

The Management Clinic Experience

This year's ANLA Management Clinic wrapped fun, education and networking into a rewarding 4-day event that took place under the Big Top.

By Meghan Boyer

The American Nursery and Landscape Association's (ANLA) Management Clinic is always a rewarding experience for attendees — the fun themes mixed with education and networking make it a good event for those in the green industry to attend. This year was no different. The circus came to Louisville, Ky., Feb. 1-4, 2006, as ANLA gathered more than 900 industry members under the Big Top with an eye-popping theme that included fire eaters, a ringmaster and popcorn galore.

If anything overshadowed the impressively thorough theme, it was the quality of the sessions and events that provided attendees with great educational and networking opportunities. In fact, there were more speakers this year than ever before, with 78 separate sessions available. Sessions were broken into four categories — distribution, growing, landscape and retail — to make determining which sessions to attend easier for attendees.

While producing the first *Management Clinic Daily Reader*, a daily newsletter that highlighted events and key sessions for attendees, the *Lawn & Garden Retailer* editorial staff sat in on quite a few of the events and listened to numerous speakers. Here are some of the highlights.

Interactive Keynotes

The keynotes are the highlight of every Management Clinic, and this year was no different. Matt Weinstein's team-building session was a popular event for many. He was one of four keynote speakers, and attendees at his event didn't stay seated long.

Weinstein moved them through a series of activities that ranged from acting out different personas to attendees waving goodbye to everyone as a centaur, a mythological half-man/half-horse creature. The latter activity was accomplished by two people partnering up and standing one in front of the other. The person in back took the wrists of the person in front and the pair walked and waved goodbye as a unit.

The whole session was a series of fast-paced activities with a main theme: laughter. Weinstein said he believes laughter helps break down barriers. If employees can learn to laugh together at work, they will bond more as a team.

CW Metcalf's interactive keynote presentation also centered on laughter. He explored a new vision of humor and its value as a stress management tool. Many attendees found his session inspiring: Metcalf touched on how people can increase their personal resilience, remain healthy and maintain productivity when the going gets tough. He spoke from personal experience and taught attendees how humor skills can help develop fluidity and creativity within high-risk, change-racked environments.

Top: Different varieties and loads of popcorn decorated the event. **Middle:** CW Metcalf's interactive session explored the use of humor as a stress management tool. **Bottom:** ANLA staff members — dressed in red tailcoats and black top hats — supported the circus theme. (Photos: ANLA)

Swapping Ideas

An annual event, Swap Shops at the ANLA Management Clinic are forums for attendees to present, exchange and discuss ideas, methods and products in their industry niches. ANLA staffers give attendees the opportunity to take the floor and present their thoughts, concerns and innovations, sometimes complete with charts and slides. There were four shops available this year: the Retail Swap Shop, Landscape Swap Shop, Grower Swap Shop and Distribution Swap Shop.

Retail Swap Shop. Promotions ruled the conversation at the Retail Swap Shop. Retailers from across the nation shared what they were doing to bring more customers into stores, with the primary focus on radio and television ads. Coupons, loyalty and discount programs were also discussed.

Landscape Swap Shop. The Landscape Swap Shop started with a discussion about computer landscaping software then moved into marketing techniques. One landscaper suggested using the company's tool trailer as advertising space. Instead of parking a plain, unmarked trailer at a job site, this individual suggested painting it and adding the company logo and project photos.

Grower Swap Shop. Reducing dump was one of the topics at the Grower Swap Shop. One nursery talked about a program it developed for reducing dump from diseased or inferior plants. The "Chuck-A-Buck" system uses cash rewards to encourage employees to better care for plants.

Distribution Swap Shop. The Distribution Swap Shop touched on promoting better customer service. One nursery implemented a type of competition to do just that. After a delivery, staff at the nursery calls the client and asks three questions: Was it on time? Was it correct? Would you do business with us again? If the overall success rate is 95 percent or greater at the end of each month, employees get a monetary reward.

See You Next Year

Of course, there were many more interesting sessions, keynotes and events — who can forget Muggets? (a gathering at the end of each night's activities, where attendees unwind and network with peers over drinks and snacks) — that we attended; so much so, there isn't enough space to discuss them all.

With all the fun to be had, it's almost easy to forget about the true value of the event — the networking, the sessions and handouts, and the future impact of the information on your business.

The next ANLA Management Clinic is scheduled for Jan. 31-Feb. 3, 2007, in Louisville, Ky. For more information, contact ANLA at (202) 789-2900.

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