

DOC'S DUGOUT - An Inning From Our Past

By Dr. Kent Kurtz - STMA Historian

Getting the Message Across

While going through some of Dr. Fred Grau's papers I found one that gives excellent advice when communicating in your job as a sports turf manager and some hints to speakers and moderators when giving presentations at annual turfgrass conferences. Since the STMA Conference is the 16-20th of January, in Las Vegas, speakers and moderators please take note.

Getting Attention. Before a message can be conveyed effectively one must have the attention of the subject.

You are an advertising executive. Yes, you are an advertising executive. You are advertising and selling yourself. Everything you do or say adds to or detracts from your stature as an executive. Your attitude toward those with whom you work actually is like a broadcasting station which tells everyone what you are and what you stand for. Your dress, whether it be neat or slovenly, speaks volumes to those to whom you are addressing yourself. Your voice can convey many impressions whether on the phone or when speaking directly. The kind of grammar you use can mark you as a rising executive or as a struggling foreman. The way you write letters and reports will be a factor in getting the message across.

Your appearance. The guiding principle would be "dress suitable to the occasion". Your spouse or "significant other" can be of great help to you in selecting the appropriate clothes. This is an elementary subject, yet you and I have seen instances where basic principles have been violated. There is a time and place for slacks and sport shirts but it is not at a Board Meeting or at an annual conference and banquet.

Your voice. The way you use your voice will do much to get your message across. A voice can be irritating, argumentative, firm, clear, respectful, soothing, conciliatory or weak. Few of us have had any opportunity to study and to




Dr. Fred Grau

improve our voices and the way we use them, but all of us can take notes on those who speak clearly and effectively. There is no magic formula. It can be very helpful if a good friend will accept the invitation to criticize and make suggestions. Above all, try to speak clearly, enunciate distinctly, and lift your chin to let the sound flow out to the person farthest from you. You

cannot get your message across by mumbling indistinctly. Your audience must hear you and understand you.

The way you write. The written report is an effective way of getting your message across. It gives the sports turf manager a chance to organize his material in a logical sequence, to edit the copy until it tells the story briefly and forcefully, and to have it typed in multiple copies so that each member

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of your committee or Board can read it simultaneously. Here again the better your knowledge of the English language the better your chances to transmit the message with compelling force. Let someone edit your written word from the standpoint of constructive criticism. Everyone will benefit.

The way you speak. Make sure that you know your subject backwards and forward. Have confidence in yourself - then forget about you and concentrate on your audience. Look directly into the eyes of those near you so that they feel your message is for them. Look to the back rows and make sure that the audience there hears you and understands you. Through practice develop an enthusiastic delivery. A monotone can kill all interest.

Reading your paper is not recommended. If you know your subject all you need are 3" x 5" cards, each with

a few words to remind you of the next topic. Then your memory refreshed, you can lift your head and deliver your message effectively.

Reduce your message to writing. Oral messages have a way of being misunderstood, misinterpreted or forgotten. The written message conveys the intent of the writer and, if properly written, can hardly be misunderstood. Copies of the written or typed message retain a record even if the original is lost or mislaid.

Work orders to the crew often are written on a large blackboard. This seems to be an excellent way to begin the workday efficiently with minimum confusion.

When a report to a superior or the Board has been prepared, your message will receive more careful attention if it is bound neatly in a colored folder and lettered neatly as to the topic, date, etc.

Photographic visual reports. Many sports turf managers have become excellent photographers. Significant events, progress of a site or specific maintenance steps are recorded on film. The report that is supplemented by a few well-chosen photos will be sure to get the message across more effectively than a report that is merely typewritten pages. (*Digital images may work best for the computer savvy.*)

Color slides shown on a screen with a good projector represent another way to get the message across. The good photographer is one who throws away his bad slides. Don't put yourself in the position of being apologetic. Show only the good ones. (*Consider Power Point for a dynamic presentation.*)


There is no magic about getting the message across. You must know your audience. You must know your subject matter. You must know the English language and be able to use it effectively in speaking and writing. Your dress must be appropriate. Practice delivery until you have complete confidence in your ability. Reduce reports to writing. Be concise and logical. Illustrate with good pictures or slides whenever possible. Be neat. Welcome constructive criticism. Keep an open mind, practice self-improvement, and learn from the mistakes of others - you will not live long enough to make them all yourself.



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