

Speaking of turf!

One of my men has been asked to speak at a local seminar on football field maintenance. He has never done anything like this before and neither have I for the matter. We work for the Parks Division for our city. Do you have any suggestions on the topic matter? Like a starting and ending point. I know you have spoke at many different events and I thought you might be able to steer us in the right direction. I was going to put a little presentation together for him. Do you have any literature that he could pass out? The City is putting on the conference and it is very low budget, so any help would be appreciated.

Central Florida

Your question caught me a little off-guard in that it was not a direct question about turf management. Putting a structured talk together, like many other tasks, is something of a learned process. Haphazardly throwing out information without some structure rarely ever works very well. Since you asked the question you realize that preparation is one of the keys to giving a good talk. A good topic and information-thirsty audience also helps. If you go to enough meetings you have probably realized that some talks are informative and some talks are not. Each person in the audience has his or her own experience and knowledge base. The listener filters out what they need and may discard the rest. I feel that fitting a talk to an audience, so that most or all get a benefit, is one of the hardest tasks when speaking to an industry group.

For example, each year I give a talk to college freshmen that are undecided in their major. In this talk, I tell them great things about working with turfgrass while showing them pretty pictures of athletic fields and golf courses. Usually no student in the room has any idea what turfgrass management is all about, so they are all pretty much at the same level of information. The talk is very visual and upbeat. I get great student reviews.

On the other hand, I spend 2 days each February talking to golf course superintendents of varying levels of experience about soil fertility and fertilizers. I cover soil physical and chemical properties to get them all up to speed before starting the fertilizer programming sections. For most this first section is dull, and for some it is such a review it is down right boring. I feel this review is necessary so that everyone can have the full benefit of the other information. I get some negative comments for the first part, but good comments for the second section. So the message is 1) choose a good topic, 2) match the information to the audience, and 3) cover what needs to be covered. All this takes some preparation.

The request you were given left the specifics of the subject up to you. Since "football field maintenance" is so dependent on proper construction, grass, soil type, environmental conditions, amount of play, pest control, and cultural practices, you could talk on about anything. You will have to determine the scope of your talk to find your starting point. You did not say how much time you have on the program, but in a 30-45 minute talk, you will be somewhat limited

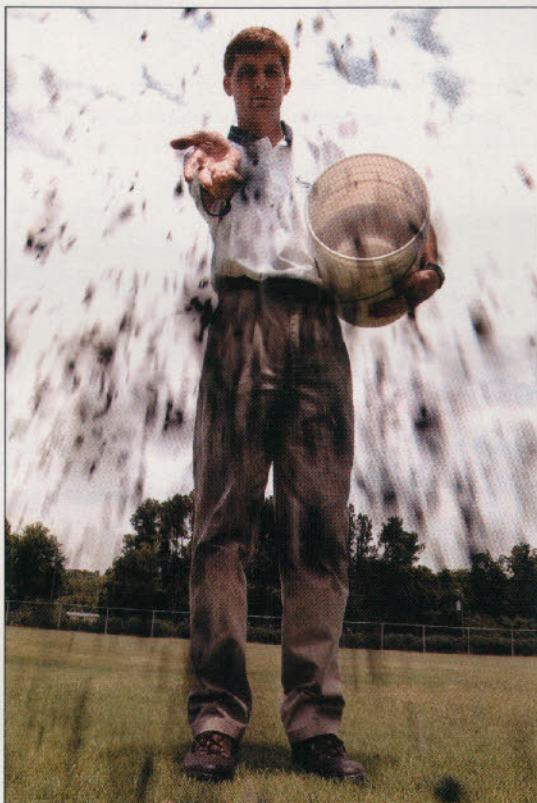
in what you can cover. Judging how much to put into a talk with a given time constraint is sometimes difficult to judge without a little practice.

Most people like to learn more about how to solve their problems or how to make their job easier. That is one reason why the pest control talks at state conferences are always full. So, in thinking about potential topics, you may want to consider some of your problems and how you have dealt with them. Of course you can get too specific for the audience if you are not careful. If you have identified a very specific point you want to address (e.g., control of annual grassy weeds on football fields), you may want to clear it with the person that asked you to speak to make sure it is what they expect.

If it is a group of people that are perhaps not well trained on athletic field management, then you may want to take a very general approach, leaving some time at the end to deal with more specific questions. You can speak from a handout or from some type of visual aid such as overhead transparencies, slides, computer-generated slides, or actual samples. Use whatever you are most comfortable with and what you have available. Taking pictures or slides during the year is a great way to document responses and are handy if you ever find yourself needing a few visual aids. Today it is easy to take digital pictures and store them in your computer or on CD for later use.

Many people will tell you that providing a handout is a vital part of preparing a talk. Most Land Grant Universities have a general handouts related to athletic field management. Most extension service publications can be provided for the meeting with some advance arrangement with your local county extension service or you may be able to personally download them from a website for photocopying before the meeting. At the University of Florida we have a general athletic field management publication available at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/lh065>. Publications such as these are organized in a logical and deliberate order. You can use the layout and information from these publications to organize your talk or to draw on ideas that you can further develop from other sources or your own experiences.

My final advice is to give examples and relate your own personal experiences when possible. This is probably why you were asked to give the talk—your knowledge is valuable to the group. If actual pictures (slides) are available they are helpful to illustrate points and can leave a more lasting impression. People always seem to like "helpful hints" when giving technical talks.



Have Questions?

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