

THE FRONT OFFICE

OPINION PAGE

A TERRIFYING MANAGEMENT EXPERIENCE



Recently I had one of the most terrifying experiences of my life. It wasn't one of those highway shootings that Los Angeles has become famous for, nor was it anything threatening to my family. Oddly enough, physical violence had nothing to do with it. It was more along the lines of mental torture.

After spending two long days in a management training seminar, the instructor gave 15 of us ten minutes to agree on a solution to a simple business problem. For the past two days, the instructor had drilled leadership, confidence, communicating and goal-setting into us at a

furious pace. By this time, we were tired, but we were pretty cocky too. We were ready to take on our crews with the power of Patton (the general). Nobody was going to mess with our heads!

The final project was to find a solution to a relatively simple business problem. We split up into groups of five and burned the midnight oil preparing our presentations for the last morning. Our egos were on the line. We didn't turn in that night until all five of us agreed we had the best all-round solution.

Bright and early the next morning each group presented its solution before everyone. Then, we waited to see which was the best, the brightest and the most gifted group of managers.

What came next surprised everyone. The instructor simply said, "I'm setting the alarm for ten minutes. When the bell goes off, I want unanimous agreement to one solution. Begin now."

At first, things seemed orderly. Each group sent its leader to negotiate with the other leaders. Meanwhile, little arguments started breaking out between members of different groups. It wasn't long before people were screaming at each other. Chaos had definitely set in. When the three group leaders were ready to present their compromise to the whole group, they couldn't get everyone's attention for all the screaming.

The bell rang before order was restored. The room became silent. Everyone felt like a jerk. To make it worse, the whole thing had been videotaped and we had to watch ourselves tear each other apart again. Talk about humility.

Trying to get a group to agree on a single solution to anything is hard. When that group is a school board, park board or city council, it gets even harder. As I drove home that afternoon it occurred to me that this was a big part of the problem to the poor state of our public school athletic fields. The solutions exist, but they aren't being implemented because they must survive board review. In other words, those who know the solutions do not have the power to implement them.

School boards don't need every detail of a sports turf maintenance program. They should stop at setting the goal of durable, safe fields and hand the details over to their qualified manager. That can be an experienced turf manager, a sports turf contractor or a maintenance management company. It is not the director of physical plant, the athletic director, or the football coach. Once the school board comes to this realization, quality football fields are just around the corner.

If you don't believe me, read the story starting on page 14. The schools that have great fields, despite tremendous use, are those that put the job of field maintenance in the hands of qualified sports turf managers.

The alternative, which can be terrifying, is to let the board battle over details. School boards have been battling and compromising for years while fields have gone progressively down hill. It's time to turn the job over to the person who can meet the goals of the board most effectively—the sports turf manager.

Bruce Shank

EVENTS

CALENDAR

AUGUST

26 University of Rhode Island Turf Field Day, Turf Research Farm, Kingston, RI. Contact: C.R. Skogley, URI, Plant Sciences Dept., Woodward Hall, Kingston, RI 02881, (401) 792-2570.

SEPTEMBER

10-11 Alabama Turf Conference, Auburn Conference Center/Best Western, Auburn, AL. Contact: Alabama Turfgrass Association, P.O. Box 70, Auburn, AL 36831. (205) 887-6916.

10 Ohio Turfgrass and Ornamental Horticulture Research Field Day, Columbus, OH. Contact: Karl Danneberger, Dept. of Agronomy, Ohio State University, Room 202, 2021 Coffey Rd., Columbus, OH 43210-1086, (614) 292-2001.

15-17 42nd Annual Institute of Groundsmanship, Royal Windsor Racecourse, England. Contact: Institute of Groundsmanship, The Agora, Wolverton, Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire, MK12 5LG, England, (908) 311856.

16-17 Southeastern Sports Turf Institute, Daytona Speedway, Daytona Beach, FL. Contact: STMA, 400 N. Mountain Ave., Suite 301, Upland, CA 91786, (714) 981-9199.

18-22 National Congress for Recreation & Parks, New Orleans, LA. Contact: Susan McCarthy, National Recreation and Park Association, 3101 Park Center Drive, Alexandria, VA 22302, (703) 820-4940.

22-23 Virginia Tech Turfgrass Research Field Days, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA. Contact: J. R. Hall, (703) 961-5797.

24-26 Pan Pacific Turf Conference, Hawaiian Regent Hotel-Waikiki, Honolulu, HI. Contact: Wayne K. Ogasawara, Hawaiian Fertilizer Sales, Inc., 94-155 C. Leowaena St., Waipahu, HI 96797, (808) 677-8779.