



**BY DR. GRADY MILLER**

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## Questions?

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# Help, I Need Somebody

**I** GET A LOT OF PHONE CALLS and e-mails that start off with, “I need help and I did not know who to call. Can you help me?” The questions that follow range from the most basic (“What do the three numbers on the fertilizer bag mean?”) to more complex (“We are about to design/build our first sports field and need help with specifications”). So, this Q&A is devoted to all those that need help and do not know where to start.

If you have not listened to the Beatles’ song “Help!” in a while, I suggest you go to YouTube and listen to the song before reading this article. I find it is very applicable to this discussion. Because like in the song, no matter what your current level of confidence, you will eventually find yourself in a situation that requires you to find help.

I hope this column will encourage even the experienced among us that need help to speak up and get advice. You know who you are—you have procrastinated for weeks on an issue and just a little information would ease your mind and get you started on the task. But you do not want to ask because you are afraid asking for help is a sign that you are not a good manager. Pride takes over and you think that you will just figure it out or you do not know where to go for help. So you wing it or you do nothing. Either can result in a poor outcome.

First, there is no shame in asking for help. I find it ironic that we do not hesitate to ask for help on issues that are well outside our expertise. For instance, asking an accountant for tax help each year or an auto mechanic when your

truck’s transmission will not go into reverse. But when it is related to an issue that is within our work domain we think, “I can handle this. I’ll just put a little fertilizer on that brown patch of grass and it will be fine next week.” But what if that brown patch was caused by a disease organism, nematodes, or a chemical spill? You may make the situation worse. So, why not get a proper diagnosis and treat the

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problem rather than the symptom?

I often get phone calls from high school coaches. These guys are good coaches that are often out of their element when it comes to managing their fields. These guys will ask a string of questions a mile long. Since their problems are not associated with coaching, they often do not hold back. They have problems and they want to find answers. On the other hand, often when I get a group of turf managers together they will not ask any questions. And I know it is not because I am such a good teacher that I taught them everything in a seminar.

My charge to you is that when attending programs speak up and ask questions. Every question that

gets answered provides information that helps you as well as everyone else in the room that may have had the same curiosity. If the presenter does not know the answer, then maybe someone else in the audience has an answer. You guys solve many more of your own problems than I can solve for you.

So, one take home message is to get to know the other sports turf managers at the meeting. Meetings are also a good time to get to know your company representatives, suppliers, and certified field builders. While you may not have questions for them at that moment, you may want to call on them one day in the future. At a minimum ask them for a card and then later put their contact information in your phone. Always work on building your network.

And I would not be a University employee if I did not put in a plug for the extension service. All of you should get to know your local county extension agent as well as your state turf extension specialist. We can be resourceful people that can answer questions or help you find a resource that can help you when we do not know the answer.

Lastly, for a non-person resource check out the “technical resources” that have been put in the “Members Only” section of the Sports Turf Managers Association website ([www.stma.org](http://www.stma.org)). The STMA has done a great job of assimilating pertinent information for sports field managers and putting it on the association’s website. And if still not convinced someone can help you, go back and listen to that Beatles song again. If I cannot convince you perhaps John, Paul, George, and Ringo can. ■