

A man wearing a red jacket, a red baseball cap, and khaki shorts is operating a walk-behind mower on a baseball field. The mower is black and red with a Husqvarna logo on the side. The background shows a green chain-link fence and a green wall.

7 Habits of Highly Defective Sports Turf Managers

By Jeffrey T. Fowler

Jeff Fowler, volunteer crew member at the Little League World Series, Williamsport, PA.

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ost of us have a good handle on what it takes to make our fields safer and more playable. We have gone to enough conferences and field days to learn techniques; we

read articles or talk to people that help us to manage our fields. Most of us admit that we still learn new information every time we go to a seminar or field day, but, most also admit that the biggest problem that we have is with our coworkers, our team, our staff, our whatever we call those that we see more often than we see our families.

Making our team function as one unit and having buy-in from all of the parties involved requires skills just like making our fields safe for play. I have seen countless work crews that don't have enough time in their day, enough help to get it all done, enough volunteers, enough money, enough equipment, enough of this or that. I have identified 7 habits that I have seen in sports turf managers that never have enough.

1. Time management. Personal time management skills are essential skills for effective people. People who use time management techniques routinely are the highest achievers in all walks of life, from business to sports to public service. If you use time well, you will be able to function exceptionally well, even under intense pressure.

Many people spend their days in a frenzy of activity but achieve very little because they're not concentrating their effort on the things that matter the most. The 80:20 Rule says that typically 80% of unfocussed effort generates only 20% of results, while the remaining 80% of results are achieved with only 20% of the effort. As you master these skills, you'll find that you take control of your workload, and say goodbye to the often intense stress of work overload.

2. Having a losing attitude. The second habit of defective sports turf managers is one that I often refer to as the Eeyore syndrome. You know the purple donkey character from Winnie-the-Pooh? "Thanks for noticing" is one of his favorite lines. He always just kind of slumps along through life and does what he has to do to get noticed. Many of us just look at the tasks that we have to accomplish and think there is no way we can do it all. Do you look forward to a new challenge? Is your glass half full, or half empty? I read a book about Steve Prefontaine, one of the greatest distance runners in American history and he

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was quoted as saying "How does a kid from Coos Bay, with one leg longer than the other win races? All my life people have been telling me, 'You're too small Pre,' 'You're not fast enough Pre,' 'Give up your foolish dream Steve.' But they forgot something. 'I HAVE TO WIN'." It wasn't his desire to win it was his need to win that made him great.

Tiger Woods said, "I don't go into any tournament thinking that it would be great to lose. I think it would be asinine to think that way." Tiger, in spite of his world rank, continues with golf lessons! Golf lessons and golf coaches are for people that play like me, not the number one ranked player in the world. I mean, think about it: how good does he need to be? Yet how many of us have that attitude about preparing our fields for the big game, or the weekend tournament. No, I mean really have the attitude that it takes to have people say "WOW" when they arrive at the field. How about lessons even when we are the best?

"Concentrate on results, not on being busy."

—James Manktelow, mindtools.com

3. Quit growing. What happens to our fields when they quit growing? They get beat down, they don't look their best, and they perform much poorer than a field that is growing. Well, sports turf managers are more like our grass than we would like to admit. When we stop growing the same thing happens to us; we perform worse than when we are actively growing. Not just growing around the middle or taller, but growing in our career.

There are entire sections in bookstores dedicated to personal growth. There are movies, audio books, podcasts, newsletters, magazines all related to growing a team, a career and even a sports field. I once heard (while listening to an audio book) "that having the ability to read and not using it is worse than being illiterate." Think about that one for a minute. When is the last time you picked up a book, or magazine, or listened to a CD, or a podcast that stretched your mind? One that really made you squirm in your seat. Set a goal to read or listen to "X" number of books, something that will make you grow in the next 12 months.

4. No "Game Plan". Speaking of setting goals, that is the fourth habit of highly defective sports turf managers—not having a game plan. Imagine

what would happen to the teams that use our fields if they didn't have a game plan? Do you think the New York Giants had a game plan when they went up against the undefeated New England Patriots in the Super Bowl? Or did they just get dressed in their uniforms and mosey out on to the field and start playing?

I had a boss in my early years with Penn State that would sit and look at my goals for the year and if she read one that wasn't up to par, she would look me in the eye and say, "So what, who cares?" I used to get so mad at her, because I had put a lot of time into my annual goals. She always followed with guidance and recommendations on making them better. Finally one year I found some things that helped me write my goals so I didn't have to hear her tell me how poor they were.

Here are the steps so your supervisor doesn't have to use that line on your goals. When setting goals think about the following: What do you want to accomplish? When do you want to do it? Write down your goals. Share them with others. Make them real and obtainable. Make them quantifiable. An acronym that will help make sure your goals are done well is SMART. Make your goals Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-Bound. Having a game plan will ensure that you and your team are moving in the same direction.

5. Unwilling to change. Habit five of the defective sports turf manager is one that is hard for everyone to overcome; you not only need to prepare for change, you need to spend some energy convincing/equipping those around you.

"The front end of an individual's resistance to change is how they perceive the change. The back end is how well they are equipped to deal with the change they expect. An individual's degree of resistance to change is determined by whether they perceive the change as good or bad, and how severe they expect the impact of the change to be on them." These words are from the book "The Biggest Mistakes in Managing Change" by Carol Kinsey Goman, Ph.D. Carol goes on and lists the 6 mistakes in managing change:

1. Not understanding the importance of people.
2. Not appreciating that people throughout the organization have different reactions to change.
3. Treating transformation as an event, rather than a mental, physical and emotional process.
4. Being less than candid.
5. Not appropriately "setting the stage" for change.
6. Believing that change-communication was what employees heard or read from headquarters. These six mistakes need to be avoided and managed as change takes place in our ever changing workplace.

6. Failing in relationships with others. You cannot just pay attention to grass and dirt and expect to be successful. It is also about the people around you. People today are inundated with information and messages to process.

They only select a small fraction of the information to pay attention to and respond. Make certain that the information and messages that you deliver to your team are in the processed, not forgotten.

Communications is a give and a take. There is a sender and a receiver. Each of these has descriptive words that are used to designate problems. Now, as you read these descriptive words you are going to have people's faces pop into your head. That is what is going to help you recognize the descriptive words used to explain the problem sender and receiver. The problem sender is too vague, a detailer, a rambler, a dictator, indifferent, overbearing, has a poor sense-of-timing, or a different context. See I told you that you would have a face attached to each of the problem senders!

The problem receiver might be unreasonable, a know-it-all, an arguer, is over-talkative, appears preoccupied, interrupts, or is confused. Make sure that in your communication with your team you are clear, concise, and understood by all. Make certain that you don't just ask for more money from your budget committee, but communicate the why you need it. Don't just tell your crew what to do, but communicate who, what, when, why and where.

Don't just assume that your field users know your desires for pre and post game field maintenance, communicate your desire for the fields, what it will do and how it will affect your abilities to provide a high quality playing surface. Don't assume that your supervisor knows what you need and do, com-

municate with them about challenges and desires. Don't fail at relationships with those around you.

7. Failure to train. The seventh and final habit of defective sports turf managers is our failure to train. We are quick to be critical of our field users, our volunteers, and coworkers. We complain about all the work WE have to do but never trust anyone else to do anything for us. I have seen volunteers ready, willing and able, but not used because they get yelled at for not doing it correctly. I have been on crews that stand around and watch others work because they have not been given clear expectations of their involvement. I have seen crew members fired for not performing, yet no one has taken the time to teach them what they need to know, or have been given substandard training. Make sure that you have provided the training needed to accomplish your team goals.

All of these items require you to think and plan. You will have to care enough to spend the energy to make it happen. The payoff is this: When you wake up in the morning, you will look forward to going to work. ■

Jeffrey Fowler is the Cooperative Extension Director at The Pennsylvania State University, a co-founder of GrassStains Productions, and a Board member of the Keystone Athletic Field Maintenance Organization (KAFMO).

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