

Sports turf-specific classes online

By Steven Jay Porus

Sports turf managers are seeking ways to get more accomplished in ever-tightening schedules. The Internet now allows professionals to tap into more information and greater knowledge with ease.

"You are almost certainly going to see more change in the next quarter century than in the last 100 years. We have to be prepared, competing in that world, for constant learning all of our lives. We have to assume the workforce will change constantly," said former House Speaker Newt Gingrich at a recent discussion on workforce development. "And we have to have an understanding that much of that learning is going to be 24/7, it's going to be online."

Green Industry Education's OnlineClassroom allows turf managers everywhere to attend live or pre-recorded conference sessions via the Internet. The classroom is easy to use, but users are advised to test their PC by selecting "Demo our OnlineClassroom" at www.OnlineClassroom.org.

The classroom works well with the following browsers: Explorer for Mac and Windows, Safari for Mac, and Mozilla Firefox for Windows. Java plugin is required to view PowerPoint presentations and have the ability to forward questions to the speaker via chat. Quicktime must be installed on your PC. Make sure the Quicktime plugin is available for Internet Explorer. This is required to view streaming video. Free downloads for Java, and Quicktime are available via the "Demo our OnlineClassroom" page at www.OnlineClassroom.org.



Last October, LandsConference in Louisville offered a Sports Turf Track sponsored by the Sports Turf Managers Association. The three classrooms provided streaming audio/video of the speakers, their PowerPoint presentations, and a chat box that allowed attendees to ask questions of the speaker. Attendees were also able to login and logout for continuing education accreditation.

The sessions from LandsConference are now available 24/7 online at LandsExpo as pre-recorded. The chat box in the live broadcast is replaced with the speaker's email link in the pre-recorded Sessions. The Sports Turf Track at www.LandsExpo.com includes the following sessions:

Session LE02

Pesticides on Turfgrass
Jay Gan, Ph.D., University of California, Riverside
Bruce Kidd, Dow AgroSciences

Session LE06

Turfgrass Selection
Kent Kurtz, Ph.D., California State Polytechnic University, Pomona;
John Rector, Turf-Seed, Inc.

Session LE10

Evaluating and Amending Soil
Kent Kurtz, Ph.D., Cal-Poly Pomona; Dirk Muntean, Soil and Plant Laboratory, Inc.

Session LE13

Synthetic Infill vs. Natural Turf
A.J. Powell, Ph.D., University of Kentucky; Darren Gill, FieldTurf

Session LE22

(sponsored by STMA)
Managing Healthy Sports Fields
Tom Samples, Ph.D., University of Tennessee; Paul Sachs, North County Organics

Session LE23

(sponsored by STMA)
Efficient Irrigation Management for Sports Fields
Dave Minner, Ph.D., Iowa State University; Lynda Wightman, Hunter Industries

Session LE24

(sponsored by STMA)
Developing an Aerification Program Specific to Sports Fields
Trent Hale, Ph.D., Clemson University; Dale Getz, The Toro Company

For information visit www.GreenIndustryEducation.com. ■

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Got Weeds? Suppress with geotextiles, mulch

It's almost mind numbing to try and list all the landscape mulches and fabrics that can help control weeds.

When it comes to mulches, consider bark, sphagnum peat moss, muck peat, compost, pine needles, gravel, plastic, and even rubber. When it comes to landscape fabrics (also called geotextiles), there are TRM (turf reinforcement mats), BFM (bonded fiber matrices) in woven, non-woven and spun-bound needle-punched types. And, of course, there are polypropylene and solid polyethylene plastics (also known as "black plastic garbage bags.")

Before choosing what geotextile/mulch combination to use, evaluate the site. Certain combinations will not let anything grow up from the soil, while other combinations will allow turf and ornamentals to grow through. So pick and choose your combinations. For instance, a rock mulch above a landscape fabric can provide greater weed control than organic mulch above a landscape fabric.

And don't expect one product to control all weeds. It's been proven that fabric control annual weeds better than perennials, and that the best fabrics for suppressing weeds have the smallest-sized pores. Landscape fabrics that are thin, lightweight or have an open mesh allow greater weed penetration than more closely woven or non-woven fabrics.

In the rare case of particular weeds actually growing under or through the fabric and/or mulch, a herbicide application may be necessary.

Fabrics, plastics

Woven fabrics are much stronger and durable, while non-wovens have greater water-flow characteristics for use primarily where more water filtration is needed.

Woven needle-punched fabrics are a hybrid between woven and non-woven fabric. The needle punching increases water flow and makes the bottom side virtually opaque. The additional cap or layer of fuzz prevents sunlight from penetrating, thus preventing seed germination.



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PROFILE PRODUCTS

In any application where the fabric will function as a filter (under pavers, behind retaining walls, or drainage applications) or any application where it's buried under sub-soils and aggregate (for stabilization and to reduce road rutting), non-wovens should be used because of their high porosity rates.

In applications where weed control is an important factor, woven needle-punched or woven fabrics should be used because of their limited porosity and opaqueness. Black plastic (solid polyethylene) seems to be a simpler solution to unwanted weed growth, especially where it will be covered with an inorganic mulch and you don't want anything to grow. But plastic also restricts air and water movement, thereby keeping roots too wet, paving the way for root-rot diseases. Also, ants are attracted to soil that's protected from rain.

For these reasons, opt for landscape fabrics rather than plastics whenever possible. Their permeability allows the proper balance of air, water, and nutrients into the soil. Research shows that woven polypropylene (the heavier the better) is best for stopping weeds and promoting growth.

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Fabrics should not, however, be used in annual flowerbeds and bulb plantings, or in areas where they would inhibit the rooting and spread of groundcovers. They are used mainly for long-term weed control for woody ornamental trees and shrubs.

Mulches

Don't expect mulches used alone to suppress weeds. The technique simply doesn't work. Mulches must be placed on top of a fabric or plastic sheet.

Besides protecting plants and preventing weeds, other side benefits of mulch are that it conserves soil moisture, stabilizes soil temperature, reduces heaving, and reduces soil erosion on slopes. When done properly, it also looks pretty good in residential and commercial landscapes, especially with some of the wood-mulch colorants available on the market today.

Spring is the best time to mulch, after the soil warms and begins to dry, but more mulch is often needed in the fall. The recommended mulching depth is 2 to 2.5 inches. A mulch that is put on too thick may result in waterlogged soil or wet tree bark, conditions that favor disease development. Heavy mulch can also be a place for rodents to nest, which can further damage plants.

The most popular organic mulching materials include sphagnum peat moss, muck peat, pine needles, shredded cones, straw, tree bark, wood chips, and waste wood.

Shredded recycled tire rubber is a possible inorganic mulching material. It's available in several colors for use in parks, schools, etc. Other inorganic mulches include paper fiber, stone, chips, pebbles and gravel, which are used as mulch for color and texture changes, particularly near public entrances to buildings, along sidewalks and in shopping areas.

Animal manures also make effective mulches, though they sometimes carry undesirable weed seeds. Composted grass clippings, leaf mold, and used mushroom composts are also used as mulch, along with composted municipal sludge and food-industry waste like cottonseed, buckwheat, peanut hulls, cocoa-bean, and other materials. ■

This article originally appeared in our sister publication, Landscape & Irrigation.

Top 5 interview mistakes

By Deborah Walker

We've all heard stories of job candidates who looked great on paper but who were absolute disasters in person. With fewer interview opportunities available in our competitive job market, it's essential to make the best possible first impression. Learn from the mistakes of others and avoid these top five worst interview blunders:

1. Not preparing for the tough interview questions.

Like every job seeker, you probably have your own set of tough interview questions you hope will never be asked. The best strategy is to prepare ahead of time with answers to ALL of these questions.

2. Failure to match communication styles.

Making a great first impression is easier to do when you communicate effectively with your interviewer. The best way to do this is by mirroring his or her communication style. Allowing your interviewer to set the tone of the conversation will put him or her at ease and makes the conversation flow more naturally.

For instance:

- If the interviewer seems all business, don't attempt to loosen him or her up with a joke or story. Be succinct and businesslike.
- If the interviewer is personable, try discussing his or her interests. Often personal items on display in the office can be a clue.
- If asked a direct question, answer directly. Then follow up by asking if more information is needed.

3. Talking too much.

In my recruiting days, I abhorred over-talkative candidates, and so did most of my client employers who interviewed these candidates. Over-talking takes several forms:

- Taking too long to answer direct questions. The impression: This candidate just can't get to the point.
- Nervous talkers. The impression: This candidate is covering up something or is outright lying.

To avoid either of these, practice answering questions in a direct manner. Using role-playing in preparing for your interview will help you avoid excessive, nervous talking.



LASERLEVELING

4. Saying negative things about your current or past employers or managers.

Even if your last boss was Attila the Hun, avoid stating your ill feelings about the person or work situation. No matter how reasonable your complaints, your negative comments will be viewed as disrespect toward your boss. When faced with the challenge of talking about former employers, make sure you are prepared with a positive spin on your experiences.

5. Giving away too much salary and earnings information.

Candidates often weaken their future earning potential by speaking too freely about their current income. No matter the official salary range of the position you are interviewing for, your current earnings have an enormous effect on the size of the offer.

You already know that it takes a strong resume that sets you apart as a candidate of choice to be invited for an interview. The next step is to hone your interviewing skills to actually win job offers. Polishing your interviewing skills can mean the difference between getting the job and being a runner-up. ■

Deborah Walker, CCMC, is a career coach and resume writer. She can be reached at Deb@AlphaAdvantage.com.

Editor's Note: This article originally appeared in the Sports Turf Managers Association's online newsletter.

Conduct background checks right

By Cindy Schroeter Graham

In this day and age it may be prudent to glean whatever information we can about a potential employee. Credit checks and background checks can provide a wealth of information, from how a person handles their finances to criminal records. How you obtain and use this information could determine whether you are complying with privacy policies and secure information handling.

The person conducting or reviewing a background check has access to information that could be devastating if it ended up in the wrong hands. If the information is lost, stolen or otherwise determined to be used for identity theft or fraud, it could result in fines up to \$2500, according to the FACT Act.

Here are some suggested guidelines to ensure the privacy of information obtained from or for employees and applicants:

- Designate who will have access to employee information. This applies to information gathered prior to and following background checks. Will a background check be conducted on all applicants? If not, make it a practice not to collect a social security number until you have determined whether the applicant qualifies for the position in all other aspects.
- Procedures for securing information. Once the information is obtained, implement safe handling procedures. Determine how long the information will be left unsecured and where the information will be kept secure. Information left unattended on a desk is unacceptable.
- Procedures for accessing the information. Determine who will have access to the information files.
- Procedures for destroying information. Information that is no longer needed should be properly destroyed, meaning shred it as soon as possible. Don't keep information in a box under someone's desk.

Background checks come in a variety of details as well as cost, from basic credit checks to full comprehensive searches. The duties of the employee and the type of information he/she will be handling may help determine what type of background check is sufficient.

Ask a few questions to start with. Why do you need a background check? What type of information are you looking for? Will the information determine whether or not the employee is hired? Will the information determine what job functions the employee will have? What details within a report will determine a positive or negative review?

Here is a non-comprehensive list of the information available through background checks that range from about \$10 to \$125.

- Criminal background check
- Credit Bureau reports
- Asset search
- Business records
- Marriage and divorce records
- Media searches
- Licenses
- State and federal court records
- Law suits
- Address and phone history
- Bankruptcy
- Liens
- Property values
- Aliases
- Roommates and relatives

As you can see, the information available can be very personal. It is vital that this information be kept as secure as possible. Unless you plan on running a check on every potential employee you should not collect personal information, such as a Social Security number, driver's license number or birth date, from every job applicant. Privacy policies should be implemented to safeguard any personal information on file, whether a new applicant or current employee.

Only after you have decided the employee meets all other qualifications should you ask for a Social Security number to run a background check.

If the employee will not be handling any sort of secure information or money, consider doing a basic background check to determine the reliability of the candidate. An address and phone history may be sufficient to determine whether the employee will stay

around or not. Don't base your decision solely on the contents of these reports. Unforeseen calamities can befall us all. Interview the candidate to further explain any questions or concerns you have. The candidate may have had problems in the past and has been working hard to correct them.

The trustworthiness of the employee should be considered if he/she will be handling private information. Reviewing background checks for criminal activity, moving from place to place or the inability to handle their own finances, could lead to temptations to misuse company funds or information.

Trustworthy employees and strict privacy policies and secure information handling procedures are necessary to help fight the battle against identity theft, fraud and misuse of information. ■

Cindy Schroeter Graham is an expert on identity theft prevention. For more information see www.whoelseisyou.com.

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