



YEAH! IT'S DOWN TIME... OR IS IT?

JANE ARNETT-RIVERS, SUPERVISOR, SPORTS FIELDS & IPM, TOWN OF OAKVILLE

So you have aerated, overseeded and topdressed everything you could (or could afford). Sod is down, seamed, seeded and rolled. Goal posts that could be pulled have been and fields have been t-barred to keep those diehard soccer and football fans off your newly renovated turf. Irrigation systems are blown out and equipment is clean – well OK, there may be a few more leaves to pick up and fence lines to clean, but you did it! You reached December! And, you accomplished this feat

working through one of the wettest seasons going. Fellow STA Director Paul Turner joked with me in late September about seeing an ark – we all felt that pain this fall.

I don't mean to ruin your well-deserved break, but this is an excellent time to polish and improve schedules while the problems of last season are still fresh in your mind. Remember the conversation in June about putting a smaller unit in that park because of the trees? How about realizing that a diamond was never used on Tuesdays so

why are we still grooming it? Then there were the missed parks you discovered thanks to an angry resident pointing out seven very long inches of growth.

I recently read an article laying out three steps to improve any operation and decided to test it. The steps are:

- 1. Simplify.** Tasks, practices, and schedules – the best format is always simple.
- 2. Innovate.** Find the better ways, quicker routes, OWN IT.
- 3. Grow.** Keeping up with expansion, achieving more in your day.

How do we put this theory to the test in our profession? Let's examine scheduling. Here's what I suggest:

1. Print off all your schedules: mowing, ball diamond grooming, lining, trimming, tennis court blowing, aerating, garbage – every schedule you have. Hand them out to the relevant staff who does the work. Changes made here will have the largest impact on your department and no one knows those hidden efficiencies more than the person(s) doing the job. Make sure staff know the direction you want to go. In the initial brainstorming session there should be no boundaries! They should consider travel, equipment, staffing, everything they can think of relevant to the job and then submit recommendations back to you.

2. Apply the three steps (simplify, innovate and grow) to improve each schedule. Then meet with the relevant staff and discuss. Your three steps may be different than theirs. For more input, bring in staff who used to do the job; experience is gold in this field.

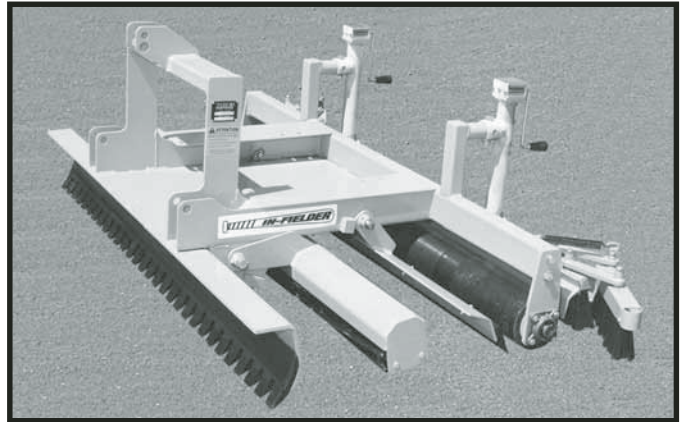
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3. Take everything into account; leave no stones unturned. For example, perhaps someone doing another schedule is working close by and their 4-wheel drive unit would be better for the job than yours. Taken a step further, perhaps your scheduled work should be done on Mondays, and not on Fridays, as you did all last season.

4. We have started putting notes on schedules – area wet, park/unload here, heavy litter area/leave yourself time to hand pick, noise sensitive neighbourhood, etc. This has really helped when staff is moved around to different areas; all your staff can have the knowledge, not just the experienced ones.

5. Once you are comfortable with the changes, create a checklist to run parallel with your schedule. Whether it is a field inspection or for time/cost tracking purposes, this will help the operator and you to know what has been done and what hasn't. We have all had the calls, "Hey, you haven't cut this grass for a month!" With your new-found level of organization, you can tell them exactly when the field was cut last (and I hope for your sake it hasn't been a month!) and when it's scheduled to be done again.

6. So, I submit this article with apologies for adding yet another task to your list. However, I promise you will be glad you took the time to perfect your scheduling when spring arrives and there are fewer bugs to work out. And everyone knows 'less bugs' in the spring is always a good thing! ♦



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