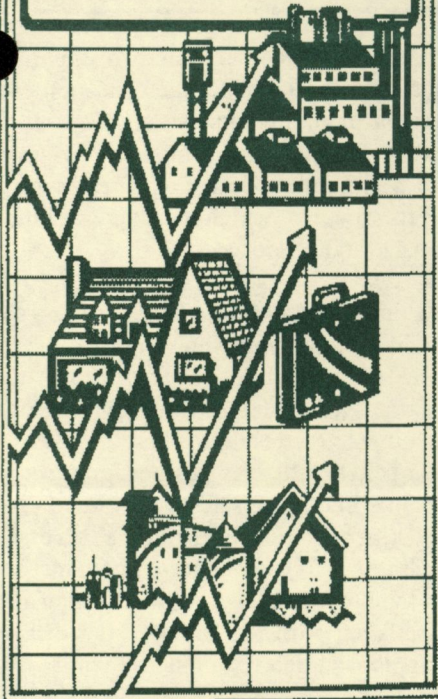


Dec / Jan 1998-99



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BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Turfgrass Producers International

Midwinter Conference Focus: Business Team Building

Interpersonal relationships are the core of virtually every business, and turfgrass sod production operations are no exception. The strength and productivity of your relationships with your customers, suppliers and employees or co-workers can determine whether you succeed or merely survive. This vital element of the turfgrass sod farm organizational structure is the focus of TPI's intensive 3-day Midwinter Conference, Feb. 3-5, 1999.

Conference attendees will explore the tangible and intangible benefits of building and strengthening business relationships. Likewise, the consequences of ignoring or undermining business relationships will be examined. Using a team-building approach and real-world examples, conference presenters and panel members will prepare attendees to put team-building ideas into action!

Strong business relationships can help you capitalize on "bull market" conditions and see your company through the inevitable "bear market" circumstances. TPI's 1999 Business Team Building Seminar is the latest in a series of pre-midwinter conference programs designed with your turfgrass sod business, and your bottom-line in mind.

The following excerpts are from past pre-conference seminar attendees:

- '93 - Estate Planning Seminar
"saved 20-30% in inheritance taxes"
- '94 - Target Marketing Seminar
"dropped 9 customers and picked up 4 customers...sales doubled while expenses dropped \$1,000.00"
- '95 - Farm Market Seminar
"reduced labor costs by \$14,800.00"
- '96 - Finance Seminar
"tighter cost figure reduces red ink"

Don't miss this year's Seminar!

Building Motivation & Goodwill A Win - Win Situation

Companies that encourage and support their employees' involvement in community work accomplish two goals:

- 1) They motivate employees, who appreciate the company's efforts; and
- 2) They improve the firm's reputation in the community. Here are some ways companies use charitable donations to motivate employees and build a good reputation:

- * Make a donation to the community organization that an employee has been actively involved in for one year. If an employee sits on the board of a non profit, the donation may increase.
- * Sponsor a Charity-day. Employees work a Saturday at their favorite charitable organization. In addition to the volunteer's time, the charity receives from the employer the volunteer's 'paycheck' for his/her donated time.
- * Match employees' charitable donations, in total, or by a stated percentage.
- * Recognize and reward employee contributions to the community.

Each of these ideas builds goodwill for your company and helps motivate your staff all at the same time!

Do Bigger Houses on Smaller Lots Mean More Turf Sales?

In the U.S., lots are getting smaller, but houses are getting larger, according to the National Association of Home Builders. This may equate to higher percentages of turfgrass sod sales, as the per-house area being sodded will require fewer dollars.

The latest issue of NAHB's "Housing Economics" reports the following median trends (shown in square feet):

	1995	1996	1997
House Size	1,920	1,950	1,987
Lot Size	9,375	9,100	9,000
Area Remaining	7,455	7,155	7,025

Marketing Tip

David Slater, Slater Turf Farm
Tryon, North Carolina

Educate Your Customers.

Educated customers are important to the turfgrass sod industry.

Sod farm customers are using a perishable, living product which is scheduled to be transplanted into a potentially harsh, stress-filled environment. It is easy to presume that our customers already know all there is to know about how to handle our product. We get busy with our day-to-day activities of farming, taking orders, fixing equipment, taking orders, solving problems and taking still more orders (hopefully.) We may forget to ask ourselves "Do our customers really know how to handle what they have received?"

There are several ways to educate your customers. Here are a few examples:

* Send them a newsletter with reprinted articles, notes from the grower and select information about your farm and product.

* Take opportunities to give presentations about turfgrass sod. Local garden clubs, professional organizations, schools or civic clubs may be very interested in having you give a presentation about transplanting and/or maintaining turfgrass sod.

* Send out a postcard with a turfgrass tip to make customers aware of special turf topics and remind them of your farm.

Whatever medium you use to educate your customers, remember to keep the message relevant. You can explain the importance of correct soil preparation, finish grading, watering and follow-up checks. You may discuss the difference among the grass types, and which varieties are preferred for specific uses. Use research-based information from your Land-Grant University (or other area research facility) and make clear to your customers that your information is founded on University research (or other non-biased data.)

Educating customers has two important benefits. On one hand, the education process places your company name in front of present and potential customers. You are also positioning yourself as a resource for turf information, which may increase future contact (and future sales.)

On the other hand, whether a turfgrass sod purchaser buys from you or your competition, and educated buyer will use the turfgrass sod correctly which will help to ensure positive results. These positive results benefit all turfgrass sod growers by encouraging future sales from those familiar with, or seeing the results of a successful sodding job. The uneducated customer using the product incorrectly will not only be dissatisfied with the supplier, but display turfgrass sod poorly to other potential customers.

Remember...educating your customers builds recognition, ensures satisfaction and encourages future sales.

Taking Care of Business: Use Your Government, You're Paying For It

Mike Ward, Eastgate Sod
Loveland, Ohio

As I sat down to write this brief article, I really struggled with the topic. I have attempted to run my business and my life with as little 'help' from the government as possible...and I suppose many of you have done the same.

The catch is that while most of us who want little to do with the government are quietly doing our own work, other constituencies are busy getting the government to do their bidding (sometimes to the detriment of our industry.)

In July, 34 TPI members met with their elected officials in Washington, D.C. and presented their views on several key issues likely to come before the U.S. House and Senate. Some Congressional staffers didn't even know what a turf producer was! This was our 15-20 minute chance to "tell our story."

In these times of great political and economic change, we must reach out to our elected officials (they work for us)

and tell them what we need and desire from them. If we don't...they will only hear the other-side of the story!

*Last night
I dreamed I was a
wigwam, and the night
before, I dreamed
I was a teepee.*

*You're
two
tents!*



Super Resource

Small Business Development
Center (SBDC) Program:

Pamphlet listing phone numbers of SBDCs that offer advice to anyone interested in expanding a small business who cannot afford consulting services. Contact the Small Business Administration, SBA Answer Desk, 800/827-5722.

Who's at Fault?

Before criticizing an employee, ask yourself the following questions to determine if you helped create the present (unsatisfactory) situation:

Were my instructions ambiguous, overly complex or misleading? Did I give appropriate instructions and feedback? Have I allowed the employee sufficient time (without undue interruption) to complete his/her assignment? Your performance and that of your employees can benefit from this self-examination.

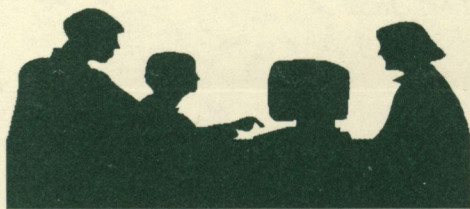
Building a Positive Organizational Culture

The rules of the game have changed! Being better, faster, and cheaper is no longer good enough to give you an advantage over your competitors. That's the message that Wolfe J. Rinke - management consultant and author of "Winning Management: 6 Fail-Safe Strategies for Building High-Performance Organizations" - tries to get across to managers.

According to Rinke, the one thing that can give your company that "elusive, sustainable competitive advantage" is your corporate culture - which Rinke defines as, "What people will do when no one tells them what to do."

"Your competitors can duplicate everything you do," says Rinke. "Your technology, your pricing structure, your quality, your volume - but they can't duplicate your culture!"

As proof, Rinke offers the example of Southwest Airlines. "Virtually all of their competitors have tried to duplicate their success in the form of 'shuttles,'" explains Rinke. "After all, there is not much magic to not feeding your customers, providing virtually no service, flying only short hauls, charging low fares, and so on. Yet no one has been able to replicate Herb Kelleher's success.



Not even one U.S. airline has been able to achieve the 'triple crown' of airlines-on-time arrival, fewest bags lost, and highest customer satisfaction. Yet Southwest Airlines has been able to achieve it five years in a row. Why? Because of the organizational culture of fun and personal responsibility that Herb continues to nurture since the day he started the airline."

Of course, Southwest Airlines isn't the only example. Rinke also points to the Marriott Corporation. Since the company

was founded 70 years ago, it has achieved success and staying power by building a positive organizational culture. And how did the company build this culture? "By putting people first," says Rinke.

"Lots of companies give lip service to that, but at Marriott they do it! Because Bill Marriott, Sr. and Bill, Jr., the current Chairman of the Board of Marriott International - have always operated in accordance with this axiom: 'If we take care of our employees, they will take care of our customers.'"

Rinke tells managers that if they want to build a positive culture at their company, they have to make the following commitment to their employees and coworkers, and then live by that commitment:

I hereby commit myself and my team members to:

1. Give my credit away.
2. Listen more and talk less.
3. Create desire instead of fear.
4. Keep my eye on the long term.
5. Treat every employee like a volunteer.
6. Speak from the heart, not the head.
7. Tell team members more than what they want to know.
8. Focus more on customer service and less on the bottom line.
9. Invest in team members so they can become the best they can be.
10. Share our mission, vision, and core values at least six times every day.
11. Trust customers and team members until they prove me wrong.
12. Build on people's strengths, and accept their weaknesses.
13. Manage by appreciation instead of by exception.
14. Push decision making down to the lowest level.
15. Catch others doing things right.
16. Lead more and manage less.
17. Publicly admit my mistakes.
18. Ask more and assign less.
19. Make work fun!

"Remember," says Rinke, "85 percent of your success comes from your people. So what are you waiting for? Start building a positive organizational culture today!" Visit Wolf Rinke's Web site at:

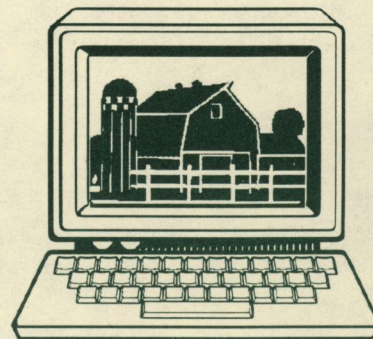
<http://www.wolfrinke.com>

Shrewder Computing

Cyber Service:

Put "links" on your company Web site that connect it with other Web sites of use to your customers. But carefully select the links you choose. Example: Link to the Web sites of garden center, building materials or other retailers that agree to provide links on their site back to your company.

Also, have a link go not to another business's home page, but to the specific page that is most relevant to your customers.



If you do not want to "lose" a visitor who follows a link to another site, have the link open another browser window (Internet Explorer as an example) to show the other company's Web page while your Web page remains on the screen.

Free Information Resources:

Manual and computer products for small businesses available from: NEBS, Inc., 500 Main Street, Groton, Massachusetts 01471. Phone: 800/225-6380.

Index of Internet sites relevant to industrial and labor relations... government reports...and articles: Cornell University's School of Industrial Relations and Human Resource Executive Magazine. www.workindex.com

TPI Action

Despite Impressive TPI Member Efforts, Congress Drops Temporary Ag Worker Program (under threat of veto from President Clinton), so the battle for H2-A reform, and a reasonable source for necessary workers will have to continue.

Write or call your federal officials (*immediately after the election*)

If they supported the effort -- thank them and encourage their continued support;

If they did not support the effort -- let them know how disappointed you are and ask them to reconsider their position when this matter comes up again;

If they are newly elected -- seek their support and encourage them to become familiar with the legislation and to talk to their colleagues who supported this issue.

Addresses

The Honorable (full name)
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515
e-mail: <http://www.house.gov>

The Honorable (full name)
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510
e-mail: <http://www.senate.gov>

TPI has a listing of all Senators who voted for the AgJOBS bill, as well as a list of the House members who cosponsored the proposals or expressed supports for its inclusion in the Appropriations bill. Please call for information on your elected officials, if you are not already aware of their position(s).

Good U.S. Tax News...

Health Care Deductions For The Self-Employed Will Be Accelerated, thanks to small business advocates (including TPI). Originally scheduled to reach 100% deductibility by 2007, the new law raises the deduction to 60% for 1999, 70% for 2002 and 100% in 2003.

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

My boyfriend and I were using some soil from a newly dug flower bed to cover a bare spot in his lawn. Admiring our work, I said, "This sure beats sowing, mulching and watering!"

"Yeah," he agreed.

"Instant grassification."

Darla K. Morgan

One day a frog went to the bank to take out a loan. He went to the loan desk and said "I want to take out a personal loan." The woman at the desk, whose name on the name plate was "Patricia E. Wack", asked "Do you have any collateral?" The frog thought about it and then reached into his pocket and pulled out a crystal figurine. "Will this do?" asked the frog. Miss Wack, seeing the figurine, indicated that she would have to ask the bank manager for his approval for the frog's loan.

She led the frog into the manager's office and asked him "Sir, this frog wants to take out a loan, but all he has for collateral is a crystal figurine. Can we give him a loan?" The bank manager looked carefully at the figurine, then looked at the woman and said vehemently "It's a knick-knack, Patty Wack, give the frog a loan!"

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

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