

Enhance your career during show season

BY MIKE ANDRESEN, CSFM

As the state, regional, and national trade conference season picks up steam this month it is important for us to realize they offer a great opportunity to progress our professionalism and skills. Conferences are a perfect time to renew old friendships and introduce yourself to new industry friends. Networking is very important and very rewarding. Of all the “green” industries, ours may maximize the networking as well or better than any other.

Whether your budget allows you to attend one or many trade show conferences, there are things you can do to not only justify your attendance to administration but to also help you maximize the opportunity. I contend that we too often fail to come prepared to receive the maximum benefit from our conference and exposition experience and we too often fail to report back to our administration the importance of our attendance. Writing up a small summary of how each conference will benefit your operation is vital in securing the next opportunity and positively reflects on you as a professional, ultimately making you a more valuable employee.

In the weeks before attending a conference I look at the schedule of speakers and topics closely to determine my “must see” sessions. I keep in mind the short-term issues of field and facility management that I’m directly responsible for and highlight those talks that will address immediate concerns. Each of us also has an idea of our administration’s long range goals and plans. Sessions that may help me become a more valuable asset when planning for the future are also circled as “must see.”

I have a responsibility to upgrade my value to my employer when presented that opportunity and conferences offer this chance. Come to these sessions with an idea of how they can benefit you and have an idea of key questions or issues you’d like expert guidance on. Being prepared to soak in the presentation, actively pull expertise from it, and adapting it to your real world future helps us be engaged into the presentation and collectively allows the presenter to connect with the audience and put his or her best effort on display.

Trade shows and expositions are something that we certainly overlook and under-use! In this era of electronic shopping and information gathering it is easy for attendees to forego this important opportunity. Commercial representatives are experts on their products and services. An initial discovery from an online search can help you develop questions about a product but talking face-to-face with a company representative will give you the chance to touch, sit on, or feel a piece of equipment that interests you. Many times I’ve come to a trade show booth with an entirely incorrect perception of the “how and why” of a product or service. Oftentimes we don’t have an immediate need for the represented product or service but can predict a future need at our facility. When the time comes to act on the future purchase or contract you will already have a basic understanding of the need or issues and hopefully you will have developed a relationship with a trusted industry professional that can help guide you through the upcoming process.

We also have an obligation to our employer to take full advantage of new technology, new services, and cutting edge ways of thinking about our jobs. Vendors are one of our greatest resources. They travel the region and the country, sometimes the world, observing successful and unsuccessful operations. Their success depends on our success as sports turf and facility managers.

I know that too many of us see commercial representatives and sales professionals



Courtesy of Brian Donaway, Florida State University

as adversaries. The fact is because of their travels, expertise, and experience we can learn a great deal about being a better turfgrass professional from them. Vendors, as well, have a great opportunity at trade shows to help add to the conference education experience and develop longtime and valuable relationships. Seldom has a trade show “hard sell” been rewarded with a written up sales ticket from me!

My interest in the trade show is to experience the existing and cutting edge technology available to me as a sports turf manager, and to maximize the chance to develop solid professional relationships with those with the same interests. The relationship between commercial representatives and sports turf management professionals is symbiotic. Each vendor feels their product can be beneficial in our quest to produce safe and aesthetically pleasing playing fields and facilities. Without properly examining each of the products and services we cannot be sure we are doing all we can to ensure the same. Just as we incur a financial expense to attend conferences and upgrade our expertise, commercial representatives also incur costs in support of that same upgrade in our expertise. Supporting those that support us by purchasing their goods and services ensures that our entire profession remains healthy and full of committed professionals.

I encourage you to evaluate your next conference packet and realize that there are potential teammates within both the academic and the exposition sides of the profession. My administrators feel the time and expense to attend conferences is worthwhile in my professional development as well as the development of our program. It’s important that I acknowledge that importance by way of a short summary of its significance upon my return from each conference. We do need all the teammates we can gather throughout our journey of sports turf management and I encourage each of us to prepare for this conference and exposition season to maximize our opportunities to grow and become the best professional we can be. To our friends on both sides of the table I wish you a productive and safe conference season. **ST**

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