



Top 10 Tips to Enhance Your Image

1. Be flexible and adaptable to workplace changes – even those that are uncomfortable.
2. Follow through on what you say you are going to do.
3. Deal with conflicts positively and with self-control.
4. Adopt a “no surprises” attitude in dealing with your employer and staff.
5. Hang your diploma, certification plaque and other honors in a visible place in your office.
6. Write articles for and give presentations to your chapter, your community and the industry.
7. Be ethical and honest in all that you do.
8. Dress for success.
9. Embrace a, “who else needs to know this” communication approach
10. Follow the golden rule: Treat others as you wish to be treated!

How have you prepared your workplace to see you?

IF YOU ARE LIKE MOST SPORTS TURF MANAGERS, you are focused on your fields, managing them so they are visually stunning, safe and playable. You train your staff and have confidence in them to accomplish their set objectives. You manage the budget, inventory, equipment, and much more. You interact with players, coaches, fans and other user groups. You believe that doing a good job is synonymous with how you should be judged.

And, you are right: doing a good job lays the groundwork for respect and recognition of your work.

Rich Watson, grounds supervisor for Pine Hills (NJ) Public Schools, believes the key to being perceived as a professional lies in exhibiting a strong work ethic. “Your employers need to be able to trust that you are going to be there, doing what you were hired to do. Delivering more than what they expect is also very effective in how they perceive you,” says Watson. He considers the effects of hard work to be a great motivator. “When you and your staff work together to make your fields look great, you can see the results of your hard work. It’s very gratifying and drives us to continue to work at the highest level of effort,” Watson stresses.

He has also worked for a private owner managing polo fields, putting greens and croquet courts. At both positions, he notes that staff has an impact on how turf managers are perceived. “My success is tied to those who work with me,” Watson says.

Triple A head groundskeeper Chris Ralston of the Sacramento River Cats echoes Watson’s philosophy of working hard. “Treat your job as a career, and your dedication to it shows through,” he says. “People will recognize that you are doing a good job, without you having to overly promote yourself.”

Ralston feels that interactions with crew members also affect perceptions of

your abilities. People will also judge you on how well you treat your employees,” he says.

Making visible improvements to the fields brought recognition to Parks maintenance director Patrick Jonas, CSFM, for St. Andrews Parks and Playgrounds in Charleston, SC. He planted ryegrass, a first for the fields under his care, 9e years ago when he joined St. Andrews. “The fields were in bad shape, and my first priority was to improve them. When people saw how the fields changed, they knew it was due to our work,” he says.

Manage yourself

Steve Wightman, QualComm stadium & turf manager in San Diego, acknowledges that working hard and good management of your field is important—and expected; however he emphasizes that perceptions are formed from day-to-day interactions. “You are rated, whether you realize it or not, when you interact with people in your private and professional lives,” Wightman says.

He believes that how you manage your own self significantly affects perceptions. “People notice if you are on time, follow through, and act with integrity,” he says.

This philosophy is supported by management guru Stephen Covey, who uses the term emotional bank account as a way to describe trust in a relationship. Acts of trust are like deposits in the account; damaging behaviors, such as failure to keep commitments, are withdrawals. Higher trust levels in the workplace between you and your employer leads to greater appreciation for the work that you do. Then, when problems occur, the higher the trust level the less likely that your job security will be affected.

Ralston also used a more formalized strategy to gain trust and awareness: he asked for feedback. He conducted a survey of stakeholders in his league: players,



People only see what they are prepared to see.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

coaches, managers, and general managers. “This survey provided a very important opportunity for our California League groundskeepers to find out how their work is viewed, and helped us to open lines of communication,” says Ralston.

In addition to conducting yourself as a professional, Wightman also believes that sports turf managers need to be the solution people. “When you bring workable solutions to a problem, even if it may not be the easiest solution for you, others begin to trust you and have confidence in your abilities,” he says. Professional success, according to Wightman, is also gained by participating in the industry. “It is very important to get involved in the industry and connect with this large network of professionals who can help you,” he says.

Effective communication impacts respect and recognition in the workplace. When Watson made a job change, verbal and written communication was critical to understanding expectations. “I wanted to make certain I was giving them what they wanted, so I checked in often with phone calls and e-mail,” he says.

Eric Fasbender, CSFM, sports turf manager for Louisiana State University cites communication as the key to facilitate change, and throughout his career he has been using a coaching style of communication. “We look at what needs to change for us to be successful,” he says, “and then do what’s needed to make that happen.”

He believes that if you create the right culture and provide the right training, the results will be seen on the field. “Growing grass is the easy part; it just needs food, water and light to grow. The hard part is in managing to the strengths and weaknesses of your team,” he says. Fasbender’s team has been very successful at LSU and regular-

ly receives praise from the coaches and players of the 15 fields they manage.

Fasbender also believes in communicating about the field management activities. “We constantly are providing information about what we are doing to the fields and why we are doing it,” he says. When people gain a better understanding of your work, they begin to perceive you as a professional.”

Jonas uses face-to-face communication almost exclusively with his boss, his bosses’ boss and his employees. “That way, communication is direct and not filtered,” he says. “I consider my boss a good friend and ally and talk with him daily, which really keeps him informed.”

Good communication has helped him build relationships outside of St. Andrews. The parks district uses church and high school fields for overflow games, and Jonas’ efforts to get to know those in charge have paid off. “If there are problems, I know who to go to, and we can easily resolve any issue because we know each other,” he says.

Add credibility with Certification

Being a Certified Sports Field Manager (CSFM) has added to Fasbender’s credibility, especially as he pursued new positions. “My degree is in history, and being able to show that I am certified by the STMA has helped me convey my qualifications,” he says. “Being certified is one of the things that I’m most proud of,” he says.

Jonas recently pursued and attained the CSFM designation. He says that he realized that he needed to build on his agricultural experience of growing up on a farm. “Becoming certified helped me improve my core knowledge, and shows my employer that I am committed to being the best I can be,” says Jonas. “My certification has definitely made me a more valuable employee.”

Gaining the recognition for your work within your community may be a bit more challenging, but showing your community that you are committed to sound environmental practices can be very effective,

according to Ralston. “Northern California is experiencing its third year of a major drought and saving water is on everyone’s mind,” says Ralston. He has implemented new irrigation technology that conserves water, and he and his irrigation partner are holding educational outreach sessions to teach others. “We just had 50 people at a session. I’m able to actually report the exact number of gallons of water I saved over a specific time period,” he says.

Jonas believes that proactivity in the area of the environment is important, and he is taking initial steps to be more ‘green.’

“It is our responsibility to move to greener practices,” he says. “We have a strong recycling program, have a hybrid vehicle and have limited the heat of our asphalt parking lots by creating islands with shade trees.” Although he says these are small steps and may not have much recognition within the community, he has the environment squarely in his future plans. “We want to capture water from condensation from our air conditioning units to reuse on our softball field,” he says.

Individuals advance the industry

The sports turf management profession is gaining in influence, as measured by the interest of other organizations that want to work with STMA. “STMA’s partnerships and collaboration have more than doubled in the past several years,” says President Abby McNeal, CSFM, and Sports Turf Manager for the Colorado School of Mines in Golden.

She attributes some of the interest to STMA’s efforts, but believes members are at the heart of this advancement. “STMA as an organization has been reaching out to other organizations, which has resulted in many joint initiatives. I believe, though, that it is because of the great work of our members and their individual efforts to be recognized for their professionalism, that these relationships have developed and strengthened,” says McNeal. ■

» STEVE WIGHTMAN, CSFM

