

Professional Development: Communication: Up, Down and Sideways

Communication is one of the most important tools in sports turf management. Used effectively, it can increase efficiency and productivity and speed you toward your goals. Yet, all too often, job-related problems occur because of lack of communication.

In your role as sports turf manager, you are the source of, recipient of, and conduit for the communication of information with multiple sources.

Within your facility, you need to communicate up the ladder: to your supervisors, department heads and managing entity or owner's representative. You need to communicate down the ladder: to your assistants, crew leaders and crew members. And, you need to communicate sideways: to those in positions similar to your own in other departments. If your sports fields are used by teams representing the facility, you also may have contacts for the team in all three categories.

For the information exchange with those outside of your facility, you need to communicate up the ladder: to the external controlling bodies of your facility (such as a Board of Directors, City Council or governmental agency) and to the public. You need to communicate sideways: to your field user groups, to your vendor contacts and contractor contacts, to event organizers and to your consultants and University contacts. And, you need to communicate down the ladder: to delivery personnel, on-site construction crews, contract labor crews, special event personnel, etc.

In reality, your communication role can be as complex as running the flight control tower at a major airport. With the speed of today's high-tech information exchange, the ability to communicate has escalated to the point where, if not controlled, it can be overwhelming. You need to take control of the communication process. The greater the level of your planning and program organization, the easier this process becomes.

Releasing information on a need to

know basis is as outdated as the typewriter. By sharing the "big picture" with all those within your communication network, you give them the opportunity to "buy into" your program and work with you to achieve your goals.

Develop a master plan for the athletic fields within your facility. Then

break this down to annual, monthly, weekly and daily plans. Meet regularly with your various communication groups to update them on progress, exchange information and fine-tune the plans. Start each day with well-defined staff assignments and goals for what is to be accomplished.

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Remember, to be effective, communication is a combination of giving and receiving information, and clarifying that both the giver and the recipient clearly understand what has been communicated. You, as the sports turf manager, have the responsibility of insuring that this has happened.

Here are a few tips to aid in this process:

- *Determine how your contact individuals best receive and give information.*

This may be verbally, either in person or by phone, or visually, in a written format. Some individuals need a combination of these. They need to hear incoming information and back it up with written notes, or to deliver information verbally from written notes they have developed. The easiest way to hit the most effective communication method is to observe how an individual communicates with you and respond to them via the same method. For example, if your supervisor generally sends messages to you via email, use email as your primary communications back.

- *Establish your preferred time slot for giving and receiving information.*

Whenever possible, set aside a specific time each day for com-

munication. Find the time that works best and most consistently for you, and then communicate this to your contact individuals. Let them know you try to check your messages first thing in the morning or that the best time to catch you by phone is at the end of the day.

- *Take time to clarify that all parties involved have a clear understanding of the message communicated.*

Ask for feedback when you give information and give feedback when you receive it. It's as simple as saying, "Okay, Joe, as I understand it, we'll tackle the revision of the specs for the football field at 9 AM on Tuesday, and we'll both have our recommendations ready in writing at that time. Is that correct?", and getting the answer. Or, as asking, "Okay, Sam, can you give me a quick recap of the mowing crew's plan for today?" and listening to the answer. When understanding of the message isn't in agreement, take the time to work out the differences before that communication cycle ends.

Communication is an important tool but, as with all tools, it's how you use it that determines what you can accomplish with it.



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