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FACILITY & OPERATIONS

continued from page 30

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.



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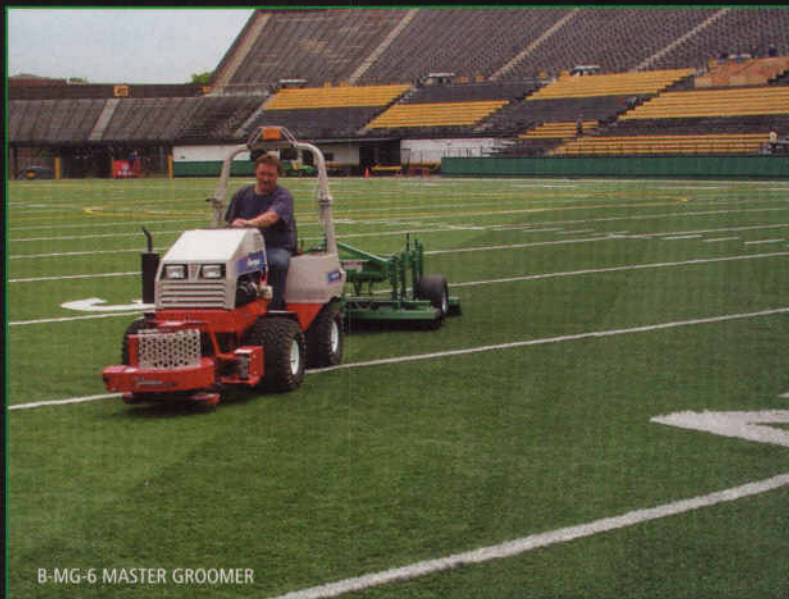
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Top 5 interview mistakes

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.

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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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Selecting and installing PVC pipe

By Luke Frank

Irrigation piping is like underwear—as long as it's hidden and not leaking, you're not likely to give it much thought. But like skivvies, an irrigation piping system must match the demands of the system and the environment in which it performs, and when it fails to perform, it's pretty obvious.

For the sake of simplicity, we'll address sports turf irrigation piping systems comprised of PVC piping and fittings, the most common material used in turf applications. Two primary types of PVC are used, and differ only in the pressure rating system used to designate their respective capacities.

PIPING PRESSURE RATING SYSTEMS

The PVC industry has developed two pressure-rating systems: the Standard Dimension Ratio (SDR) and the Schedule system. The SDR is a ratio of the minimum wall thickness to the outside diameter of the pipe for an established pressure level. This type of PVC pipe is commonly referred to as Class pipe. Therefore a system comprised of Class 200 PVC pipe has a pressure rating of 200 psi.

In the Schedule system, Schedule 40 and Schedule 80 PVC pipe have specific pressure ratings for each pipe size. These ratings can range from 850 psi for half-inch Schedule 80 pipe, down to about 180 psi for 6-inch Schedule 40 pipe.

The use of Class pipe in turf irrigation systems ensures a consistent pressure rating throughout the entire system. The Schedule system would have the same rating as the largest-diameter pipe, since the pressure rating decreases as the diameter increases.

A fitting proposition

There are several choices of fittings used to connect PVC pipe and route the system main and laterals. We'll zero in on the four primary options: PVC fittings that are solvent welded to join pipe; PVC fittings that use ring-tight gasket connections; epoxy-coated steel fit-

tings that are joined to pipe with gasket joints; and ductile-iron, gasket-joint fittings.

Naturally, there are a near endless variety of specialty fittings that target the individual needs of sports turf managers and sites. And, there are numerous products that can make irrigation piping system repairs simpler.

Compression couplings using gaskets to effect a seal, and solvent-welded slip-fix type expanding couplings can transform a difficult repair into a relative cakewalk. But far and away the most popular type of fitting used in landscape irrigation systems is the solvent-welded PVC fitting. It's inexpensive and easy to install, and when properly used should provide years of trouble-free operation.



When the pressure's on

Large turf irrigation systems consist of pressurized mainlines that feed water to a series of automatic control valves. The control valves are opened and closed either electrically or hydraulically and in turn feed water to the lateral lines and ultimately the sprinkler heads.

The opening and closing of valves can cause pressure surges in the system, known as water hammer, that if repeated often enough can damage fittings and cause a destructive and at times expensive piping system failure.

The power behind water hammer can be reduced by maintaining acceptable system velocities through proper system design and scheduling. So, if a system is properly designed, why do we still have fitting failures? The issue may lie with how the fittings are/were installed.

Perhaps the most common problem associated with sports turf irrigation piping system failures is the welding of solvent-cement joints. As straightforward as the process seems, a certain degree of attention and procedure is required to construct a leak-free, durable joint.

Before you ever get out into the field, it's critical that you select the proper solvent cements and primers. Don't confuse primers with plastic pipe cleaners, and most cement labels offer a range of pipe sizes for which the product will be most effective.



Solvent cement consists mostly of volatiles that evaporate during curing. When a solvent-cement is not evenly and appropriately applied and the parts aren't quickly joined, the volatiles "flash off," leaving insufficient solvent to create a bond between the pipe and fitting. This results in a dry joint.

Always adhere to the proper sequence of applying primer and cement recommended by the manufacturer. Generally, the recommended procedure is to prime both the pipe and fitting socket to be joined. Then, immediately apply a light coat of cement to the adjoining tapered socket pipe end and a more liberal coat of cement to the outside of the pipe. Push the parts together, rotating one-eighth to one-quarter turn and hold the joint for about 15 seconds.

The second coat of cement on the pipe is the key to success because it puts the most adhesive where it will be most beneficial. As you insert the pipe into the fitting, any excess cement on the pipe will be pushed out along the pipe, filling the gap between the pipe and the fitting at the socket opening. Excess cement will not be trapped inside the joints.

Finally, wipe off the connection, as excess cement and primer can cause softening and blistering of the plastic compounds. And rest easier with the knowledge that properly designed and installed irrigation piping and fittings should last upwards of 50 years.

Paying a little more attention to the less visible parts of your irrigation system will increase your comfort in how well and how long products perform. ■

Luke Frank is a veteran writer who specializes in irrigation topics. He can be reached at lukefrank@earthlink.net.

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Tales from the Gulf

One turf manager's Hurricane Katrina experience

By Ken Edwards, CSFM

Editor's note: Ken Edwards has worked for the City of Gulfport's Department of Leisure Services in Mississippi for the past 6 years. He is the sports turf manager/superintendent for both the Goldin and Gulfport sport complexes, responsible for day to day maintenance operations and supervision of nine crewmembers. He previously served in the US Army where his responsibilities included recreation program management, sports field and golf course maintenance and management, and human resources management.

The last hurricane I recall to pass through Gulfport and cause damage to any of the complexes was Hurricane George a couple of years ago. There was very minor damage to the Gulfport SportsPlex. One set of ten high bleachers blew over, a couple of bleacher tarps ripped off but that was it. No turf or major structure damage. Goldin Sports Complex was not completed yet.

Being a native of New Orleans I have experienced some bad hurricanes, including Betsy and Camille. My family and I relocated to Gulfport in October 1995 after my military retirement. As I recall, the day our household goods were to be delivered a storm was in the Gulf of Mexico approaching us. We stayed in Gulfport through that but promised never to stay again. For the past 10 years we boarded up the windows and doors on the house and left town whenever there was a hurricane approaching. We always prepare for hurricane season, we just never stay for the storm itself.

On Thursday, August 25, all indications were that Katrina was headed our way. We watched the news faithfully and every model showed that Katrina was huge and would hit the entire Gulf Coast area. A department staff briefing was called and all scheduled weekend tournaments were cancelled.

First order of business for me was to brief my crew and update their contact information. Our goal was to have the two complexes prepared by noon on Friday, then everyone would go home to prepare their personal property or plan to evacuate.



Ken Edwards, CSFM, Gulfport, MS, snapped these shots in the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

The order of business for preparing the sportsplexes:

- Fuel; top off every vehicle, all equipment and every available fuel container
- Remove all advertisement banners from fences
- Remove tarps from bleachers and flip over the three highs
- Tie dugout benches to dugout fence
- Pull all bases and portable mounds, place them in the shop
- Remove soccer goal nets, flip goals over and strap to light poles
- Flip over all picnic tables
- Empty all trashcans and place in the restrooms
- Put all equipment, trailers, and vehicles in shop
- Unplug all appliances
- Empty contents from shop refrigerator
- Turn off power to irrigation pump
- Shut off main valve to potable water
- Shut off power to the maintenance building and lock the gates.