and an order form to request multiple copies of the booklet for distribution in their market area—although the books are free, there is a nominal charge for shipping and handling. Watch your mailbox for the new booklet's arrival.

TPI is Looking for a Few Good Leaders!

If you or another turfgrass producer or manufacturer/supplier representative you know have leadership qualities and an interest in helping direct TPI in the future, contact TPI Nominating Committee Chairman George P. Brandt Jr. at 847/358-0144 or e-mail americansod@comcast.net. Potential candidates must be Class A (producer) or Class B (supplier) members in good standing who are willing to participate in at least four Board meetings and other activities per year, for a period of at least three years. The Nominating Committee will meet selected candidates during the Midwinter Conference in Point Clear, AL.

TPI Membership Continues Strong

Based on this year's renewals, TPI Membership continues strong despite the current challenging economy in the U.S. and many other countries. Any members who have yet to send in their renewal dues have until Wednesday, October 1 to be included in the *TPI Membership Directory*.

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>

Spotlight on Member Benefits

TPI Membership Directory—Much More than a Listing of Members

If you haven't opened your *TPI Membership Directory* to its contents page recently, now would be a good time to take a fresh look at the wealth of information contained in this publication. As a reminder of the type information your *Directory* contains, it is divided into three sections:

1— TPI Leadership and Benefits section includes current TPI officers and Trustees, Working/Advisory Groups, Past Presidents, Honorary Members, Honors and Awards, The Lawn Institute information, listing of exclusive membership benefits and services, explanation of membership categories, and even international calling country and city codes.

2— Directory of Members by Class provides complete contact information, as well as types of products and services offered by each. There are two ways to find a member in the *Directory*: 1) alphabetical by representative, and 2) alphabetical by company name.

3— TPI Information section includes a product/publications order form, green industry associations and technical resource, TPI By-Laws, TPI History, TPI past and future meetings, TPI staff e-mail addresses, a *Directory* Corrections Update form and even a Metric System Conversion chart on the inside back cover.

In short, the *TPI Membership Directory* can answer many of your questions.

Business Management

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