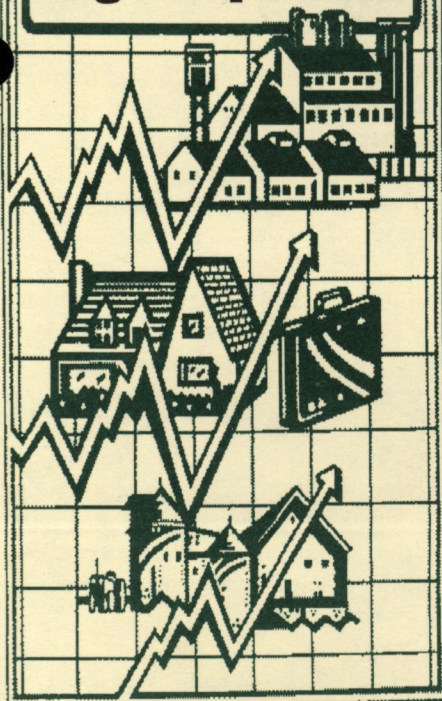


Aug / Sept 1998



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BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Turfgrass Producers International

Hill Day Proves Effective

'Guest Worker Reform' Passes Senate

A workable guestworker program for agriculture recently passed the U.S. Senate by a 68 to 31 vote, thanks to the direct involvement of many TPI members. The issue will now move to the House. The Senate vote took place just days after TPI members lobbied the issue during the organization's first-ever "Hill Day."

As part of their activities while on Capitol Hill, some 35 TPI members told their Senators and Representatives that shortages of legal agriculture workers were a severe problem across the country and that the present H-2A temporary visa program was unworkable.

Within just days after making personal visits on the Hill, TPI members also called or faxed the Senate offices to seek a favorable vote on the issue when it came to the floor for consideration.

For the past several years, TPI has teamed-up with the National Council of Agricultural Employers (NCAE) to create a guestworker program that will help to assure the availability of a legal seasonal ag. work force. Supporting this position was a recent report by the General Office of Accounting documenting at that least 40% of the current ag work force is living and working in the U.S. illegally.

It is almost certain that because of its effectiveness, TPI members will again be called upon for assistance when the House begins its consideration of this legislation. While the House agenda is very full, it is hoped that they will be able to consider this important issue before adjourning.

Members Address Multiple Issues

While in Washington, D.C. for the 1998 TPI Summer Convention, the Hill Day participants also brought attention to other important issues as varied as sod production being defined as an agricultural activity, wetlands on turf farms and the loss of important chemicals as a result of the Worker Protection Standards and the Food Quality Protection Act now being implemented by the Environmental Protection Agency.

In addition to receiving a thorough background on the industry issues, Hill Day participants were given leave-behind fact sheet folders for each appointment they would have during the day. Prior to leaving for their appointments, the group held a special lunch in the Senate side of the Capitol building, where they were addressed by Senators Frist and Cochran as well as several senior staff members.

**This is the last newsletter
you will receive,
unless you have renewed your
TPI Membership by August 31.**

**If you uncertain whether or not your
membership was renewed, please call TPI
at 800/405-8873 or 847/705-9898.**

Business Lessons Borrowed from the Experts

Bridging the Gender Gap: What Managers Need to Know

Men and women work differently, and smart managers need to understand these differences in order to make sure they treat each group fairly. Sally Helgesen, author of *The Female Advantage: Women Ways of Leadership*, explains some of the nuances that managers should consider:

- * Women work at a steady pace, and build in small breaks throughout the day. Men are more likely to work nonstop, at a frantic pace, with no breaks.
- * Women workers tend to see themselves at the "center" of things; whereas men often view themselves at the "top."
- * Women place a high priority on relationships in the workplace-with their subordinates, peers, and bosses. Because of that, they are much more likely to make themselves available to peers and subordinates than male workers.
- * Women try harder to make time for family and home life. It's often a high priority for them. Men often view the home as a "branch office," and are more likely to let work take precedence over family and outside activities.

* Women are more comfortable sharing information; men tend to collect it, and often hoard it.

-Adapted from *The Business Woman's Advantage*

Use these Simple Techniques to Save Time on the Telephone

The telephone is obviously a great business tool. However, you have to control it - not the other way around. Once you become a slave to your phone, it can actually steal away a lot more hours than it saves. Here are some simple phone tips you can put to use immediately:



1. Set time limits on each call. As soon as the callers identify themselves and their purpose, jot down a time limit on a piece of paper where you can see it. Otherwise, you run the risk of spending too much time with unimportant calls.
2. Leave specific voice mail messages. If you simply ask for callbacks, you will later have to explain to people your

reason for the original call, wait for them to analyze the situation, hold on while they make up their minds, and so on. By leaving a specific message, callers can think about things on their own, and call you with an answer.

3. Stand up when you answer the phone. And keep standing while you talk. You'll ~~spend less time on the call~~ and sound more energetic.
 4. Call "talkers" at the end of the day. We all have those business associates who just love to talk on the phone. If you need to call these people, do so at the end of the day, when their apt to spend less time on the phone.
 5. Set up a signal system. When you give a signal to another person in your office, that person interrupts you to handle an important matter. This gives you a graceful way to end a seemingly endless conversation.
 6. Use the "hold" technique. If you're having trouble getting someone off the phone, imply that you're busy by asking them if it's okay to put them on hold. Do this once or twice and most people will get the message and let you go.
- Adapted from *Communication World*

Use the '5 Rs' to Keep Customers Happy

Dialogue is essential to maintaining good relationships with customers. To help you develop and maintain a good dialogue with your customers, remember the "5 Rs": recourse, recognition, responsiveness, respect and reinforcement:

* **Recourse:** Make sure it's easy for the people you deal with to contact you and get their problems solved. *Example:* If a customer is unhappy with the turfgrass sod or service they got from you, but have to wait weeks to get the issue resolved...that doesn't bode well for your future relationship or potential referrals. Make yourself available to your customers, and make it easy for them to deal with your company.

* **Recognition:** When customers make the monumental decision to give you their business, they want you to recognize that fact. *Example:* Some companies reward their most valued customers with a lunch with the owner. Surveys reveal that these customers valued the personal recognition that the lunch offers as much as they value other more expensive forms or recognition.

* **Responsiveness:** It's not enough to provide an 800 number and/or e-mail address. That's only the first step. True responsiveness means listening to the customer, putting what they say in the context of their needs and history, and making sure their problems are solved and their needs are addressed.

* **Respect:** Consumers today want companies to respect their time. They resent intrusive communications and overbearing companies. *Example:* An IBM focus group turned up one customer who said that although he already had IBM software and hardware, if he received even *one more* sales call from IBM he would change operating systems - no matter how much it cost. Deal with customers at *their* convenience, not yours.

* **Reinforcement:** Customers like to be reassured that they made the right buying decision. This type of reinforcement strengthens your relationship with the customer, and can generate repeat business and referrals for years after the original sale.

Taking Care of Business: Lower Prices Impact on Profits

Jack Meyers, Meyers Turf Farms
Stilwell, Kansas

Pricing and its relationship to profits is a constant dilemma for turfgrass sod producers. It is a double-edged sword.

Do you reduce prices in order to increase volume and hopefully, profits... or do you raise the price and maintain acceptable volume to provide increased profits?

My preference is to increase the price and offer a discount for early payment. This benefits "good customers" who pay promptly. It also benefits my company in

terms of increasing our cash flow and reducing the costs associated with billing and collections. The higher price paid by slower-paying customers helps defray billing and collection costs and adds profit to the bottom line.

Lowering prices can effect the whole market by forcing others to compete based on price, regardless of costs. By keeping prices up, taking care of business with a quality product and good service and maintaining control of your operating costs...your profits will grow.

Human Resource Idea Files

Unscheduled absences can destroy productivity and cost your company hundreds of dollars per employee each year. While some last-minute emergencies and other absences can't be helped, there are certain things you *can* do to motivate employees to keep unscheduled absences to a bare minimum:

1. Customize your attendance incentive plans. Different things will motivate different employees. Some might like extra time off; others may want restaurant certificates. Find out what kind of incentives will work for each employee and develop personal, customized incentive plans.

2. Be as creative as possible. You don't have to spend a lot of money to inspire employees to avoid unscheduled absences. Fill their car's gas tank for a month, award a special parking spot or relieve them from an unpleasant task for a period of time.

Hold 'promotion parties'

When you promote an employee, use the occasion to inspire and motivate all your workers. Close up shop for two hours, order pizzas or sandwiches, and throw a 'promotion party' to honor the employee.

Give a short speech about the qualities and achievements that led to the promotion. This recognizes the employee who is being promoted, and gives other employees a mark to shoot for.

3. Inspire loyalty among coworkers. Employees are less likely to have unscheduled absences if they feel they are letting the team down when they don't show up.

4. Put peer pressure on employees. Post a chart with unscheduled absences. Nobody wants to be publicly criticized.

5. Set up short term goals. Award employees for a perfect month - instead of a perfect season. This way, the goal remains in sight and they won't lose interest.

6. Make sure employees stay home when necessary. Employees who come to work when sick can wipe out an entire crew. Similarly, injured employees can aggravate their injuries by coming into work too soon. In your incentive plan, it is best to accommodate excused absences, rather than creating problems through good intentions.

Introduce support staff to customers

Consider bringing your 'order-taker' or other support staff on sales calls. The support staff will get a better feel for customers, and will appreciate the fact that you value them enough to introduce them to important clients.

Your customers will enjoy the chance to put a face with the voice they hear when they call. This should also make for a more relaxed sales call for everyone.

Shrewder Computing

* Virus Protection.

If you have access to the Internet or exchange storage disks with others, you need to be prepared to deal with computer viruses. Tens of thousands of viruses are now in circulation, and about 1,000 viruses are discovered each month.

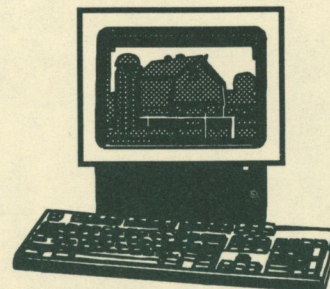
* What To Do?

Purchase - and continually update - software to detect viruses.

Typical cost: \$30 to \$70 for an effective antivirus program, plus a modest fee for periodic updates.

Examples...

- * IBM Antivirus.
- * McAfee Virusscan.
- * Norton Antivirus
- * Quarterdeck ViruSweep.



*** U.S. Members...Did you know** that tax deductions for the cost of correcting computer programs to eliminate the Year 2000 Bug (*June/July Business Newsletter*) can be taken either entirely in the year they are incurred or amortized over three years?

Where To Go For Help?

Computer-related assistance may be closer than you think...

1. Colleges and even high schools in your area may be able to refer you to students with significant knowledge of computer systems and software.

2. Many TPI members have real-world computer experience which may be just what you need. After all, sharing information is what TPI is all about!

TPI Action

Landscape ordinances, turf farm environmental practices and erosion control specification samples are all needed by TPI committees so they can begin to develop an industry-friendly set of documents that cover these important areas. With the Board's encouragement, several TPI committee are working on these new publications; however, they all need additional input to ensure that the results will be practical and usable. Ultimately, these publications will help TPI members increase sales and ensure that their farms are being managed in an environmentally responsible manner. If you have any of these materials or suggestions as to where they can be obtained, please send them to the TPI office at 1855-A Hicks Road, Rolling Meadows, IL 60008.

"2-Cents Worth" Annual Fundraising Campaign will be kicked-off in the September/October issue of "Turf News" magazine. The simple, yet fair and effective approach asks all TPI members to make a contribution to the Foundation in an amount equal to 2-cents for each pallet or big-roll of turfgrass sod sold during the year. The contribution is tax deductible and all proceeds go to support industry-specific research or toward the creation of an endowment.

Does a 2003 Midwinter Conference in England sound interesting to you? If so, please contact a TPI Board member or the TPI office so that potential interest and participation can be gauged. If you are opposed to England as a meeting site, please contact TPI as well. This would be the first time a TPI Conference is held outside of North America and while costs would be similar to the 1998 Hawaiian meeting, it seems that there is considerable interest in England as a destination. Please call today!

To Receive Additional Information On Any of These Items

Contact the TPI Office

Phone: 800/405-8873 or 847/705-9898

Fax: 847/705-8347 or E-mail to Turf-Grass@MSN.COM

Jest For The Fun Of It

More Famous Last Words...

There should be enough gas to get home.

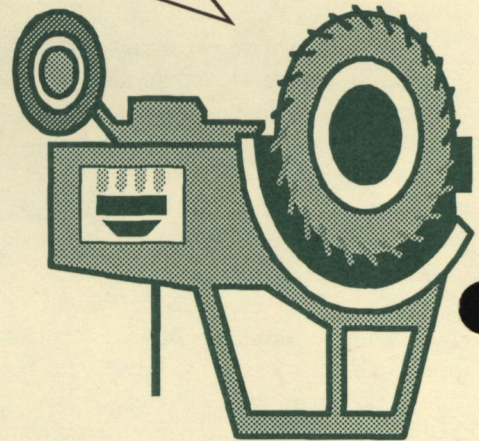
I can do this with my eyes closed.

I'll hold it. You light the fuse.

OK, this is the last time.

That's not a real gun.

"Dad...this is where you're supposed to ask if I'm alright"



BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Turfgrass Producers International
1855-A Hicks Road, Rolling Meadows, IL 60008

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