

DISASTER from page 20

How to price—During crisis time, management may want to charge a premium price for repair services. Long-term relationships are seldom developed when a company follows this practice.

Yes, short-term gains may be realized; however, in the long-term, customers will realize they are being charged more than a reasonable amount for the service they receive.

When you determine a price to repair damage caused by a natural disaster, it is critical that the total costs for personnel and equipment are taken into consideration.

Overtime and salary personnel may work extra hours and, therefore, may need to be considered for overtime or additional benefits. By reviewing your current costs for hourly rates and equipment utilization, a company can determine if any adjustment in its pricing is needed.

Is travel required?—Choosing between

traveling to a distant market or staying at home is a function of the number of skilled people you have on staff, the level of service committed to current customers, and the size of the opportunity at the distant location. Managing or performing work far from home base requires that you know the local laws, insurance regulations and lodgings available.

Many green industry companies look at disaster work as an opportunity to keep the employees working. However, a company needs to consider the liability it may be exposing the company to. Employees working in unfamiliar areas may encounter local resistance to their presence, a lack of things to do after hours, or fatigue from long work periods.

While working in New York to clear streets from a major ice storm last year, many companies coming into the state were surprised by the increase in auto insurance rates, workers compensation

premiums and the amount of the tax obligation levied as a result of working there. Profit was reduced significantly due to these unbudgeted expenses. A profit of 15 percent was reduced to 5 percent.

Be prepared—Timing is important if you want to profit in natural disaster work. A company needs to be prepared to react to opportunities when they arise. Be organized and disciplined, and have work teams at the ready to respond quickly. Too often, companies take on tasks that are too complex or difficult to perform. Other companies find management of the work crew to be excellent when working out of the office each day. However, when they go on the road, it becomes a total nightmare.

—The authors are principals in Wandtke & Associates, a business management consultant to the green industry located in Columbus, Ohio. To contact them, phone (614) 891-3111.

Communicating: with employees, co-workers and customers/clients

Learn from your conversations, and don't be afraid to use body language to convey your points.

■ Communicating is a contact sport, said Mike Jousan of Clear Communication Co., Scottsdale, Ariz. That is—"you've got to connect."

"Whatever your goals are in life, you'll reach them faster if you can communicate better," Jousan told New Jersey Turfgrass Expo attendees. But his presentation only scratched the surface of the self-help information available to landscapers and superintendents.

Of prime importance: "You are not only carrying a message, you are part of the message, and you can never separate yourself from the message," Jousan said.

He has what he calls the "1-10-100" rule: the same skills you use to talk to an employee, your dentist or spouse, you use to talk to groups of 10 or 100.

And he believes that good communication is an "equal opportunity" skill because anyone can do it.

Four simple things which Jousan suggests for any situation in which you must connect with another person or persons:

- Your voice has to be energetic.
- You must use eye contact: when all else fails, look at people.
- Use gestures: your hands enhance what you're saying.
- Your body language must be going forward in a positive fashion.

"Words, tone and body are the only things we use to communicate," Jousan says. "Words are 7 percent of the process, tone 38 percent, and body language 55 percent. So you must support your words, or they won't mean much."

Dr. Tony Alessandra and Dr. Phil Hunsaker, writing in "Communicating at Work," agree with Jousan. One of their beliefs is that perceived sincerity is directly proportional to eye contact.

Alessandra and Hunsaker say that, when conversing with others, you should use body language to convey openness, confidence and enthusiasm.

For instance, you convey openness with open hands and uncrossed arms. To be totally effective, you should not establish spatial barriers between yourself and others: move closer to them, lean forward if you're sitting.

They believe that the area within two feet

of you is the "intimate zone." From 2 to 4 feet extends the "personal zone;" from 4 to 12 feet, the "social zone;" and beyond 12 feet from you is the "public zone." Don't try to talk to someone 10 feet away in a personal manner, they suggest; you should be no farther than 4 feet from the person you're talking to.

You can convey confidence and authority by using relaxed and expansive gestures. You can convey enthusiasm with an inward smile, an erect body stance, alert eyes and a lively, well-modulated voice.

continued on page 24

Jousan: You've got to connect with your audience whether it's 1, 10 or 100 persons.



COMMUNICATE from page 22

Your voice, in fact, is another key. It should be assured; use a strong, full (but not overwhelming) resonance. Speak clearly and distinctly. Show enthusiasm through pitch, volume and inflection. Vary your vocal qualities, but always speak naturally and at ease.

"Communicating is about openness," Jousan adds. Here are the keys:

- **Care** about what you're talking about.

- **Connect**—use your physical self and tell stories or solve problems.

- **Commit**—you learn to speak by making a commitment.

If you've ever taken a Dale Carnegie course—and they are recommended, especially for people in managerial positions—

you know the group's three steps to effective communication:

- 1) Make communication a top priority in every interpersonal situation.

- 2) Be open to other people. Share and listen.

- 3) Create a receptive environment for communication by laying a foundation of genuine trust and shared interest. Be sincere.

The Carnegie people, in one of their books, offer these tactics:

- Try to see things from the other person's perspective. If you're talking to an employee who has made a mistake, find out why the mistake was made so you can offer advice.

- Don't listen to hear. Listen to learn.

In order to find out why the mistake was made, you must pay careful attention to that same employee.

- Apply the Golden Rule and respect the dignity of others. For instance, criticizing that employee in front of his peers is taboo. Always take him or her aside.

- Be quick to admit mistakes and slow to criticize. And when you criticize, above all, be constructive so that the employee will follow instructions and do it right next time.

Additional information on this subject is available through a wide variety of books you can find at your local public library. Look in the section with the Dewey Decimal code number 658.84.

—Jerry Roche

Compost preferred over topsoil as soil amendment

As compost becomes more available to landscapers, more and more topsoil is being replaced with compost for a variety of project uses.

■ Whether for general grading purposes, lawn establishment or renovation, or tree and shrub planting, landscapers purchase and handle a tremendous amount of soil products.

One of those products—topsoil—has never been available in good quantity. Wide differences in availability exist among different areas of the country. Even

within small geographic areas, price and supply can vary considerably, especially given the high cost of trucking topsoil, even over short distances.

Many contractors have difficulty with topsoil availability in metropolitan areas. In fact, some city and county governments have banned the shipment of topsoil across city or county lines to limit the stripping of topsoil before construction or new development.

Compost, on the other hand, is becoming increasingly available. More and more cities and towns, private composters and landscape contractors are composting,



The quality of materials used determines the quality of the compost you produce.