

EVENTS

CALENDAR

SEPTEMBER

13-15 Virginia Turf Field Days, Virginia Tech Turf Research Center, Blacksburg, VA. Contact: J. R. Hall, professor of turfgrass management, College of Agriculture, Virginia Polytechnic Institute, (703) 961-5797.

14-16 The Trade Show - Atlantic City, sponsored by the New Jersey Association of Nurserymen, Inc., Atlantic City Convention Center. Contact: S. Howard Davis, NJAN, 65 S. Main St., Bldg. 1, Ste. 3, Pennington, NJ 08534, (609) 737-0890.

OCTOBER

4 24th Annual Turfgrass Equipment, Irrigation and Supplies Field Day, sponsored by the GCSA of New Jersey, Rutgers Stadium and Golf Course, River Road, Piscataway, NJ. Contact: Dr. Henry Indyk, (201) 932-9453.

9-12 Florida Turfgrass Annual Conference and Show, Curtis Hixon Convention Center, Tampa, FL. Contact: Florida Turfgrass Assoc. Inc., 302 S. Graham Ave., Orlando, FL, (407) 898-6721.

NOVEMBER

8-11 Oklahoma Turfgrass Conference, Tulsa Convention Center, Tulsa, OK. Contact: Dr. Michael Kenna, Dept. of Horticulture and Landscape Architecture, 360 Agricultural Hall, Stillwater, OK 74078, (405) 624-5414.

13-15 Southern Turfgrass Conference and Show, Montgomery Civic Center, Montgomery, AL. Contact: Dr. Jeff Krans, (601) 325-2311.

THE FRONT OFFICE

OPINION PAGE

SECOND GUESSING IS DANGEROUS



Recently I was surprised to hear that three capable sports turf managers lost their jobs. Two are stadium groundskeepers and one is a golf course superintendent. In each case management made the change after calling in consultants to solve problems that they felt the sports turf manager couldn't handle. Management simply lost confidence in the people they had hired after talking with consultants.

In my opinion, these individuals got caught in the middle of a debate that they could have avoided. They aren't alone either. There were a few other close calls during the past year when groundskeepers

and superintendents had to defend themselves against the comments of consultants. It can happen to just about anyone in our business.

The reason I bring this up is not to condemn consultants—they do what they are paid to do. The consultants involved are highly experienced and highly regarded. They were hired by management to give their opinions and they did as they were asked. But there were definite flaws in the way their suggestions were presented to and received by both management and the sports turf manager.

First of all, rank has its privileges. The manager of a golf course, stadium, university campus or park has the authority to call in a consultant anytime he wants a second opinion about a problem. His job is to delegate authority AND to check that this authority is properly used.

It is the sports turf manager's job to respect this authority and report back to his superior about progress and problems. If he is stumped by a tough problem, and he has already sought advice from other sports turf managers, extension agents, and distributor tech reps, he should tell his boss he needs help. In other words, the sports turf manager should initiate the request for a second opinion.

The trouble starts when someone complains about turf conditions directly to management. The best sports turf managers stay in close contact with coaches, players, their greens committee and other influential people so that they can handle problems without involving the facility manager. That's the way it's supposed to work. The facility manager isn't supposed to handle turf and landscape problems on a day-to-day basis, the sports turf manager is.

When a turf consultant is brought in, he should make an effort to learn the turf manager's side of the story before he makes any recommendations to the facility manager. More importantly, the sports turf manager should be open to suggestions and show his willingness to cooperate. If he won't listen to the consultant, the the facility manager is forced to decide who is right on his own. This is when things enter the danger zone and "second guessing" begins.

If the sports turf manager is cooperative, the consultant and the stadium manager should involve him (or her) in most discussions. In fact, the best situation would be to hire a consultant to work directly with the turf manager, not the facility manager.

Facility managers who insist on going around their turf manager when they have serious problems may never solve them. The best sports turf managers will not work for facility managers who do not respect their knowledge and ability. And they also know which consultants are on their side and which are always on management's side.

Studies have shown that most people fail because they lack "people skills," not because they lack technical skill. The facility manager, the sports turf manager and the consultant must work together, communicate with each other and respect each other's position. They can't function autonomously by second guessing each other.

At the present time it seems that when things get down to second guessing, it's the sports turf manager who loses out. Therefore it is mainly to his advantage to be cooperative when a consultant steps onto his fields or golf course. Once it gets to second guessing, there's nothing but trouble.

Bruce F. Shank