

PIPELINE

piping systems inc.

COMMERCIAL/INDUSTRIAL/INSTITUTIONAL MECHANICAL CONTRACTORS

WINTER 2012

Mulch & Fire

Piping Systems, Inc. has been a member of the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) for several years. As a member, we receive a monthly publication entitled NFPA Journal. In October 2011, the magazine printed a Special Bonus Issue: NFPA + Wildfire. In that issue, I came across an article, "Mulch + Fire," written by Marty Ahrens, that I found very interesting. Although we may not all have a fire protection system installed in our business or our home, we are all familiar with mulch. To view the complete report, log on to nfpa.org/brush.

Mulch fires are attracting increased attention. As more homes and businesses ban indoor smoking, a larger share of smoking is done outside. Too often, discarded cigarettes end up in the landscaping mulch, leaves, or vegetation. In a March 2008 *Fire Engineering* article, Mark Finucane wrote that the Johnston City, Tennessee Fire Department responds to an average of 100 mulch fires per year. Burning mulch was sometimes right next to a building and could ignite the underside of the structure's siding and spread into the structure. Large piles of mulch can spontaneously ignite.

In 2010, the Massachusetts Department of Fire Services issued a press release reminding people to keep smoking materials out of bark mulch. Massachusetts had 184 fires in the past five years that began with mulch and spread to buildings. A 2008 Massachusetts mulch fire caused \$5 million in damage to a sprinklered apartment building and permanently displaced 36 residents.

Heat sources were analyzed in brush, grass, and forest fires beginning with two types of material that could be mulch: a) wood chips, sawdust, and shavings; and b) hay or straw. Smoking materials started half (48%) the fires that began with wood chips, sawdust, or shavings, compared to 14% that began with hay or straw. Hot embers or ashes were common heat sources for both hay or straw and wood chips.

In general, fires starting with hay or straw were more likely than wood chips, sawdust or shavings to have had a flaming ignition source such as matches (16% vs. 3%), lighters (6% vs. 3%), and fireworks (6% vs. 1%). Arcing was also a more frequent

heat sources in hay or straw fires (5% vs. 1%). An unclassified hot or smoldering object was the heat source in only 5% of the hay or straw fires compared to 13% of the wood chips, sawdust, or shavings fires.

In a 2003 *Journal of Arboriculture* article, Steward, Sydnor and Bishop described how 13 landscape mulches were ignited by cigarettes, matches, and a propane torch. Ground recycled pallets, composted yard waste, and shredded pine bark were the most easily ignited by cigarettes.

Decorative ground rubber, pine straw, and oat straw were the most easily ignited by the propane torch. Weathering increased the ignitability of some mulches and decrease others.

In their 2007 paper on mulch flammability, Zipperer, Long, Hinton, Maranghides and Mell studied four mulches: pine straw, shredded cypress wood and bark, small pine bark chunks, and large pine bark chunks under laboratory and field conditions. Pine straw was easiest to ignite.

The large pine bark and pine straw produced large amounts of heat and had high rates of consumption. However, the pine straw burned for the shortest length of time. The authors noted that "each one of the tested mulches burned and none are 100% safe. Mulch should not be used next to flammable material or vinyl surfaces on buildings... Only decorative gravel or stones or some other non-flammable material should be used immediately adjacent to the home."

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A 2008 mulch fire in Massachusetts caused \$5 million in damage to a sprinklered apartment building and permanently displaced 36 residents.



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Get More Energy Throughout The Workday

Maintaining your energy level all day can feel like an insurmountable challenge. Don't ignore physical or mental fatigue, but don't surrender to it, either. Try these tactics for recharging:

- **Move around.** Take a walk, even if it's just a quick stroll around your office several times throughout the day. Getting your blood flowing speeds delivery of oxygen and nutrients to your body.
- **Take a deep breath.** Several, actually. Sit up straight to open your chest cavity and get more oxygen into your lungs. Here's an exercise: Breathe out through your mouth completely. Then inhale through your nose for four seconds. Hold it in for seven seconds, and then exhale for a count of eight seconds. Do this four times to refresh yourself.
- **Drink sufficient fluids.** Water, like air, delivers oxygen throughout your body. If you're dehydrated, you'll feel tired. Drink plenty of water or a low-calorie sports drink.
- **Get outside.** Sunshine and fresh air can have a rejuvenating effect, along with the exercise benefits of taking a short walk.



- **Learn something new.** Spend a few minutes with a book or on the Internet researching a subject that's really interesting to you. You'll stimulate your mind and make new mental connections.

Beyond "Bow-Wow"

Yeah, we all know you've got the smartest dog in the world—but scientists at Wofford College in South Carolina say they've trained a border collie to recognize the names of 1,022 objects and distinguish those names from orders to fetch them.

In one experiment, the researchers randomly combined objects with specific commands to test whether the pooch, named Chaser, would follow the right command with the right object. Chaser responded to each combination correctly right away, suggesting that she understands that nouns and commands have separate meanings.

Chaser also apparently understood the concept of categories. She was taught that the word "toy" referred to all the 1,022 objects she was allowed to play with, while keeping the individual objects straight, and was able to add a third category like "ball" or "Frisbee" to the category-name combination.

Of course, no dog is as cute as yours...

Home Work

About 2.9 million U.S. workers telecommute on a regular basis—but 50 million want to do so. That comes from a recent white paper by the Telework Research Network, which reports that from 2005 to 2009, the number of employees telecommuting on a regular basis increased by 61%. The rate of growth has been highest among federal employees (407%) and state workers (88%), although private-sector employees represent the greatest increase in raw numbers.

The white paper estimates that those 2.9 million telecommuters save 390 million gallons of gasoline each year, reducing the release of greenhouse gases into the air by 3.6 million tons. In addition, the report states that telecommuting can save employers up to \$13,000 per teleworker a year and can cut absenteeism by 25%.

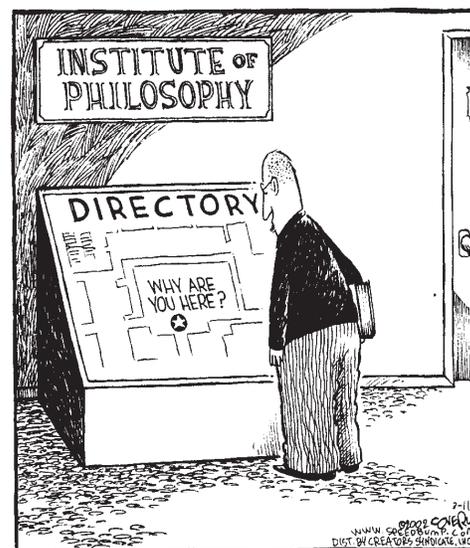
Debunking The Myths Of Ingenuity

Creativity isn't some mysterious process like sorcery or quantum physics, but many people have misconceptions that limit their ability to be creative. Don't sell yourself short. Reject these myths about creativity:

- **People are born creative.** Creativity isn't genetic or inborn. Most of us can generate creative ideas if we're open to the process.
- **Pressure stimulates creativity.** Deadlines (or rewards) can sometimes give you a nudge, but in general, pressure interferes with concentration and an open mind.
- **Creative ideas spring fully-formed from the brain.** We've all heard of people solving complex problems in a single flash of genius (the "Mozart Effect"), but most of the time creativity is the result of long hours and hard work, not a single stroke of insight.
- **Competition beats collaboration.** There's widespread belief that internal competition fosters innovation. However, studies have found that creativity takes a hit when people compete. Conversely, the sharing and debating of ideas encourages creativity.
- **Older people aren't creative.** Child prodigies and twenty-something geniuses don't have a monopoly. People can retain their creative powers throughout their lives if they keep using their brains actively.

SPEED BUMP

Dave Coverly



Create The Brand You Were Meant To Be

The concept of personal branding may have been born in 1997, with Tom Peters' article "The Brand Called You" in *Fast Company* magazine. Even if it predates Peters, it's become a legitimate career practice employed by entrepreneurs, CEOs, and even regular workers who want to distinguish themselves from the pack.

Take charge of your career—and your life—by constructing your very own personal brand. Just put these steps into action:

- **Identify your passion.** Your brand won't stand the test of time unless it's based on something you feel strongly about and want to do for the rest of your life.
- **Specialize.** Plant your banner in a niche that's narrow enough for you to stand out in. Look at what you already do better than anyone else, and concentrate on keeping your skills sharp in that area.
- **Market yourself.** Position yourself as a service provider. Let your manager and co-workers know what you're capable of and what you want to do. Think of yourself as a CEO, even though you have an employer. Your career is ultimately your responsibility, after all.
- **Keep a scorecard.** You know that setting goals is important to your career progress, right? Decide what you want your brand to accomplish, and establish some milestones—your next promotion, a new client, a completed project, etc. Track your brand's success over time.

Explain The True Value Of Employee Benefits

Do you get frustrated when members of your workforce don't understand the value of all the benefits your company provides? The real problem may be that you haven't effectively communicated that value to them.

Here are some tips for explaining benefits clearly:

- **Spell out the costs.** When you hire people, or review their salaries during the evaluation process, make sure they see in black and white just how much money benefits like insurance and pension plan contributions cost the company. Help them understand that a compensation package includes far more than a salary.
- **Keep things simple.** The financial details can get complicated, so simplify the terms you use when explaining benefits to your workers. Check with knowledgeable sources in your HR department when you're not sure what to say.
- **Provide the right benefits.** Employees won't care how much a benefit costs if they're not interested in it. Different employees have different needs. Find out which benefits your employees really want, and if possible, set up a cafeteria-style program that lets employees choose the benefits they'll use and value.

Get Better Answers From Job Candidates

When you're interviewing employee candidates, you've got to probe a little if you want to get a good idea of what makes them tick. Here are three sure-fire ways to draw more revealing answers:

- **"Can you give me another example?"** This question is good to use, whether you're dissatisfied with the first answer and need more information or you're fascinated by the answer and want to hear more.
- **"What did you learn from that experience?"** This question can give you a good handle on a job candidate's judgment and maturity. And it buys you more thinking and planning time for your next question.
- **Silence.** Don't follow up with another question right away once the candidate has finished answering. After a few moments of dead silence, most candidates will say something more just to fill the void. And what they say may reveal a lot.



Who invented the mercury thermometer?

Trivial Matters

- 1) Which of these U.S. cities never served as the nation's capital?
a) Philadelphia
b) New York
c) Boston
d) Washington
- 2) Which of these particles of matter has a negative charge?
a) proton
b) neutron
c) electron
d) neutrino
- 3) Which type of artisan commonly employs a kick wheel?
a) potter
b) carpenter
c) diamond cutter
d) glassblower
- 4) Who invented the mercury thermometer?
a) Anders Celsius
b) William Kelvin
c) Daniel Fahrenheit
d) Galileo Galilei
- 5) *Sable*, *corkscrew* and *sickle* are terms used to describe which part of a dog's body?
a) tongue
b) ears
c) hair
d) tail

—from *mental_floss*

Answers: 1) c; 2) c; 3) a; 4) c; 5) d.

Safety: Everyone's Full-Time Job

Piping Systems, Inc. was once again honored to receive the Silver Safety Training and Evaluation Process (STEP) Award in recognition of the "company's Silver Level of achievement and its ongoing efforts in the development of a quality safety program for 2011."

The STEP Awards were established by Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC), a national association with 75 chapters representing 23,000 Merit Shop construction and construction-related firms with nearly two million employees. ABC's membership represents all specialties within the U.S. construction industry and is comprised primarily of firms that perform work in the industrial and commercial sectors of the industry.

STEP was created in 1989 by the ABC National Environment, Health & Safety Committee to recognize ABC member companies with exceptional safety records. There are six levels of achievement in the STEP program: Participant, Bronze, Silver, Gold, Platinum and Diamond. Piping Systems has applied for and received a STEP award every year since 2003.

When you hire Piping Systems, Inc., you can feel confident that our technicians are fully trained in safe work practices, minimizing downtime at your location because of accident-related delays and ultimately saving you money as a result of reduced insurance costs.



We're doing our part. This newsletter is printed on environmentally-friendly paper—50% recycled, using 25% post-consumer waste, and is composed of a mixture of fibers from certified forests, post-consumer recycling processes and fibers from other controlled sources.

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