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Fire Stick

By Paperitalo Staff

We live in a typical US subdivision. I would rather be out in the country, but that is another story.

Being in a subdivision, we have the requisite ¼ acre of lawn. It is a stretch, actually, to call ours lawn—it is a collection of weeds with some recognizable sprigs of grass. Nevertheless, it needs mowing on a regular basis, at least until the middle of summer when the rain stops. For the last couple of summers, the young man next door has been doing the mowing.

However, between last mowing season and this he has acquired (a) a girlfriend, (b) a driver's license and (c) an enhanced love of computer games. Lawn mowing, despite his need for gas money, seems to have dropped in priority. By last week the lawn was out of control. As I was working in our garage on a bright sunny morning this past Saturday, Lawnboy was over in his driveway shooting hoops.

Not wanting to do my usual and turn the neighborhood into a war zone, I wisely consulted Laura, and proposed a plan. I would talk to Lawnboy's Dad (who calls me the original Grumpy Old Man, lovingly) before doing anything else. With her blessing, I did so. I also knew most any course of action I took would be OK with Dad, for Dad is the manager of a plastics injection molding plant. He is used to demanding performance from employees.

Catching Dad, I told him the lawn situation needed to improve or else. He agreed and further agreed Lawnboy needed some training, which he left up to me. The next event was that Lawnboy was over mowing our grass, and I was in the garage, working on my electric dumbwaiter project (yet another story) and thinking how I was going to permanently correct this problem. Working with wood in my garage, I got an idea. I cut two scraps about 6 inches long. When the mowing was done, the young man came over to see me.

I introduced him to the scraps of wood. I explained to him that although he had been in the Boy Scouts and may have been familiar with fire sticks, I had a new meaning for this nom de gar. One stick was for him and one was for me. I told him I would be taking my stick out in the yard occasionally, and he should plan on doing so himself, for if I find the grass taller than the stick, he is fired, hence; "fire stick." I then had him summon his dad over for a repeat of the explanation. Dad was delighted, asked me to drill a hole in son's copy of the fire stick so they could hang it in their garage, next to the back door, as a reminder.

Do you have someone for whom you need to make a “fire stick?” It most likely will not be for the purpose of mowing grass and hence will take on a figurative meaning, but there may be a subordinate in your charge needing same. I caution you, of course, to operate within the guidelines of your human resources department, but that should not deter you from doing what needs to be done.

Most likely you have been delaying this step, for it is unpleasant for most of us. Yet, if needed you must do it. It is your fiduciary duty to keep only the productive working for your company.

For safety this week, let’s talk about real fire. When was the last time your safety meeting focused on fire prevention and fire safety?

Be safe and we will talk next week. ##