

Landscape Leader: Alec Kowalewski

The logo for 'Turf' features the word in a bold, black, sans-serif font. A green grass blade graphic is integrated into the letter 'u'.The logo for 'Tree Services' is in a bold, black, sans-serif font. A small green leaf icon is placed above the 'e' in 'Services'. Below the main text is the tagline 'Taking Tree Care to New Heights' in a smaller font.The logo for 'DesignBuild' features the word 'Design' in black and 'Build' in orange, both in a bold, sans-serif font. A small orange square icon is placed above the 'i' in 'Design'.The logo for 'PLOW' is in a bold, blue, sans-serif font. The letters are slightly slanted to the right.

Source: www.TurfMagazine.com

✖ Alec Kowalewski, assistant professor and turf specialist at Oregon State University, believes that forming personal relationships and gaining the respect of his students – in and out of the classroom – have been the keys to being an effective leader.

How would you describe your style of leadership and why does this work for you?

Coaching high school wrestling taught me that forming a personal relationship with someone was an essential component to gaining his or her respect. A person who respects you is more likely to listen to you. Therefore, I spend a lot of time with my students in and out of the classroom. I am their club adviser, and I visit them during their summer internships. I work with students to find internships and jobs, and I regularly write recommendation letters. I am convinced these personal relationships make me an effective leader. Coaching high school wrestling for seven years also taught me how to motivate students according to their individual personalities.

How do you work at consistently becoming better at leadership?

Always checking in with my students and employees to see how I can help them. By doing this I see problems and roadblocks as they approach and simultaneously build a team atmosphere. People want to know you have their back. The important part is providing truly constructive criticism and not making people feel like you are smothering them.

Who are your leadership role models and why?

My father, Greg Kowalewski. Growing up in a farm environment, he taught me the importance of a hard day's work, being on time and completing the tasks I committed to.

My high school wrestling coach, Jim Sullivan, was a great leader because he

always treated his athletes with respect, and he also built positive personal relationships serving as a coach, teacher and mentor.

Dr. Trey Rogers, my major professor, is another one. He knows how to push a person to his or her full potential. This experience, much like wrestling, taught me that I am also capable of much more than I initially believed.

What have you done in a leadership capacity that you are most proud of and why?

My current job is what I am most proud of. I lead the [turfgrass management program](#) at Oregon State University. I teach the turf management classes, provide extension information and bulletins for the state of Oregon and direct a turf research program. The program's focus is on improving the environmental and economic sustainability of turfgrass management.

If you were to give young leaders one piece of advice, what would that be?

Hard work always pays off, as well as forming new professional relationships. It might not pay off today, but things always come around.

What leadership words or quote inspire you most and why?

I am a big 'Star Wars' fan, and my favorite Yoda quote is, "Do or do not; there is no try."