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, CSEF, 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