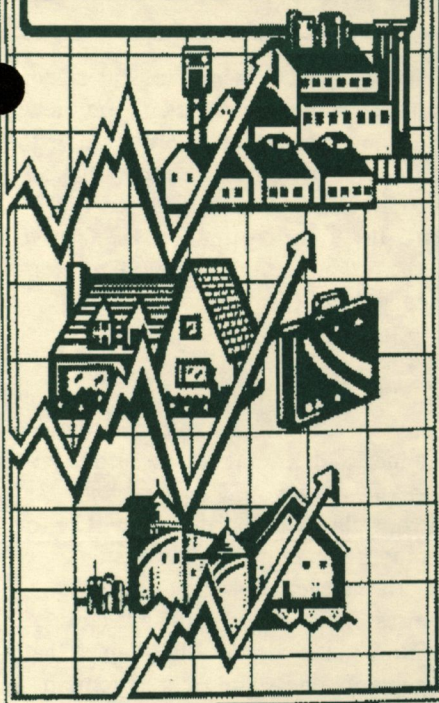


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BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Turfgrass Producers International

TPI Pre-Midwinter Conference Seminar

Train, Retain and Motivate Your Employees

Your employees are the lifeblood of your company. How to manage these precious resources is the topic of the pre-conference seminar being held in conjunction with the 1998 TPI Midwinter Conference at the Westin, Maui.

Your Conference and Convention Committee, under the leadership of conference chairman Ben Copeland, has put together this *interactive* session with your business in mind. Recognizing both the value of your employees to your company, and the tight supply of qualified workers in many areas, seminar presenter Mike Jackson will cover relevant topics from finding the right people to developing, retaining and motivating them.

This is the third installment in a series of seminars presented by Mr. Jackson for TPI, each covering a new and relevant topic. The past two sessions led by Mr. Jackson have been very well received by the TPI members in attendance and have led to this "encore" performance. As was the case in prior seminars, a significant amount of research is being

conducted by Mr. Jackson and his staff at Agri Business Group in order to provide true-to-life case studies and examples which are applicable to the turfgrass sod production industry in general and your company in particular.

Seminar attendees can expect to cover the following areas in depth:

* Finding the right people.

What is the right number of people?

* Developing Employees.

Individual performance planning.

Coaching for success.

* Retaining employees.

Do you have enough productivity?

Creating equitable pay systems.

Motivation through your actions.

Adding value / creating opportunities.

You'll learn about each of these topic areas - and more - using small-group discussions, case studies and problem solving that enable you to take what you've learned and *use it* once you get home. Your 1998 TPI Pre-Conference Seminar will be held February 11th. Don't miss this terrific opportunity!

Keeping 'em on the farm

Retain Employees Thru Job Diversity

Once you hire a good employee, how do you keep them?

According to Cornell University Turfgrass Team member Thomas R. Maloney, a Senior Extension Associate, writing in the latest issue of "Cornell University Turfgrass Times," expanding on mundane, repetitive and simplistic work can help overcome monotony, boredom and turnover. He suggests including new assignments along with basic routine work or rotating jobs so an individual is not doing the same job every day.

On a turfgrass sod farm, this might harvest crew from driving to stacking, or include rotating responsibilities of a it

could mean encouraging a stacker to mow fields for part of a day.

In addition to offering diversity and job enrichment for the individual, this will also provide the farm with more cross-trained individuals who could assume new responsibilities when another worker is unavailable.

While it has to be understood that not all employees want or would welcome new responsibilities, your more valued personnel probably will and the results would be positive for them and the farm. For more examples and ideas on how to train, retain and motivate your employees, attend TPI's 1998 Pre-Midwinter Conference Seminar on February 11.

Marketing Tip

By Art Campbell, Campbell Sod
Rossville, Kansas

Making the Sale

To "make sales," you need create the **Opportunity** for yourself to develop customers. This begins by **1. identifying your market** by analyzing the type(s) of potential customers (ie. wholesalers, retailers, builders, etc.), and **2. reaching these potential customers** through your marketing efforts.

Keep an open mind when identifying your market. Think both in terms of traditional customers (landscapers, etc.) and in terms of nontraditional customers (polo fields, zoos, cemeteries...let your mind wander). Once you have a list of potential customers, you need to decide how to reach them.

Use direct mail, radio, television, networking, word-of-mouth (referrals), and telephone directories as opportunities to reach your identified 'market'. These are but a few of the ways you can use to market your products. Each is a

good method in its own way, and they can be used in conjunction with others. It is important to set aside a portion of your sales revenue for sales/marketing activities. Your marketing efforts help to create, explore and ultimately exploit your sales opportunities.

Once you have the opportunity to make a sale, three steps should be followed. First, **listen to the customer**. By being a good listener, you can better understand the customer's primary concerns. Find out their needs, wants, desires and budget restrictions. By understanding the intended use for your products, you will then have the opportunity to explain the benefits of your product in light of the customer's need(s).

Second, be ready to **fill the customer's need and/or solve the customer's problem(s)**. Sales should be directed to the customer's needs, and not toward educating the customer. Most customers are not interested in the production

of turfgrass sod, or what previous customers have accomplished - they want their needs met and problems solved. Give the customer enough information to make a decision, but not so much as to confuse them. Invite the customer to the farm to see the product in production to ensure acceptability (this may be particularly important for large jobs).

Finally, don't forget to **ask the customer to buy**. After you have informed the customer of their options, be sure to let them know that you want their business. All your plans and hard work will be for nothing if you don't ask the customer to buy. In the event that your customer requires more time to make a final decision, make sure to follow-up so that your attentiveness and interest remain evident in the customer's mind.

Remember...**create your sales opportunities; listen to the customer; fill the customer's need / solve the customer's problems; and ask the customer to buy**

The Secrets of Faster Payments...from slow payers

While most companies put enormous resources into marketing and selling their products - too many of them treat credit and collection efforts as an afterthought. However, most businesses can dramatically improve collections with minimal investment.

Start by implementing policies that prevent your salesmen or order-takers from doing business with noncredit-worthy customers or delinquent accounts. You can do this by having a system in place to check the creditworthiness of prospective customers and that orders aren't shipped to accounts that are over their credit limit or that have past-due balances. Controls should be in place to flag such orders and give them special review/handling.

Vital Steps: Billing and Training
Improve billing. No company can improve cash flow or customer relations if it bills inconsistently or inaccurately. Billing should be done

the day a shipment goes out, or no later than one day after shipment, without errors. In addition, genuinely confusing bills are the excuse given for many bills being set aside for further investigation. A simple redesign of billing forms can solve this problem.

Train collection people. It's a big mistake to use inexperienced part-time clerks to make collection calls. Using a trained collector will make a difference.

Collection Guidelines

Don't feel guilty or sound tentative. Remember, the other party ordered and received goods for which the company is entitled to pay.

Ask for a decision maker. Often your call will be answered by a payables clerk who has no decision-making authority.

Let the customer respond. After saying that there is an open balance on the account, be quiet. This forces the customer to make some response and puts the burden on them to suggest a way to settle the matter.

Have details of the bill at hand. The worst thing that can happen to a collector is to be put on the defensive. Never give customers a chance to say they don't know what you're talking about. Prepare to be very specific about the whole transaction.

Ask for specific payment dates and amounts. Never hang-up without asking what the amount of the payment will be and when the check will be mailed. Make a note of both.

Plan for follow-up calls. It doesn't hurt to call back on the date the check was supposed to be sent to make sure it is indeed going out. If it doesn't come, another follow-up call is in order.

Use call sheets to document all collection activity. These can be powerful tools when customers fail to keep previous promises. By referring to *past* collection efforts, you make it clear that decision-maker's previous promises have been recorded and their credibility documented. The sheets help determine credit worthiness on future sales as well.

Taking Care of Business: What Do You Call What You Do?

By Mike McDermott, Grass Pad
Warehouse, Olathe, Kansas

Names and trademarks are part of our everyday media culture. Through television, radio and newspapers we are constantly reminded of the importance of names and titles. In the everyday market place, generic "no-name" brands run a poor second to their well-named cousins. We eat *Whoppers* and *Big-Macs*...not hamburgers. We don't not drink cola...we drink *Coke* or *Pepsi*. Likewise, with other commonly consumed items, such as beer, cigarettes, automobiles and tennis shoes, all have recognized trade names.

The importance of names and titles in advertising is more than a media gimmick - it reflects how human beings use language and titles in everyday life. Who we say we are, we become. What we call what we sell, it becomes. The names we choose convey immediate impressions.

Offering our product for sale and calling it "grass" is like trying to sell a racehorse named "Betsy." Even a sod farmer can think of a better name for a racehorse: "Lightning," "Streak," "Blue Thunder." OK. Now try to think of a name for your "grass." What is it you want to convey about the product you sell - quality, consistency, reliability, durability, color,

elegance, ease of use? Whatever it is, call it by its name. Name it "Quality Turf," "Consistent Turf," "Reliable Turf," "Durable Turf." You choose.

Within the sod business, the use of names and titles has been slow to catch on. Many consider it pretentious, putting-on-airs, or worse. The dilemma is that using a common name sets a low standard of expectation for you, your staff and your customer. If you sell "Elite Tournament Turf" instead of "grass," it creates a higher level of expectation on the part of your customer. It also sets a higher standard for both you and your employees.

Once you develop a name, it is important that you use it for more than a sales tool. If the only place the new name is used is in the sales brochure, then don't waste your time. It needs to be used in the shop, on the phone and in the field. Only then will it have an impact on how you or your staff think about what you do and what you sell. If you are just a "farmer" selling "grass," then you have lots of competition. If you are a turfgrass specialist selling "Elite Tournament Turf" you are the only one in the book.

Business Briefs

Personnel...

> **Build a pool of "permanent" temps.** Today, many skilled people want to work part-time - such as women who want to spend more time with their children without giving up their careers...seniors who don't want to retire completely. *Opportunity:* Build up a list of "permanent" temporary workers who gain knowledge of the business through repeat assignments. They'll be much more effective than temps who have to learn from scratch for every job.

> **Put praise on paper.** Written words carry more weight than spoken words. When giving positive feedback to an employee, don't just say "Good job"... Put it in writing.

> **Problem Solving.** When a company suffers a quality problem with a product or service, customers often are lost. That's usually not due to the problem itself - but due to the company's failure to respond adequately to it. *Opportunity:* A strong and speedy response to customers who experience a problem can strengthen their loyalty to the business. *Reason:* Customers know they can experience problems anywhere and would rather deal with firms that show they care about fixing problems quickly. *Key:* Admit a problem quickly, really listen to customers' opinions about fixing it and act on them promptly. A satisfied customer is an excellent 'advertisement' for your company. Their word-of-mouth referrals can have a big impact future business.

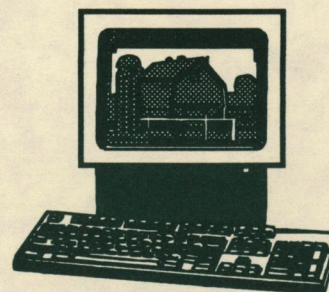
Shrewder Computing

Problem: As software publishers add new features to their word-processing programs, spreadsheets, databases and other business programs, many products are becoming overly complex and difficult to master.

Solutions:

* **Look for mature products.** Software products that start out badly flawed or mediocre often are improved significantly over time. With newly released programs, you're betting that the publisher got it right the first time.

* **Get recommendations.** Regular users of a particular program are usually glad to speak frankly about their positive & negative experiences with the product.



* **Evaluate the publisher.** Look for a firm that extensively tests its software with users from a wide variety of fields.

* **Don't let yourself be dazzled.** Avoid programs with eye-catching, cutting edge features. Problems typically arise when a program that was originally designed to address a single, focused task has been upgraded to do multiple chores.

* **Never buy a program that can't be returned.** If you're not happy, you should be able to send it back for a refund or credit.

* **Provide employees with adequate training.** All programs present new users with a learning curve which can be shortened using books, videos or classes.

TPI Action

TPI's membership reached a new record...846...to start the 1997-98 membership year, even after dropping 120 members for non-renewal. The previous record of 844 was set in September, 1994. Personal phone calls to non-renewing members by TPI Representatives and Board Trustees indicated that nearly half of the 120 dropped members plan to renew later in the year. *To strengthen TPI and help educate fellow producers, current TPI members are encouraged to recruit all non-TPI members in their area. Contact TPI to obtain membership applications.*

TurfgrassSod.org, TPI's world wide website, should be "launched" by the time members receive this newsletter. Designed to serve both members and consumers, the site will be routinely revised, updated and expanded. *TPI welcomes all member comments and suggestions on how the page can be more effective.*

Plan to put in your "2-Cents Worth," to support research specific to the turfgrass sod industry. A request for contributions...roughly calculated at two-cents per pallet of harvested turfgrass sod...will be printed in the November/December issue of "Turf News" magazine, as well as direct mail requests. Last year, TPI members contributed over \$40,000 through this campaign. The *International Turf Producers Foundation (ITPF)*, responsible for administering the funds, determined that up to 25% of all funds raised in this campaign can support current-year research, with the remaining 75% going to create an endowment that will grow every year and support future research projects. Contributions are tax deductible.

You can recommend TPI Board candidates by contacting Nominating Committee Chairman Wayne Thorson (402/624-6385). This committee will be selecting Class A (producer) members to be candidates at the 1998 annual business meeting for the offices of vice president, secretary-treasurer and two three-year trustee positions. Current members are encouraged to volunteer themselves or to recommend members they believe would be strong TPI Board members.

TPI Committees meeting in Hawaii will welcome all members. A schedule of planned meetings is printed in the Midwinter Conference promotional brochure and will be expanded and updated in future issues of "Turf News." Many of the committees will meet Tuesday, February 10, a day before the official opening of the conference. Other committees will meet February 11 and 12.

Jest For The Fun Of It

It Pays to Remember

When Henry Ford purchased a very large life insurance policy for himself, the fact was spread in bold headlines across the Detroit newspapers. One of the articles was read by an old friend of Mr. Ford's who was in the life insurance business.

Hurt that Ford had not bought the insurance from *him*, his friend called on Ford to ask why. Ford's reply was: "You never asked me." Don't forget to ask!

Business Buzzwords

Customer - someone who is always right, until safely out of earshot

File Cabinet - four-drawer, manually operated trash-compactor

Loss Leader - product sold below cost in order to hook customers into buying other, overpriced items

Management - the art of getting other people to do all the work

Productivity Increase - what management labors to raise, but what labor can't manage without a raise

Success - something that only comes before work in a dictionary

Telemarketing - dialing for dollars

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

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