

Management: More Than Turf



Human Resource Update

Why we think a turf organization has high employee turnover:

- good employees are not available
- employees do not like horticultural work
- people just do not work like they used to
- turf cannot compete with other businesses



The turf season is slowly coming to an end. Leaves are beginning to cover the grass. Does this mean the turf manager can look forward to having nothing to do?

The answer, of course, is **no**. Why? Because the turf manager is a manager of more than grass, a golf course, a landscape, a park, or an athletic field. To help you, the turf manager, function better as a manager, we will look more closely at management, and we will analyze problem identification and diagnosis, important tools for the manager.

Management is the Success Key

Management is the key to the successful operation of any organization. In turf-oriented facilities we have viewed management as a generic term describing essentially anything dealing with successful operation of an organization involved with turf and have failed to give the term definition and rigor. The result is that management has become an almost mystical term that we apply to turf organizations with high productivity and/or profitability. To provide more rigor, management is defined as: *Determining what must be done and achieving results through the efforts of oneself and other people. Management is planning, organizing, staffing, directing, and controlling the business resources toward the accomplishment of established objectives and goals.*

Note that management is defined in terms of people. Management deals with people, including oneself, who then work with turf, fertilization, etc. This can be illustrated by an example of analyzing why a turf organization has high employee turnover. The usual answers — good employees are not available, employees do not like horticultural work, people just do not work like they used to, turf cannot compete with other businesses — are technical and external to the turf organization. If one continues to ask “why”, answers relating to management are detected:

- No one plans employee tasks so the employees are unproductive and/or unmotivated.
- No one is monitoring how employees are performing and feeling.
- It is unclear who the employees supervisor is.
- The skills of the individuals hired is not appropriate for the job they are performing.
- The manager is not providing leadership.

These management answers are people oriented and are more amenable to a long lasting solution.

A management definition of a problem always involves one of the five functions listed in the definition. The management solutions delineated above involve planning, controlling, organizing, staffing, and directing respectively. These functions can serve as a job description for the turf manager.

Plant Growth Regulators

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mefludide applications resulted in very poor turfgrass quality by the end of the first year and were not used in 1996.

In 1996, a cooler and wetter year, trinexapac-ethyl reduced clipping production similar to the first year but with no reduction in water use. In fact, more water was used by the creeping bentgrass sites treated with trinexapac-ethyl. Thus, at times when plant water use is high, we would expect trinexapac-ethyl to reduce the need for irrigation, while at times of low irrigation need, no water saving would be realized.

One of the primary reasons plants take up and transpire water is to keep the turfgrass plants cool during high temperatures. If a plant uses less water, then the plants may be under more stress (as a higher temperature in the plant canopy would indicate). We measured canopy tempera-

tures in 1995 and found no difference in canopy temperatures between plots treated with trinexapac-ethyl and the untreated control plots indicating no stress. We believe this is a result of the fact that trinexapac-ethyl reduced the shoot growth rate while transpiring less water thus having no effect on the level of stress (temperature related). Or in other words the trinexapac-ethyl treated turf maintained a transpiration rate necessary to keep itself cool.

These results suggest that the PGR trinexapac-ethyl can be used to reduce the mowing cost on the greatest high maintenance turfed area on golf courses (fairways) while also cutting down on the need for irrigation on the largest irrigated part of a golf course, while apparently not putting the turf under stress.

Problem Identification and Diagnosis — Determining Root Causes

Of the many planning activities performed by turf managers, problem-solving is potentially one of the most challenging and fun. Problem solving begins with problem identification or by asking "What is the problem?" The current situation is evaluated in comparison to the objectives and goals of the golf course, landscape business, park, or athletic field. In comparing objectives and goals to the current situation, three types of opportunity areas can be evidenced. Those opportunity areas arise from three types of unsatisfied objective and goal situations: unmet, conflicting or unset.

After having identified a problem, one frequently jumps to generating alternative solutions to solve the problem. This tendency skips the essential step of problem diagnosis, or asking "What are the causes of the problem?" If the step of problem diagnosis is skipped, one is much more likely to solve a "symptom" of a deeper problem rather than the "real" problem.

If problem diagnosis were to be summed up in one word, the word would be "why." In answering why has the problem occurred, one will be finding causes for the occurrence of the

problem. Often it is necessary to ask "why?" repeatedly in order to get an answer which is causal rather than symptomatic.

The initial answers to "why" are usually technical answers. Going beyond the technical causes for a problem is necessary in order to identify causes which the manager can deal with. Identifying management causes is referred to as "asking the management why." Management causes involve one of the five management functions discussed above and involve people.

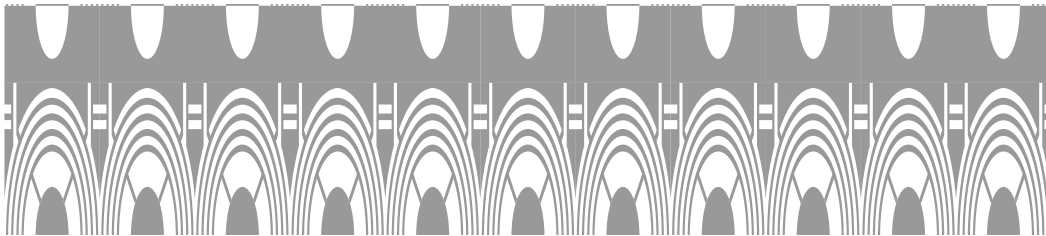
Often multiple technical causes will converge on one management problem. Equipment breakdowns, undersized equipment, and poor mower maintenance might all converge on the management problem of no one having been assigned responsibility for the equipment (organizing).

Having diagnosed root management causes, you are far more likely to be focusing on the real problem rather than spending time on symptoms of the real problem. I suggest that you carve out some management time during the coming months to carefully analyze your turf business including identifying and diagnosing problems that have arisen during this turf season.

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Why, really, a turf organization has high employee turnover:

- ***no one plans employee tasks, so the employees are unproductive and unmotivated***
- ***no one monitors how employees are performing and feeling***
- ***it is unclear who the employee's supervisor is***
- ***the skills of the individuals hired is not appropriate for the job they do***
- ***the manager is not providing leadership***



Cornell Turfgrass Short Course

"The Tradition of Excellence Continues"

The cornerstone of the Cornell Turfgrass Program's outreach efforts is the intensive two week experience known as the Cornell Turfgrass Short Course. Over the last 12 years the course has grown in quantity and quality of information presented and boasts over 800 alumni around the world.

This is a must-attend event for turfgrass managers new to the industry as well as for managers who have never had formal training. It serves as a comprehensive review of topics ranging from the basic scientific principles of grasses and soils, to the research behind turfgrass and

environmental management practices. Specific case study work is developed for golf turf, sports turf and lawn care managers integrating the concepts learned during the course with practical experience from industry leaders and students.

As a result of the overwhelming response to the January 12-23, 1998 course in Ithaca on the Cornell campus, a second two week session is being held on Long Island February 16-27. If you'd like more information on the Short Course, contact Kelly Woodhouse at (607) 255-3090.

Make plans now to attend Cornell's Turfgrass Short Courses in Ithaca January 12-23, 1998, or on Long Island February 16-27.

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