

Why do we put up with bullies?

I hate bullies. Stupid me, though — I didn't learn how to deal with them until after I'd suffered months of silent anger and personal anguish. While it took a neighborhood bully's actions to open my eyes, we in the professional landscape/lawn industry seem to be always relearning the same lesson.

Consider the bullies who want to stop us from delivering the professional services we have every right to offer. For years, they've campaigned against our use of chemical tools. Now, their ill will is spreading like cancer. Some have begun demanding that lawmakers forbid the use of these tools on turfgrass and ornamentals for 'aesthetic' or 'non-essential' reasons.

That's an astounding demand. Other bullies (by definition, bullies are also cowards) seem to have the moral, if not legal, right to destroy valuable private property, as evidenced by dead-of-the-night raids on turfgrass breeding efforts in Oregon.

In their singlemindedness, bullies don't see any demand or threat as too outrageous. That's one reason we don't deal with them as we should. In fact, we do an awful job of it. Dreading confrontation, we seek compromise. We delude ourselves into thinking that unreasonable people will engage in reasonable dialogue with us. Stranger yet, we ignore all warning signs and hope the poison behind their actions evaporates and floats away.

Actually, we embolden bullies with our inaction. We invite them to perform even more outrageous actions and concoct even more outlandish demands. I've been there, and I can tell you — it's better to deal with a bully from the get-go.

The bully on the block

Consider my experiences with a neighborhood bully who convinced himself he had the right to drive his pickup truck into the front or rear of any vehicle parked on the street too close to his property. Unfortunately, his house is across the street from mine. As the months passed, he began lacing his actions with threats, sometimes verbal or handwritten notes he inserted under the offending vehicles' wiper blades.

Finally, it occurred to me that a neighborly relationship us wasn't going to happen between us and probably wasn't worth pursuing anyway. That's when I insisted that local authorities take action. Through phone calls, letters and personal visits, I made it known I wouldn't tolerate these actions and would take "any and all" legal action to stop them. It took lots of my time and energy to straighten out this problem, and I now realize that if I had shown some backbone when these incidents first started I would have, if nothing else, earned some measure of respect, if not in his eyes, than certainly in my own. And I would have saved myself and my family a lot of unpleasantness.

As an industry, we're faced with the same bullying tactics, with similar choices to make. If I've learned nothing else from my dealings with bullies, I've learned it's a lot better to face and challenge their actions from the start than to ignore them and hope they go away.

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