

Three ideas for running the best operation

BY MEL LANFORD

The new millennium has uncovered a new consciousness toward athletic fields and their maintenance, with groundskeepers at the center of this evolution. Over the past decade, the "maintenance men" of athletic fields have grown into athletic field managers who ensure the quality of the athletic field and accept all responsibility for the safety and professional look of the facility.

Professional athletic field managers have taken on the responsibility of spearheading these operations and providing safe and playable athletic facilities. We have also come to understand that we are liable for all incidents and damages that occur on our fields. The issue of liability is frightening in our judicial system where anyone can sue anyone for anything anytime.

There are three main concepts that athletic field managers should incorporate in running their operations: educating decision-makers; communicating and implementing ideas; and, smart recordkeeping.

#1 Educating decision-makers

To evolve into this new responsibility as athletic field managers, we must work efficiently to educate the people who approve the field projects and financial budgets of athletic facilities. It is vital that athletic field managers inform executives about what it takes to provide a superior and safe playing surface and also the consequences of failing to reach such standards. In too many cases, athletic facilities are not using the valued products, equipment, and efforts to create reliable fields that can withstand the "wear and tear" of numerous contests.

In the reverse role, athletic field managers need to be open-minded and allow the executives to teach them the business aspects of running an athletic facility. This two-way communication constructs a strong management where all sides of the party understand and respect each other's decisions. In many cases, athletic field managers will better understand the financial situation of the facility and work to conserve resources and increase productivity. Together, athletic field managers and executives can incorporate a communication model that will benefit the playing field, players, and fans.

#2 Communicating and implementing ideas

Succeeding at educating the decision-makers builds great momentum in communication among all employees at your facility. Good communications will initiate the process of adding new budgets, products, and services to the facilities and make the process easier and more productive.

The next major strategy is to effectively communicate different ideas and needs concerning facility maintenance. Through this communication, we want to remember to offer our ideas as coming from an expert in the field of groundskeeping. Athletic field managers have a special passion for their work and we must display this in our strategies and ideas that we present to executives. When meeting with them, we need to express an involved and zealous attitude, which shows how much we care about our profession and our projects. This tactical communication is extremely persuasive and it allows us to promote a dedicated feeling to our leaders.



Remember that we chose this profession because we love the outdoors, the smell of freshly cut grass, and because we didn't want to sit around in an office all day. For the same reasons, the accountants chose their role in the cool setting of an office. Respect this and use this to your advantage while communicating.

#3 Smart recordkeeping

As you use persuasive and effective communication to implement your ideas, remember that you have put your reputation as a groundskeeping expert on the line. For this reason, it is vital to keep records of all applications and projects that occur on your fields.

With the evolution of athletic fields and the growing popularity of competitive sports, athletic field managers have seen their staffs grow exponentially and this causes a new system of delegation. By delegating duties, you are responsible for the work of others and this is the prominent reason why we should be keeping records of our projects.

Recordkeeping is also a key tactic because we deal with so many chemicals in our daily duties. To be in compliance with state and federal licensing, we must keep complete records on all chemicals used and stored on the job.

I have had instances where an outside contractor was hired to complete a specific project and did not fulfill his obligation. To alleviate this problem, I always have a camera on hand to record the progress of different projects. This keeps outside contractors honest and keeps me out of trouble. The dated photographs from a camera can easily show the history of a project and provide a concrete argument for your staff and yourself.

With these three concepts in mind, you can work better to advance our industry into the realm that it deserves.



Mel Lanford, the creator and host of the Ace of Diamonds Tour, here at Frontier Field, Rochester, NY.

Mel Lanford, a 30-year veteran of the groundskeeping industry, is the creator and host of the Ace of Diamonds Tour, sponsored in part by Diamond Pro Professional Groundskeeping Products, a division of TXI. Mel travels across the United States year-round presenting hands-on seminars, demonstrating the proper infield and sports turf maintenance materials, equipment and techniques to athletic field managers. For information, see www.diamondpro.com or call 336-210-9722.