

a.m. Saturday. The rains had subsided by early Saturday morning.

On Saturday, at game time, nothing yet was brought to the attention of the field grounds department by either of the coaching staffs. Dolan made a point of checking with the grounds superintendent, who had been on-site throughout the day on Saturday, to verify that fact.

"Most people thought the field was in good shape, the best of the three years since the natural turf was installed.

Comments were on what great shape the field was in, and on the good stand of grass," reports Dolan.

What most sports turf managers are concerned with, and in reality all that they should be concerned with, is that the playing field provided is safe and playable.

As Dolan says: "It's unthinkable that any professional sports turf manager would create a condition that might threaten the safety of an athlete or cause a problem that might be detrimental to the overall turf pro-

gram. It's our job to create an equal opportunity for all athletes for competition on a safe, playable surface. They all put their pants on the same way—and the all play on the same surface."

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Shake Out

competitors to boost productivity

Are some of those 'price cutters' in reality just more sophisticated business people?

by Ed Wandtke

■ So far in the 1990s we have seen the impact of a tighter economic climate in the green industry.

The recent sale of the ChemLawn divi-

sion of Ecolab to ServiceMaster at a very discounted price suggests that the green industry may be going through some rough times.

During the past three years, many green industry companies that had been in business for more than 10 years suddenly



Some tools require a lot of time and manpower ...

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lost customers and employees, and thus experienced lower profits. Many owners attribute this to the influx of lowball competitors, who don't know how to operate at a profit, in the late 1980s.

These newer owners might just be more sophisticated business people. Their companies usually are very cost competitive and efficient in service delivery. They also offer the quality the customer wants.

If you have been experiencing business reduction, loss of profitability, or increased pressure from competitors, examine your company through the eyes of a critical businessman, and re-design the services your company offers or the methods in which you do business.

Industry consolidation—As more consolidations and company closings take place in the green industry, you have to address many cost challenges.

One method is to return to the basics. Specialize in landscape service, landscape design and installation, chemical lawn service, and so on.

Many companies have discovered that diversifying their business often leads to a

dilution of the efforts of top management (the owner), and one or more of the new services just don't seem to grow as fast or as large as the owner thought possible. People *do* make a difference, and an owner needs to examine how far he can delegate responsibility before he runs out of qualified employees.

During this period of consolidation in the green industry, some companies need to upgrade or add employees with the needed skills to improve or fill voids in the company. Examine the supply of potential candidates and choose those who possess the skills you need to grow and improve profitability. The cost for a quality individual may be high, but the results should show the initial investment was worth the risk.

Marketing/profitability—Computerization has become a reality. Some software can perform marketing functions. Determine if your management information system provides you with timely service information: missed applications; cancellations; service calls; employee productivity.

And never use the excuse that you're too busy. Next year may be too late.

Look at the approach you have been taking to attract and retain customers. I see companies improve customer retention to 85 and 90 percent. Who says you should have a 30 percent cancellation rate each year? Maybe your customers are coming aboard for the wrong reason or your company is not delivering on promises.

Now is the time to do a customer survey to check on customer attitudes about your service before the season starts in order to reduce cancellations this coming season.

Make this the year to examine the efficiency and productivity of your entire operation. What if you operated with one less office worker or hired a part-timer instead of a full-time employee?

Other survival tips:

- Establish production standards.
- Train employees so they can meet those standards.
- Reward them when they exceed the standard performance.

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