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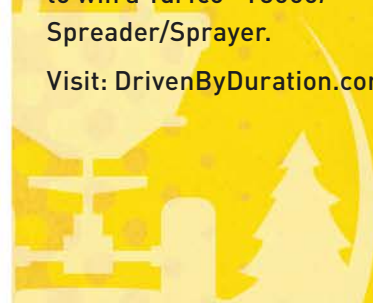
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Landscape Management

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Photograph by Laura Watilo Blake



OUR MISSION: *Landscape Management* — the leading information resource for lawn care, landscape maintenance, design/build and irrigation professionals — empowers Green Industry professionals to learn and grow from their peers and our exclusive business intelligence. Serving as the industry conscience, we not only report on but also help shape news, views, trends and solutions.



EDITOR'S NOTE

MARISA PALMIERI EDITOR

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A tip from the tech world

Have you heard of a hack day? How about a hackathon or hackfest? These are different names for the same thing: an event where computer programmers collaborate intensively on software development projects for as short as a day or as long as week.

Sometimes there's a specific goal, like finding new uses for a single company's application programming interface, as is the case with Yahoo's Open Hack Day, a public event held since 2006. Or sometimes it's for a cause, like Random Hacks of Kindness, a joint effort between Microsoft, Google, Yahoo, NASA and the World Bank, where tech professionals volunteer to create solutions for disaster management and crisis response situations.

But sometimes hack days are held solely to drive company innovation. Facebook and Google are examples of organizations that hold internal hack days to foster idea generation and software development. In fact, Facebook's trademark "Like" button was born from a hackathon, according to *Wired*, which also describes these events as a "group brainstorm and software-coding party."

What's my point for Green Industry professionals? All organizations have pain points they'd like help solving and any company may

benefit from a new "big idea," whether it's a way to increase revenue, improve customer service or cut costs through efficiency. The answers may lie within your staff, but employees need the encouragement and time to pursue innovation, outside of their day-to-day duties. Many owners and managers believe their "open-door" policies ensure new ideas will roll in as employees have them. But all employees don't know all of your challenges. And many of them, due to their roles in the company or for cultural reasons, may not feel comfortable sharing them. For example, due to a culture with a deeply rooted respect for authority, Hispanic employees may not voluntarily offer feedback for fear of "challenging" their superiors, according to Sonia Diaz with the National Hispanic Landscape Alliance. (See "How to prepare Latinos for leadership" in our October issue.)

So why not host a hack day? If you're familiar with "lean management," consider a hack day to be a shorter, less structured version of a kaizen event. It's like taking a page from Zuckerberg, not Demming. (If you don't speak "lean," companies use kaizen events to analyze and remove waste from a given process to pursue continuous improvement over time.)

Many of you will offer education over the winter or early-spring training. Why not clear the schedule and set aside time for your employees to brainstorm and problem solve? Buy some pizza or subs, give your employees a challenge or two to tackle, split them up into groups and give them a deadline. Then, each group could present its solution to a panel of judges, which could offer a reward for the best idea.

Maybe you won't implement anything from your first hackathon, but the creativity and viability of some ideas might surprise you. And you could improve morale and empower your people in the process.

Employees need the **encouragement and time to pursue innovation**, outside of their day-to-day duties.

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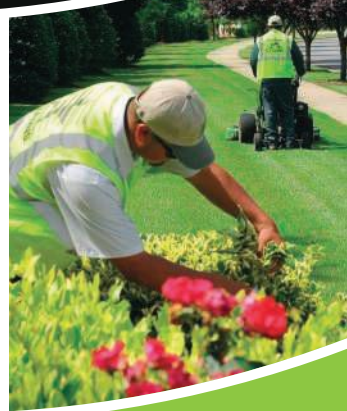
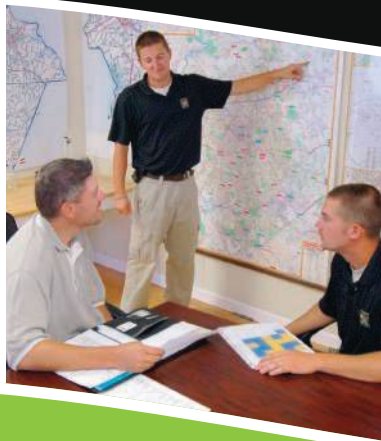
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Turfgrass exhibit takes root in D.C.

A U.S. National Arboretum project is set to promote positive messages about turf. BY **MARISA PALMIERI** EDITOR

The U.S. National Arboretum's (USNA) plan for an interactive outdoor exhibit called Grass Roots is great news

for the Green Industry, says Kevin Morris, president of the National Turfgrass Federation (NTF). The four-year initiative is slated to include a 3/4-acre exhibit plus workshops to inform the public about the importance of turf and turf research. Organizers hope to break ground early next year.

Grass Roots was spearheaded by the USNA's Director Colien Hefferan, Morris says, adding the NTF is collaborating on the effort. Current plans include 15 educational stations, including the history of lawns, fertilizer, irrigation, green roofs, sports fields and lawn games and golf.

"It's unique because the exhibit is at a federal government facility and they're going to talk about what turf does and its benefits to society," Morris says, noting the USNA gets about a half million visitors per year, including Congress members. "This is a federal agency that's going to be making positive statements about the turf industry. That's pretty significant. We haven't had that kind of exposure."

The USNA is administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service. Located on 446 acres in Washington, D.C., its goal is to serve the public need for scien-

tific research, education, and gardens that conserve and showcase plants to enhance the environment.



LM: How's the design coming?

Kevin Morris (KM): The Arboretum is in the design stages. They have a design firm offering their services for free, a new firm out of Maryland called Rain Underground. It's quite a nice gift.

They have some preliminary designs and drawings worked out. Besides that, the

Arboretum has to work on the messaging: What to deliver and how to deliver it. The idea is this will be a fun, interactive exhibit to attract and inform people who don't know much about the turf industry.

LM: How about fundraising?

KM: The Arboretum is donating about \$80,000, so they need to raise the other \$400,000 or so to meet the proposed

\$480,000 budget. That's where they are right now, trying to raise the money. The plan is to try to have a grand opening in October of 2013. To do that they'd need to break ground in the spring. That's why they have a January deadline to make sure they have enough funds to get going, at least two-thirds or three-fourths of the total.

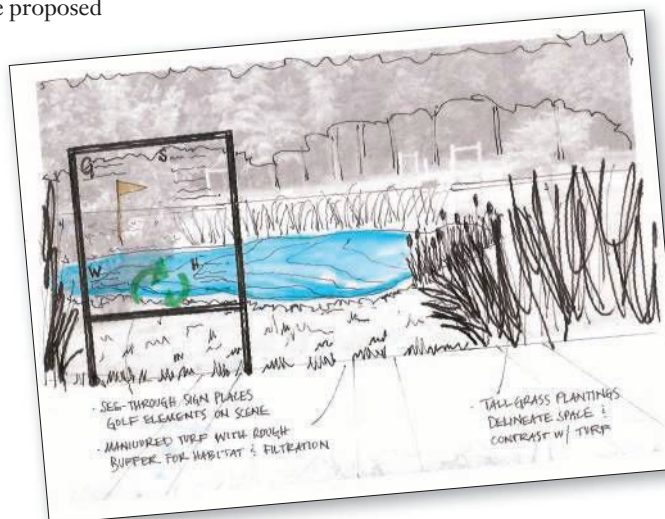
They have some pledges from the industry of about \$65,000 or \$70,000 from nonprofit organizations. We're working with some of the bigger suppliers and equipment companies, but we haven't gotten anything firm yet. Still, we're confident it's going to happen.

LM: Tell us about the messaging.

KM: Their intention is to showcase the science USDA is conducting now and what's been done in the past. The exhibit is going to stand on the science. The Crop Science Society of America, where the turfgrass scientists have a home, has agreed to review statements made and certify that they're scientifically valid. We've got a lot of science on our side and if something's not backed up, they won't use it.

The exhibit won't be just throwing a bunch of grass down and labeling it. It's got to be interesting, visually and content-wise, to attract people. It's going to be there for four years and it isn't just about the physical exhibit. It's a whole initiative of programs and demonstrations that feed off the exhibit.

The USNA is in the design phase, evaluating sketches and concepts, like the one at right, from the design firm.



PHOTOS: KEVIN MORRIS (LEFT), U.S. NATIONAL ARBORETUM



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THE BENCHMARK

KEVIN KEHOE

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The salesman's pre-call routine

The top salespeople in the grounds maintenance segment of the industry sell more than \$1 million in new annualized contract revenue every year.

The industry's top account managers in the same segment manage more than \$2 million in business with a mix that might include \$1.4 million in contracts and \$600,000 in additional upsells.

How do they do it? First, they are confident, asking good questions and listening. Second, they focus on achieving their key performance indicators monthly (number of leads worked, number and dollar volume of proposals delivered and number and dollar volume of contracts closed). Third, they are very good time managers, wasting little time on low probability leads and proposals. Fourth, they are always prepared for the sales call.

It is axiomatic to say that sales success is based on numbers. If you have enough leads, it should produce enough proposals to achieve the sales goal. But this is only true if it can be done within the time available. Time is the salesman's scarcest resource. Salespeople who manage it poorly always will come up short of their goals.

Therefore, it makes all the sense in the world to train your sales staff to make the most of the time they invest with a prospect or customer. To do this, let's start with the idea that every sales call is a decision-making call. In other words, the salesman must expect the customer to make a decision that either 1.) closes the sale (*really good*), 2.) declines the

sale (*not fun but still good because no more time needs to be expended in the chase*), or 3.) advances the sale with a specific next step (*like a presentation with a decision maker or a final submission of best offer*).

Making the most of every call is a matter of preparation. The best preparation should follow a predictable pattern. Let's call it the salesman's pre-call routine. Before any call the salesman should answer the following:

- 1 What's my objective here today?** Is it to get a decision (yes or no) or an advance?
- 2 What's my agenda to achieve this?** Set up expectations for the call, review needs and wants, handle objections, negotiate price/scope and ask for a decision.
- 3 What are their potential objections to doing business with me?** These could be price, cost, changing a vendor, necessity, schedule and/or capability. What are my responses?
- 4 What are my negotiating positions?** Will you provide a discount if it's the only option? What's your position on value engineering, scope change, value pitch, term (multiyear deals) and concessions on future proposals?
- 5 What's my close?** This should be a summary and request, such as: "It sounds like we have covered everything, and we agreed at the start of the meeting that we wanted to make a decision today. How do you want to proceed?"

The best salespeople don't wing it. They are prepared. This allows them to control the sales call with confidence and make the most of their own and the customer's time. I recommend that all sales managers develop pre-meeting routines with their staff and watch their peoples' confidence and performance increase.

Time is the salesman's scarcest resource. Salespeople who manage it poorly always will come up short of their goals.

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BEST PRACTICES

BRUCE WILSON

The author, of the Wilson-Oyler Group, is a 30-year industry veteran. Reach him at bwilson@wilson-oyler.com.

Making tough calls

“The hardest thing to learn in life is which bridge to cross and which to burn.”

Owners and managers have to be willing to do things others are unwilling to do. Leaders routinely face moral dilemmas that impact the company's future.

They put themselves on the line when confronted with high-stakes decisions involving customers, employees and company values, along with tough calls affecting finance, growth or other challenges that demand risk.

One example of having to make a tough call might be about the tenured employee who's been with you from day one, but now doesn't fit. The employee, for example, may not be adapting to new formats or technologies that have changed task processes. What should you do and how do you handle it?

Another example is a customer threatening to cancel a contract if you change account managers when you know you need to make the switch. Or what if a client has received another bid (too low for you to make money on), and you're given a choice to match the price or lose the job? How about deciding between keeping and firing your best sales person even though he or she is toxic to morale?

Some issues require an immediate action; others are less time-sensitive or fraught with emotion—these are the ones that do the most damage to a company. In the case of a long-term employee who's no longer able to do his job but is being given what's perceived as special treatment, the longer the deci-

sion lingers, the more it undermines team harmony.

Tough calls are not made without personal cost: You may get criticized, it may cost you relationships and you may be unpopular. But if you're a leader or want to become one, tough calls are part of your job.

Take charge of the emotions that accompany important choices and structure your decisions around facts and key issues. Seek counsel and perspective from your inner circle, trusted advisors or peer group to get options. To make the process a little easier, make your decisions based on principles and values you believe in.

Some guiding principles might be:

- › All employees will be treated honestly and fairly and be given regular feedback about their performance as team members.
- › We can't make a profit on business that we don't have, but all business we do have must be on a path to profitability.
- › We must listen to our customers but do what's best for our business and customer base as a whole. We cannot be everything to everybody.
- › We need to be aware of our competition but not copy them. We need to take what we admire and improve on it. We need to determine our own direction and let our customers guide us.
- › We will treat our customer's money as if it were our own.

There is no right way to make the right decision, but once you commit to the path, do not waffle. Take action, learn from the experience, take responsibility for the outcomes, ignore criticism if it gets in the way of your principles and move on.

Being decisive will define your leadership; if you do it well, it will take your leadership to a higher level. Be guided by values and be conscious of them when making a tough call. Think about the difficult decisions you've had to make in the past and how guiding principles could have made the process easier. It will help you develop the best practices you need to make the best possible decision the next time you need to make it.

Take charge of the emotions that accompany important choices and structure your decisions around facts and key issues.

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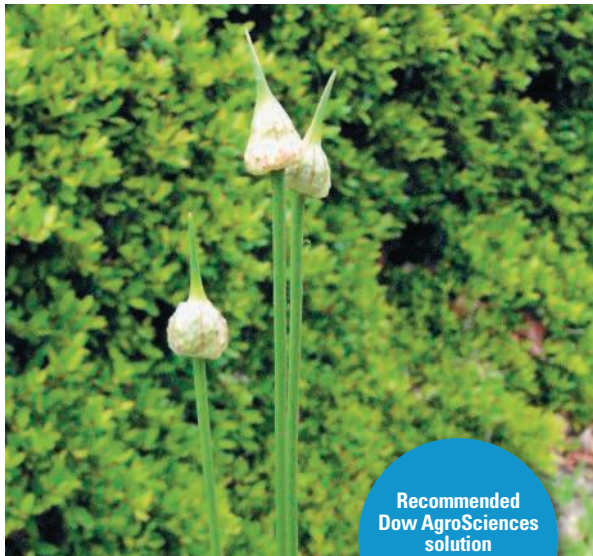
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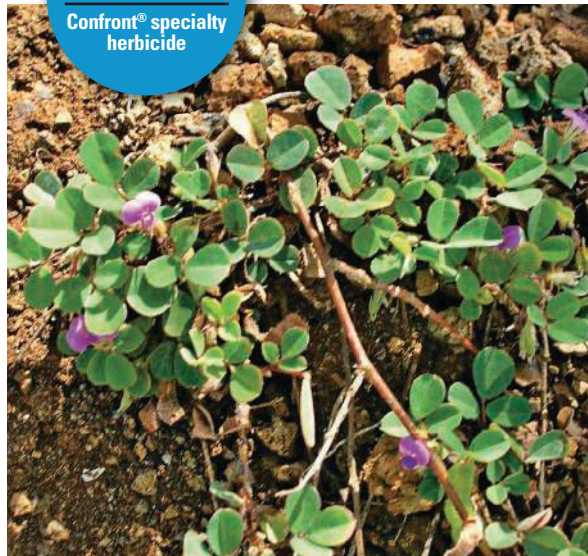
Allium vineale

IDENTIFICATION TIPS

- ▶ This perennial grows from bulblets that emit a strong garlic or onion smell when crushed.
- ▶ Its seedlings resemble those of a grass but have hollow, round leaves that grow from a bulb.
- ▶ The only stems that occur are flowering stems—slender, solid, waxy and unbranched.
- ▶ Small, greenish-white flowers grow from the tops of the flowering stems.
- ▶ Smaller bulblets and fibrous roots may form at the base of the bulbs.

CONTROL TIPS

- ▶ Wild garlic is difficult to eradicate because several bulblets will sprout and grow at different times from the same plant. In actively growing turf areas, sequential applications of two- or three-way herbicides containing 2,4-D applied in the winter and very early spring will provide control. Additional treatments the following year may be needed.
- ▶ In completely dormant bermudagrass or in non-crop areas, a glyphosate product can provide control when applied twice in the winter months.



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THREEFLOWER DWARF BEGGARWEED

Desmodium triflorum

IDENTIFICATION TIPS

- ▶ This perennial has leaves with three small, heart-shaped leaflets.
- ▶ It propagates through seeds and stolons. The prostrate hairy stems root at nodes.
- ▶ It flowers in warm months. Flowers are blue or purplish pink.
- ▶ Its close relative, creeping beggarweed (*Desmodium canuum*), has leaves with three leaflets that vary in size and are elliptic, pointed at the tip and rounded at base. *Canuum* also has hairy stems ascending to erect. Flow-

ers are pink to rose color. It can propagate through seed, stolons or broken taproot.

CONTROL TIPS

- ▶ To minimize the establishment and spread of both *Desmodium* species, maintain a lush lawn with proper mow height, fertility and water management.
- ▶ Repeat applications—either pre- or post-bloom—of a product containing triclopyr and clopyralid are recommended.

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