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ISSUE HIGHLIGHTS

Taking Care of Business Page 2
– Seven Ways to Fuel the Fire in Employee Performance

Safety Management Pages 3-4
– the Importance of Safety in a Down Economy
– Testing Employees for Substance Abuse
– Important Steps You Can Take

– Drug Users As Employees
– Tips for Effective Safety Communications
– TPI Safety TIPS

Marketing Tip Page 5
– Beyond the Basics—Keep Your Sales Up in a Down Market

Shrewder Computing Page 5
– When NOT to Use E-Mail
– E-Mail Etiquette

TPI Action Page 6
– Turfgrass Lawn Guide Marketing Brochures in the Mail, Really!
– Dr. Hank Wilkinson Joins "Turf News" Editorial Advisory Staff
– We Want Your Comments

Spotlight on Member Benefits . . . Page 6
– BP Business Solutions Program

Has Your 2009 TPI Membership Directory Arrived?

The latest *TPI Membership Directory* was mailed last month. If yours did not arrive or if you want to purchase an additional copy (continues at \$10/copy), please contact the TPI office.

Included along with the new directory were the latest *Member Username* and *Password* for accessing the Members-Only section of the TPI website.

Special recognition is deserved by Spriggers' Choice for helping keep costs down by sponsoring the latest *TPI Membership Directory*.

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Turfgrass Producers International

Don't Wait Until it's Too Late! 10 Things You Must Do Now

Customers have stopped buying, companies are closing, layoffs are common, banks have stopped lending, consumer confidence is falling and the list goes on. As a business owner or manager, your choice is simple. Do what you know you need to do and do it fast. . . or die a slow death.

There are 10 things you must do right now:

- 1. Set goals to grow and make a profit now.** Stop lowering your prices. Start focusing on sales, customers and making money. Write down your annual targets for revenue, direct costs, overhead expenses and net profit for the next three years. This will help you decide what you'll need to do to achieve your goals.
- 2. Cut your fixed cost of doing business now.** Determine what your business really needs in order to prosper in tougher times. Look for overhead you can cut, and eliminate all unnecessary expenditures and under utilized people. Hold a contest about who can cut the most money from the budget. Sell any equipment or assets that aren't needed; and if you can't sell it, try renting it out.
- 3. Preserve cash now.** Delay any major purchases. If you really need something, lease it on an "as needed" basis.

- 4. Eliminate your poor performers now.** Poor performers and those who don't fit your long-range plans should be eliminated; good employees are easy to find now.
- 5. Visit your top customers now.** Chances are a handful of your customers provide 80 percent of your revenue. Invest time with these customers to learn their needs, problems and plans, looking for ways your company can provide additional services and solutions.
- 6. Seek new customers and markets now.** As sales opportunities decrease, you need to increase the number of sales proposals to land the same amount of business. Start looking for customers, markets and territories that competitors don't.
- 7. Get in the opportunity business now.** Successful owners use their companies as platforms from which to seek business opportunities to maximize their bottom-line. Look for strategic alliances, ventures and new profit centers.
- 8. Increase sales and marketing now.** Marketing and sales must become your top priority, advertising or mailing to your target list monthly. Upgrade your presentation, stationary, uniforms, signage and website. Always send "Thank-you" cards and handwritten notes of appreciation to every customer.
- 9. Increase spending on technology now.** Can you improve or become more efficient by implementing cutting-edge technology? Make it your goal to never stop upgrading your technology.
- 10. Seek companies to buy now.** Be on the lookout for struggling companies you can acquire at low prices. Weak competitors may need an infusion of cash and consider merging with your business. Also, look for distressed real estate.

By George Hedley, CSP, author, speaker.
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www.hardhatpresentations.com



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2009 TPI Summer Convention & Field Days—East Lansing, MI

Monday, July 27
The Lawn Institute Memorial Golf Tournament
MSU Campus Tour
Early Bird Reception

Tuesday, July 28
Prayer Breakfast
Farm Tour
TPI Banquet

Wednesday, July 29
Women's Forum Breakfast
TPI Annual Business Meeting with Speaker Presentation
Roundtable Forum & Lunch
Exhibit Hall Reception

Thursday, July 30
Field Day

Friday, July 31
Working Group & Committee Meetings

Taking Care of Business

By Howard Hyden
The Center for Customer Focus
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Seven Ways to Fuel the Fire in Employee Performance

In a down market, it is crucial to do an awesome job for your customers. Retaining your existing customers and attracting new ones is the key to having a good year in tough times. If you want your employees to be awesome with customers, you must be awesome to your employees. Here are seven key strategies to increase employee performance.

1— Change management behavior.

Einstein's famous definition of insanity is "Doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results." If management doesn't change its' behavior, why should you expect different results from your employees? If you tell your employees, "The market is tough and we'll probably have a tough year," they will probably prove you right.

However, if you communicate that the market is tough, then the good news is that the competitors think they're going to have a tough year. Since they believe they are going to have a tough year, why don't you focus efforts to bring more value to your customers so you can have a good year? Communicate a strategy that it is important to go the extra mile for the customer so you can minimize the risk of losing customers. Additionally, if you are awesome with customers, they may spread PWOM (Positive-Word-Of-Mouth) so that you can attract new customers.

2— Hire the best. All too often, employers run a classified ad that brings marginal candidates and then they hire the tallest "twerp." If you want to motivate your current team, you must add new hires that bring the right attitude and work ethic to the party. Hiring wrong can have negative impact on your current employees. You, as well as your staff, can look for hard-working, dedicated employees with the right attitude in their personal life. When you're a customer and an employee treats you properly, even going the extra mile, hire them! It is easier to teach them about your business than it is to try to fix poor attitude or a weak work ethic.

3— Weed the garden. The strategy here is to hire the best. If you do not "weed the garden," the performance of the team will go down. When you finally do weed the gar-

den, the other employees will probably cheer and wonder, "What took you so long; we figured that out 10 months ago." If you do not weed the garden, the employees just might be standing at the water cooler complaining about how tough it is. If they are doing that, they certainly are not focused on going the "extra mile" for the customer. This often leads to NWOM (Negative Word Of Mouth), which can lead to either lost customers or fewer sales opportunities. When you finally weed the garden, the performance of the rest of the team will go up.

4— Provide the right environment including tools and equipment. To better service customers, a company installed GPS systems in the field personnel's vehicles. Then when a customer called in to find out where his delivery was, the company dispatcher as able to give a true estimated time of arrival to that customer.

Another company had numerous catalogs with a variety of products from their suppliers. The problem was that the information quickly became obsolete. When the company put all of their catalogs and current pricing information on CDs and provided laptops, the field personnel were able to give accurate product and pricing information to the customer.

5— Using WIIFM (What's In It For Me) as a key strategy to light the fire in your employees. Employees can obviously see what's in it for the customer when they (employee) give up their lunch hour, stay late or go the extra mile for the customer. Employees are also good at understanding "what's in it for the company"—more profit. In tough times, it might be even more vital to use WIIFM to motivate your employees. There's a significant amount of research on corporate culture and behavior change that indicates one of the key strategies was that *positive* KITA change behavior more than *negative* KITA. Translation: a positive KITA translates into a positive kick-in-the-(posterior) changes behavior more than negative negative KITA. Most employees feel under-appreciated. If they felt appreciated, imagine the performance level that can be achieved.

6— Train, Train, Train. In tough times, it is often the variable expenses of marketing

and training that are the first to get cut. Maybe doing the opposite would be a better approach. This is referred to as "counter-intuitive marketing strategies." When the rest of world goes south, perhaps you should go north. This might be a great time to resist the temptation to cut training and, instead, increase your investment in this area. Employees must be viewed as "an appreciating asset." This means that their ability to add value to customers must continuously increase.

Employees will work hard for companies that make an investment in them, and training can be an inhibitor to turnover. If you have higher turnover relative to competition, you will have lower customer satisfaction.

Therefore, companies that have made an investment in their employees just might have lower turnover, which increases their customer satisfaction.

Training can also be a magnet to attract top talent in the marketplace. The best employees want to work for organizations that will help them grow.

7— Celebrate. Don't wait until the end of month or the end of the year to celebrate success. "Sweat the small stuff." Frequently hold gatherings of employees to celebrate the small wins. This will not only recognize those people who are going the extra mile but it will encourage others to do the same.

It is also focusing on the positive versus negative. Focusing on the negative may only lead to more bad news. Management behavior will need to change to focus more on rewarding the behavior that you want. "What gets rewarded gets done" is an axiom that has been around a long time.

When looking at the above seven strategies to motivate employees in tough times, it should be evident that the biggest change must be in management behavior. If management doesn't change its behavior, what are the odds the employees are going to change theirs? Whose behavior do you have a better chance of changing, yours or someone else's? The answer is obvious. If you want your employees to go the extra mile for the customer, then go the extra mile for your employees. "There is no traffic jam on the extra mile!"

Safety Management

The Importance of Safety in a Down Economy

The economy is poor, the residential housing market is down, and orders for new turfgrass sod and installation services are the lowest they have been in years. Where do you make cuts to make ends meet? If you're thinking that your safety program might be one of those places, please think again.

"If companies believe they will save money by reducing or ignoring safety for their workers, customers and communities they do business in, they are mistaken," says Warren K. Brown, president of the American Society of Safety Engineers (ASSE). "Money cut from safety processes now could have enormous costs later. These can include injury and health care costs, fines, lost production time, employee morale or—worst of all—employee injury or even death."

ASSE notes that businesses spend an estimated \$170 billion per year on the costs associated with workplace injuries and illnesses, and pay out nearly \$1 billion each week to injured employees and their medical providers.

So what can you, a turfgrass sod producer, do to continue to emphasize safety in today's economic climate? Here are a few tips:

- ♦ **Continue with the most important "basics" of your safety program.** Among these are brief weekly "tailgate" safety training sessions, equipment-specific training that includes a demonstration by each new operator before allowing the person to use the equipment, and monthly review of all injuries/incidents followed by prompt corrective action to prevent recurrence.
 - ♦ **Make use of the free resources available to you.** In addition to the many Web-based safety resources, approach your insurer, safety suppliers, industry trade organizations and others for help. Specifically, ask for access to any free training materials and/or help in orally training your workers. For example, turn to your forklift supplier for training assistance (including checklists) with new forklift operators. Also, ask your insurer to conduct random safety audits of your property and equipment as part of the cost of your insurance premium. If your insurer declines to do this, look around for other insurers—and ask their loss control representatives what services they will provide to help keep your operation safe.
 - ♦ **Make greater use of your own employees.** Pull together a small team of longtime, safe employees (including supervisors) to "brainstorm" on no cost or low-cost ideas for making your operation safer. You might be surprised at some of the ideas you get. This is also a good way to make these people feel like they are an important part of your company's safety culture.
- Note:* In our next issue of "Safety Management" we will provide additional safety ideas to implement in times of limited resources.

Testing Employees for Substance Abuse

Editor's note: In our April-May 2007 issue of "Safety Management," we wrote about alcohol and drug use and how that can affect your turfgrass sod operation. The information in this follow-up article is based on a presentation at the 2008 Stateline Safety Workshop in Wisconsin by Cindy Groves, RN, clinical manager of outreach services at Beloit (Wisconsin) Memorial Hospital.

Employee substance abuse is a costly and potentially deadly problem a turfgrass sod farm manager or owner wants to avoid. Yet the reality is that there is "no painted picture of what a typical substance abuser looks like," says Cindy Groves, RN, clinical manager of outreach services at Beloit Memorial Hospital in Beloit, Wisconsin.

Statistics show that:

- ♦ There are as many as 20 million current illicit drug users.
- ♦ Eight percent of full-time employees and 10.3 percent of part-time employees are current illicit drug users.

Employing persons who abuse alcohol and drugs—or who show up at work with alcohol or drugs in their systems—can result in a serious accident. In fact, Groves says, substance abusers are involved in workplace accidents 3.6 times more than other employees and are five times more likely than non-substance abusers to file job-related injury/illness claims.

Testing job applicants and current employees for substance abuse is a good preventive measure. However, it's critical that you check all applicable laws and consult with a professional in this area before you begin a testing program.

Groves has these suggestions when developing a substance abuse testing policy:

- ♦ Determine when to test.
- ♦ Determine who you will test (for example, job applicants, employees involved in an accident, etc.).
- ♦ Decide what to test for.
- ♦ Determine the consequences of a positive test.

She also suggests that you identify your testing objectives, develop a strategy for achieving those objectives and design your policy to be the blueprint for achieving your objectives. "What employers most often overlook are the consequences of a positive test," Groves says. "Are you terminating them? Rehabilitating them? Laying them off?" *Note:* Make sure these consequences are applied fairly and equally across the board to all employees who test positive, and be sure that you understand the potential legal ramifications of terminating an employee.

Groves has these additional suggestions:

- ♦ If you decide to do pre-employment testing, make the testing appointment for your prospect—don't let the person make the appointment himself or herself.
- ♦ Put into writing what you will do if the person cancels the appointment.
- ♦ Define what an "accident" is—when and at what level of injury you will do substance abuse testing. *Note:* In the case of a traffic accident, it's also important to determine in advance whether you will just test the driver or anyone else involved as well. "Define what you will do if someone else is injured," Groves suggests. "For example, a person who gets his or her foot run over by a forklift should probably get tested, too."
- ♦ With post-accident testing, do both drug and alcohol testing.
- ♦ Keep substance abuse testing results in a separate medical file—not in your regular employee personnel files. Also, limit access to these files. "The same person who has access to employee personnel files may not need access to medical files," Groves notes.

- ♦ Send tests to credible, approved laboratories for analysis. In the United States, they should be sent to laboratories approved by the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). For more information, visit the following website:
www.workplace.samhsa.gov

Important Steps You Can Take

- ✓ Identify your substance abuse testing objectives.
- ✓ Devise a strategy aimed at achieving those objectives.
- ✓ Write your policy around your objectives.
- ✓ If you are already testing, re-evaluate who you test.
- ✓ Reconsider when you test.
- ✓ Consider alternative testing methods.
- ✓ Train supervisors.
- ✓ Annually review the success of your program.
- ✓ Update your program as needed.

DRUG USERS AS EMPLOYEES ARE

- ♦ More likely to be involved in an accident.
- ♦ More likely to file a workers' compensation claim.
- ♦ More likely to utilize health care benefits.
- ♦ More likely to quit or get fired.
- ♦ More likely to steal from the workplace.
- ♦ More likely to miss work or show up late.
- ♦ More likely to be involved in a confrontation.
- ♦ Less productive.

Tips for Effective Safety Communication

Your turfgrass sod farm is committed to safety but you're finding your safety lessons are getting... well... stale. And when you hold your monthly safety meetings, you look at your employees and notice that their heads are nodding—a sure sign something isn't right.

No matter how long you have been teaching safety or how many times you have told your workers to lift safely, drive safely and stay away from moving equipment parts, there are ways to "liven up" your safety presentations. Here are a few ideas:

- ♦ **Turn it over to someone else.** If you have been the only person teaching safety for years and years, it's no wonder your workers have started tuning you out. Even if you think you're the "expert" on a certain topic, give others a chance. You may be surprised at how the same safety message all of a sudden reaches workers who weren't listening very well in the past.
- ♦ **Review your use of visual "props."** Are you saving damaged personal protective equipment (PPE) to use in conjunction with safety training? For example, save dented safety glasses to make the point that the person's eye could have been poked and he or she could have lost his/her eyesight if the safety glasses hadn't been worn.
- ♦ **Determine whether your language is understandable.** Are you using simple words your workers can understand, regardless of their educational levels? If the language you are using is not their native language, are you taking that into account?
- ♦ **Cut back the length of your monthly meetings.** Safety meetings do not have to be long in order to be effective. Cut back the

length of your monthly safety meetings to no more than an hour, if possible. Give attendees breaks and don't expect them to sit in one place for more than 30 minutes. Use brief tailgate safety sessions for training. Focus your monthly meetings on reviewing injuries/incidents and on implementing corrective actions that need to be taken.

- ♦ **Determine whether there are better ways for your workers to learn.** Learning occurs in many different ways. For example, some people learn the best visually and others by hearing what you have to say. Incorporate as many ways of learning as possible in your safety sessions. You can easily gauge your workers' understanding by watching the expressions on their faces as you talk.
- ♦ **Inject some humor into your meetings.** There is nothing like a long, boring "lecture" to put people to sleep. There are many ways to inject some humor into meetings—even when talking about safety. One example is by having two people try on the same type of PPE but have one of them put it on backwards. Then turn on some lively music, have them "strut" in front of the others and ask their co-workers to tell you what is wrong. This type of "PPE fashion show" will not only be remembered but will also reinforce the correct way to wear safety glasses, a respirator or other PPE.
- ♦ **Personalize your safety sessions.** Give employees examples of what has happened to you. Ask others to relay examples of "near miss" accidents or actual incidents related to the topic you are discussing. Pay attention to what is happening at other turfgrass sod operations. If you know of an incident that has occurred, tell your workers about it (even if you choose not to use the other company's name)—then ask them how they will prevent something similar from happening to them or one of their co-workers.

TPI Safety TIPS

- Repeat safety training topics on a regular basis.
- Ask employees for their training ideas.
- Stress safety both at work and at home.
- Prohibit running on the job.
- Let employees know that you CARE about their safety.
- Remind workers to use their personal protective equipment.
- Require appropriate dress (including long-sleeved shirts and pants and sturdy boots or shoes).
- Train supervisors to enforce safety violations.
- Regularly review your company safety program. Update it as needed.
- Encourage employees to report all incidents, including "near miss" accidents.
- Build your safety program slowly. Don't try to do everything at once.
- Decide on your top one or two annual safety goals.
- Hold barbecues or find other ways to reward employees for safe behaviors.
- Document all injuries and other incidents in writing.
- Look for any incident trends.



Think Safety!

Marketing Tip

By Douglas Smith
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Beyond the Basics—Keep Your Sales Up in a Down Market

Salespeople are being hammered in today's economic environment. Entire market segments have evaporated. Customers and companies are holding back orders or literally have no money to buy. Opportunities and new prospects are fewer and further between. In 2008, many salespeople earned only half the commission they earned in 2007. When you take a 50 percent pay cut, you know what a recession feels like.

But not all sales professionals are in a slump. Some are thriving. Some are busy growing their client base and making good money, despite the uncertainty around them. You can do the same. Your commitment to success starts with a dedication to your goals and where you want to be; remember the basics, and then go beyond.

Some salespeople will take the safe road this year, ratcheting down their expectations. When you plan just to get by, that's exactly what you'll get. When you plan and expect to succeed it's a different story. As one astute sales manager once said: "Most salespeople reach the level of expectation they set for themselves."

If you want to be one of those who will thrive this year, apply these five tips now:

1— Don't wait for things to change. The best salespeople are taking action and moving forward. They recognize the economy may be in this mess for years. The movers and shakers are moving and shaking, setting up appointments, making sales calls and presentations, contacting their current and past customers and marketing like never before. Their pro-active approach is creating opportunities, leads and sales.

2— Work harder. Top salespeople understand this age-old axiom: "You can't make more money with less effort." That's why they are working harder and putting in more hours than ever before.

Think about this: Arriving just 30 minutes earlier and staying 30 minutes later each day equates to an additional 20 hours every month. When you are working 20 hours more than the average salesperson, you can make at least 20 percent more contacts, and even 20 percent more sales.

3— Talk to the right people. Successful salespeople today are selective about where

and with whom they spend their time. They are out looking for "real" buyers: customers and prospects who have both money and ability to buy. Every minute you spend with an unqualified prospect is another minute you won't have had to find a qualified one.

4— Make more contacts. Selling is a "contact sport." When times are good, business is easier to come by. But contrast the last few years of relative prosperity to what we see. Customers are more cautious, more apprehensive and spending decisions take longer. This means that to land more sales, you have to make more contacts. When capture and conversion rates go down, to maintain a steady volume of business, your sales contacts have to go up. Top producers get this. Do you?

5— Change the way you work. Successful salespeople have stayed successful through the years by evolving and adapting to change.

By reviewing trade publications, reading top books on selling, and attending industry conferences, client events and networking among successful peers, you are able to learn and apply new marketing approaches and sharpen your face-to-face skills. This is how you stay current, fresh and on top of your game.

While all of this may sound like the old "back to basics" line of attack, it's truly more than that. Successful salespeople in today's market have gone beyond the basics in most everything they do. They understand that roughly the top 20 percent of every sales force produces about 80 percent of most companies' sales results. To get and stay in that top 20 percent, you have to be willing to give and do 20 percent more than almost everyone else. That's not only what gives you your edge; it allows you to keep your sales up—even in a down market.

This year may not be the best year you've ever had but it doesn't have to be your worst.

Take advantage of the fact that most of your competition has pulled back, slowed down and, in some cases, completely left the business. Now is the time to push forward. You have a window of opportunity in front of you, and how you use that window is up to you.

Shrewder Computing

When NOT to Use E-Mail

- When you're trying to reach consensus. It takes significantly longer to do this with e-mail.
- When the message is very long. Call first and then use e-mail to confirm the main points.
- When the news is really bad. "Routine bad" (i.e., meeting is cancelled) is fine; really bad is not.
- When the reader is likely to be displeased with your solution.
- When the reader has a different agenda from yours.
- When the information is sensitive. Disclaimers do not protect you!
- When the information is confidential. People could easily file and/or forward your note.
- When you're communicating with someone who prefers the phone to e-mail.
- When you know the other person will respond from his or her blackberry and you'll get only a two-word response to a complex question!

E-Mail Etiquette

Manage Connectedness: E-Mail Etiquette and Productivity

E-mail can devastate productivity or boost it. It can extend brand or destroy it. It can enhance efficiency and/or destroy effectiveness. It can save time, build relationships and be our best friend or it can interrupt everything.

The smart business strategy is to manage connectedness. How many times have you written something, only to have the reader interpret it another way? Or, you receive an e-mail that is rude, thoughtless and frustrating, and you immediately respond only to wish you hadn't written it or sent it, a few minutes later?

Use e-mail to connect, collaborate and climb! Make every message you write work for you!

Source: Sue Hershkowitz-Coore, CSP,
www.speakersue.com



TPI Action

Your Turfgrass Lawn Guide Marketing Brochures Should have Arrived in the Mail

The Turfgrass Lawn Guide folder with its six marketing brochures replace the former TPI brochures with up-to-date information and photos. The series includes: *Benefits of Turfgrass*, *Establishing a Lawn*, *Why are Most Lawns Sodded?*, *Measuring for Turfgrass Sod*, *Turfgrass Installation Guide*, and *Turfgrass Watering Guide & Post Installation Care*. An order form WAS included in the mailing.

Available from the TPI website are: *Farmland & Urban Soil Conservation Resulting from Turfgrass*, *Federal & State Rulings—Turfgrass Sod as an Agricultural*, *Guideline Specifications to Turfgrass Sodding*, *Turfgrass Farm Employee Handbook*, *Turfgrass Tech Sheets (8)*, *TPI Logos*, *TPI Clip Art*, *Turfgrass Big Roll Installation Guide*. Also available as hardcopies are *Our Precious Planet* and *History of Turfgrass Producers International*. To order, contact TPI office.

Dr. Wilkinson Joins Turf News Editorial Advisory Staff

Dr. Henry (Hank) T. Wilkinson, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, will be *Turf News* Editorial Advisor for cool-season grasses. Dr. Wilkinson replaces Dr. Roch Gaussoin who relinquished the position because of HIS greatly increased work schedule. Dr. Gaussoin deserves special recognition and appreciation for his guidance. More information will be published in the next *Turf News* edition.

We Want Your Comments

Help us do a better job by taking a few minutes to let us know what you like most about this newsletter. Rate each segment on a scale of 1-5 (5 is best): Front Page, Taking Care of Business, Safety Management, Marketing Tip, Shrewder Computing, TPI Action, Spotlight on Member Benefits. E-mail your opinion to info@TurfGrassSod.org and be sure to key in the subject: "Newsletter Opinion."

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

BP Business Solutions Program

TPI members can receive a 4¢ rebate on every gallon of gasoline (2¢ rebate on every gallon of diesel) purchased at the more than 10,000 U.S. BP locations. The BP Business Solutions Program gives members an excellent fleet management tool. Consider:

Flexible Card Management

- ♦ Complete on-line control by manager
- ♦ Set spending and usage limits for each card by day, week or cycle
- ♦ Restrict purchases to specific locations or hours
- ♦ Limit purchase to fuel only
- ♦ Real-time transaction information available 24 hours/7 days a week

More Charge Freedom

- ♦ BP credit card is accepted at more than 10,000 BP locations (U.S.) and anywhere MasterCard® cards are accepted for fuel and maintenance

Security and Reporting

- ♦ Can set prompts to require vehicle or driver number for validation
- ♦ Can set prompts to require odometer reading to track mileage for MPG Report

Simplified Billing

- ♦ Receive on-line invoices free—paper statements available for a fee

Membership Fee

- ♦ \$10 monthly membership fee waived if purchases exceed 4,000 gallons

For more information, call 800/348-7959 and be sure to mention code number 830

Business Management

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