

Battling Stereotypes

by Keith Williams

Where do stereotypes originate? Is it the media that should take responsibility for all of the negative aspects of unfairly stereotyping people, places and industries? Regardless of this it can be safely stated that stereotypes, generalizations, preconceived ideas and misinformation can dominate the public's perceptions about the turfgrass maintenance industry and those people who work in it. We, as an association and an industry, must constantly strive to convey to the public the who, what, why, where and when of our jobs and the industry so as to allow the public to gain a deeper appreciation and understanding.

To accomplish this we must devise a strategy, or strategies, to enhance our image and to raise our professionalism to a higher level. The following suggestions should be modified to your particular situation and should not be misconstrued

to reflect negatively on any specific working environments in our region.

GET PUBLISHED

Submit an article(s) for publication in the MAAGCS newsletter, *Golf Course Management*, *Golf Course News*, *Turf North*, etc. and/or suggest to your community newspaper about writing a periodic column about lawn care. A club newsletter is always a good way to convey information to the golfing public. Be sure to post these articles and columns in the pro shop area to gain maximum visual traffic.

READ and/or BECOME WELL READ

Subscribe to the *Wall Street Journal*, *Fortune*, *Business Week*, and *P C World*, etc. to become better versed in the "information age." While we probably don't have the time or energy to read these publications from cover to cover it is still

good to stay abreast of certain topics. Conversations with golfers and members are not relegated to golf and by sharing your educated opinion or information you can show others that you are knowledgeable and thus enhance your standing in their eyes.

YOUR VEHICLE

Somehow somewhere the pick-up truck was stigmatized and now some people view pickups and their drivers with less than high prestige. We know how functional pick-ups can be but our focus is on how others view us and our industry. Consider a sport utility vehicle (SUV), a minivan or a sedan if and when the opportunity arises to change vehicles.

PERSONAL APPEARANCE

"Dress for success" has been a cry for over twenty years and while it is next to

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impossible to stay clean while fixing an irrigation break remember that the clothes you wear sometimes leaves a lasting impression with some people. Always have a change of clothes handy and ideally keep a suit or sport coat nearby for any situation.

APPEARANCE

Does your office/workplace have a neat, organized, "in control" appearance? Or does it resemble, say, something else? Visitors pick up on the environment that you work in and attach it directly, fairly or unfairly, to you.

YOUR STAFF

Does your staff look professional in uniforms, are they courteous and helpful, do they convey a customer-friendly ap-

proach and a "can do" attitude? By addressing these questions will serve to enhance your image in the eyes of the golfers /members.

TAKE THE MESSAGE TO THE PEOPLE

Examples of this point may include an ongoing informal dialog with golfers, volunteering to speak to community and neighborhood organizations, have an office in the clubhouse so as to be more accessible to golfers and the pro shop staff, and speaking to golfers/members throughout the year, in a formal setting

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

While many of the above points have alluded to this it is good to remember that for good and effective communication to exist YOU must be a good communicator. Be able to articulate your point(s) with a good vocabulary and by avoiding

the use of slang. Just as important is being a good and "active" listener.

BE CREATIVE

Don't be afraid to use your imagination and to try new things. Allow yourself to think "outside the box" occasionally. Many people will react favorably to the novelty of the new idea or may enhance your idea or concept in a way that you had not thought of before with the result being more cooperation, cohesion and a better understanding of the situation.

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