

# Thriving in a Time of Unprecedented Change

The internet, distance education, environmental stewardship, globalization, continuous improvement, pesticide-free. These are all topics we had not even heard of five or ten years ago that are now, or soon will be, a part of our everyday turf business life. Change is occurring at unprecedented rates. We must be prepared for that change both psychologically and organizationally. Let's begin by addressing how we view change. We often think about responding to change. "Responding" is a very reactive word. To be most successful in a time of great change, we must individually and organizationally be proactive. A more proactive view is portrayed by the title of this article: Thriving in a Time of Unprecedented Change. A proactive view better prepares us for the change and facilitates our viewing change as an opportunity rather than as a threat.

Individually and organizationally we must also focus on our resilience. Daryl Conner in his book, Managing at the Speed of Change: How Resilient Managers Succeed and Prosper Where Others Fail, suggests that we each have a rate of change with which we are comfortable. When the rate of change is greater than that rate, the rate of change exceeds our resilience. At that time our ability to reactively or proactively respond is diminished, as we become—at a minimum—uncomfortable, to—at a maximum—dysfunctional. In order to thrive in times of change we must increase our resilience to manage at the speed of change.

Resilience can be defined as the ability to bounce back from the consequences of change. Individuals who have great resilience have the following five characteristics:

1. They are positive: The positive person is optimistic and focuses on opportunities while recognizing the threats.

2. They are focused: The focused person has a clear vision of what he or she hopes to achieve and is striving toward that achievement.

3. They are flexible: In Everyone's a COACH, Ken Blanchard and Don Shula argue that great performers must overlearn their key tasks to be prepared for crisis situations and they must be audible reading, meaning they must be able to adjust to meet changing conditions even

in a crisis. The flexible person is always audible ready and is comfortable calling "audibles."

4. They are organized: The organized person sets priorities, has a plan, knows when to ask for help in defining a plan, and is working to implement the plan.

5. They are proactive: The proactive person is actively seeking change opportunities that can benefit himself or herself and the business.

As you plan for your less busy season, I suggest you think about ways to increase your personal and organizational capacity to thrive in a time of unprecedented change. Perhaps you should invest time in reading or taking workshops in personal improvement skills like time management, interpersonal skills, or conflict resolution. Perhaps you should redouble your efforts to keep current on technical developments in turf. Perhaps you should take a more creative and longer range view as you interact with other leaders in your organization to plan for next year and beyond.

## References and Suggested Readings

- Blanchard, Kenneth H. and Don Shula. 1995. Everyone's A COACH, Harper Business, NY.
- Blanchard, Kenneth H. and Sheldon M. Bowles. 1993. Raving Fans: A Revolutionary Approach to Customer Service, William Morrow and Company, Inc., NY.
- Blanchard, Kenneth H. and S. Johnson. 1983. The One Minute Manager, Berkley Books, NY.
- Conner, Daryl. 1992. Managing at the Speed of Change: How Resilient Managers Succeed and Prosper Where Others Fail, Villard Books, NY.
- Covey, Steven. R. 1989. The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, Simon & Schuster, NY.
- Fisher, Roger and William Ury. 1983. Getting to YES: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In, Penguin Books.
- Senge, Peter, Art Kleiner, Charlotte Roberts, Richard Ross, George Roth, and Bryan Smith. The Dance of Change: The Challenges to Sustaining Momentum in Learning Organizations, 1999, Doubleday/Currency, NY.

ROBERT A. MILLIGAN  
CORNELL UNIVERSITY TURFGRASS TEAM



## Human Resource Update

*Individuals who have great resilience have the following five characteristics:*

- They are positive.
- They are focused.
- They are flexible.
- They are organized.
- They are proactive.

7