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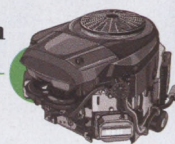
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Brian Horn

Editor | Lawn & Landscape

Don't let
rejection or
mistakes
kill your
optimism.

Keep the glass half full

I'm writing this column from Dayton, Ohio, on one of the stops on the 2019 Turnaround Tour. As I scraped the ice from freezing rain off my car to head over to one of the winners – Brunner's Lawn and Services – this morning, I was thinking about the start of winter here in the Midwest.

And with winter, my mind goes to New Year's resolutions and the optimism that surrounds them as we turn the calendar to the next year. I've never been one to set those resolutions, but I'm envious of people who have the optimism to set them, and even better, follow through.

So what does this have to do with the Turnaround Tour, which you can read more about on page 26?

The participants signed up for the project through Lawn & Landscape to work with the Harvest Group, an industry consultant group, to solve problems that have stopped them from reaching their potential. The idea is with some consulting, they can break through to the next level.

When we started 2018 visits in November and December of 2017, there was

tons of optimism from everyone involved. Plans are made, goals are set and everyone is "rah-rah" to start the season.

But, of course, as the year goes on, reality sets in, problems come up and that sunny optimism turns into, well, freezing rain.

But as the companies in 2019's Turnaround Tour hit speed bumps and fall short of daily, weekly and monthly goals, I hope they maintain the optimism they have right now. The same goes for you as you start the new year with personal and professional goals. Don't let rejection or mistakes kill your optimism.

As I make mistakes individually, or we make collectively as a magazine, I take a few minutes to realize what could have been done differently. But then I think about a few things we've done well as a way to not dwell on the mistakes we just made.

For me, it's a way to avoid getting stuck in a rut.

So as problems arise in 2019, put the rain gear in the closet and keep the sunglasses nearby because learning from your failures will provide you sunshine in 2019. — *Brian Horn*

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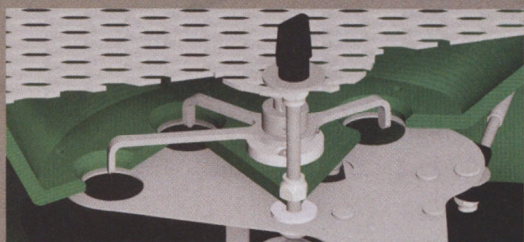
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TRAVELS WITH JIM

follows Jim Huston around the country as he visits with landscapers and helps them understand their numbers to make smarter decisions.

'ROUND AND 'ROUND

- **I'VE DRIVEN MORE THAN 1 MILLION MILES** as I've consulted with clients throughout North America these last 32 years. Three deer, numerous birds and a couple of groundhogs joined the ride along the way and helped me total two pickup trucks as well a brand-new Hertz rental Volvo. My objective in all of this driving was to keep the wheels on my vehicle going 'round and 'round in the right direction and underneath it. Unfortunately for my animal "hitch-hiker" friends, this wasn't always the case.

GET THE RIGHT PEOPLE ON THE BUS.

Rob and Michelle Munn were looking for a vehicle to help them achieve their financial goals. They purchased a residential landscape maintenance company, English Garden Care, near Sacramento, California, to help them do so. Having no experience in the landscape industry, their "wheels" weren't always going in the right direction and their ride was a bit chaotic at times. It was challenging, to say the least, and it brings to mind the lyrics of the song, "Take It Easy" by the Eagles: "Don't let the sound of your own wheels drive you crazy."

First, they realized that the residential maintenance market wasn't best suited to them and their goals. They began a painful process to transition to the commercial maintenance market. This took a number of years, but they did it successfully. As they did so, they realized that they needed to implement Jim Collin's sage advice from his book, "Good to Great."

"... (L)eaders of companies that go from good to great start not with 'where' but with 'who.' They start by getting the right people on the bus, the wrong people off the bus and the right people in the right seats. And they stick with that



JIM HUSTON
runs J.R. Huston Consulting, a green industry consulting firm.

discipline – first the people, then the direction – no matter how dire the circumstances."

It was also at this point that I began to work with Rob and Michelle.

Few of the people who started with Rob and Michelle lasted and personnel changes had to be made. Making those changes wasn't fun but it was necessary. The existing account managers had to be replaced with ones who were willing to change and grow with the new management team and its direction. The same occurred with a number of the crew leaders. As uncomfortable as it was, Rob and Michelle knew that they had to get the right team in place.

Next, I helped them implement accurate benchmarking, budgeting and bidding. As I worked with the new owners, we benchmarked the business by means of a detailed budget and properly formatted P&L statement. Once these were in place, we made sure that bids were sufficiently detailed and accurate.

the changes and the accompanying chaos were extremely challenging to deal with. Add the fact that not only were Rob and Michelle raising three daughters during, but they also had to deal with a cancer battle.


The Munns knew that running a small business was not for the faint of heart. They were neither intimidated nor deterred by challenging circumstances as they faced some brutal setbacks and made the necessary changes to turn things around.

GET TOUGH. How's your financial vehicle doing? Is it taking you to your desired destination or are you letting its wheels "drive you crazy?" If you aren't getting the results you desire, be like the Munns. Show your grit! First, face the facts, then be creative to find and implement a solution that works.

If you're not achieving the goals that you desire, be like Rob and Michelle. Face the situation, be creative and get help. If you do, you might be surprised at what lies just around the next bend or two. **L&L**

The Munns took to all of this with enthusiasm and over a five- to six-year period saw their entire company transform from one going in the wrong market with the wrong people and the wrong results to one that provided good profits in the right market with the right people. All of





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WORDS OF WILSON features a rotating panel of consultants from Bruce Wilson & Company, a landscape consulting firm.



BEFORE YOU EXPAND

- **IF YOU'RE LIKE MOST LANDSCAPE BUSINESS OWNERS**, you still have an entrepreneurial streak that not only got you where you are today but continues to drive your enthusiasm for action. And if business is so good you've outgrown your facility, there's no action bigger than opening a second location.

Growing your service footprint, opening up a satellite yard and launching a full-fledged branch office can all be effective ways to become more profitable. But it's far from easy. Expanding takes a lot of preparation and, just like buying a new home, location, value and ROI are everything. If you're bursting at the seams, a word of caution: Think before you leap.

DO YOU HAVE A PLAN? If you have a long-term business plan or strategy with specific growth goals, you're already ahead of the game. But even if you don't (and you should), you need to measure the strength of your existing business. Is your current operation profitable and generating positive cash flow? Can what works at your home office



BRUCE WILSON is principal of green industry consulting firm Bruce Wilson & Company.

– the behavior and characteristics of your culture and service model – work at a new location with equal strength? What's the profile of the existing competition? Can you staff a new location with qualified talent without compromising your ability to generate and sustain quality across the whole of your business? How long will it take you to capture sales and become financially sustainable in your new location?

HAVE YOU DONE YOUR HOME-WORK? Research is an opportunity to be strategic and confirm

objectively what you think you know. Survey your customers for feedback so growth is aligned with their needs. Perform an analysis of your competition to more fully understand gaps you can fill and demands not met by competition you can deliver to fill the void.

DO YOU HAVE THE MONEY? Assess your financial situation to see if you need funding sources, outside investors or financing to support expansion. Opening a new office can be disruptive to current business and you'll need sufficient cash flow to carry the project through its ramp-up phase. Understand the impact of expansion on HR and your legal and internal resources. And make sure the risk vs. reward case and the hidden costs of running a

second business are well considered. A satellite location may not need administrative support on site, for example, but a branch does.

ARE YOU READY TO DELEGATE?

You can't be in two places at once. Can you afford to move some of your senior executives away from your current operation to drive readiness initiatives for a new location? Are you comfortable with having a second-in-command, a new partner or a new manager? Can you replicate your workplace culture, systems and processes across new locations and new employees? As an owner and 'chief vision and inspiration officer,' your presence at the new office is critical in the early phase as a transition and morale booster. But by delegating leadership, you're also empowering your new site's team to run with the ball.

DO YOU HAVE SYSTEMS IN PLACE?

Determine how the new location will be staffed and supported, and have an organizational chart in place for reporting and accountability. The logistics required to manage more than one site require integrated technology infrastructure, state-of-the-art back end software and a virtual communications plan to stay on top of workplace and customer issues.

Unless your business is performing profitably at a high level and you have a strong relationships and favorable market data in place, don't rush. Think instead about a satellite yard or a service or operations hub as an interim step. Use the time to scale up strategically, build a deeper bench, grow your profits and put great systems in place to ensure that the best practices you use in running your 'home' location can drive your new location toward greater success. **L&L**



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SAFE SPACE

• **THE TOPIC OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT** is back in the news with more publicity than ever before. High-profile individuals like Harvey Weinstein, Les Moonves and Al Franken have re-illustrated the importance of understanding sexual harassment across myriad contexts, methods and victims.

Notwithstanding its social stigma and personal impact, it is important to restate the fact that at its legislative core, sexual harassment is an aspect of sexual discrimination, which directly violates Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

Whether it's quid pro quo or a hostile work environment, all types of sexual harassment are illegal at both the state and federal levels, putting individuals and organizations at considerable risk. In response, many organizations have drafted detailed sexual harassment policies, instituted legally compliant training programs and secured comprehensive employment practices liability insurance policies. These are all ways to pledge to provide a safe, discrimination-free environment for all employees.

WORKPLACE HARASSMENT.

"Sexual" harassment now commonly falls under the umbrella of "workplace" harassment. For example, workplace harassment



STEVE CESARE is the Harvest Group's expert for human resources and safety. He has more than 25 years of HR experience.

now covers the following types of harassment: discriminatory, physical, psychological, third-party, retaliation, personal, power, on-line, verbal and, of course, sexual.

Organizations have strengthened their affirmative defenses by broadening their workplace harassment training strategies, administrative policies and managerial awareness.

Due to this heightened cultural awareness, many companies now include questions about workplace harassment as part of their selection interview protocols, present extensive reporting procedures in their employee handbooks and craft comprehensive workplace harassment prevention and investigation guidelines.

WORKPLACE VIOLENCE. While not yet formalized, the steady trend suggests that bullying may soon become a precursor to violence in the workplace. With that seemingly inevitable causal progression in mind, insightful organizations are choosing to address the root causes of this proactively, instead of awaiting potentially detrimental outcomes.

BEST PRACTICES. Organizations successful in preventing sexual harassment are led by stalwart executives who routinely take public stands against all acts of discrimination, harassment, bullying and violence, as conveyed during new employee orientation sessions, all-hands meetings and supervisory skills training events.

Secondly, these companies possess clear policies, procedures and core values designed to eliminate any instance of disrespectful behavior. Next,

these companies take great pride in providing interactive training articulating the legal foundations, formal definitions, behavioral examples, desired response sets and unforgiving consequences associated with such unwanted behavior.

And finally, these companies uniformly hold all employees, business partners, customers and vendors accountable for their actions – actions which must treat all employees with sincere respect at all times.

Regardless of the type of incident, organizations must always have an appropriate response system in place. Failure to do so implies negligence.

Specifically, the company employee handbook should outline the exact steps for reporting any such incident to human resources or a company executive, and guide employees to state and federal agencies for information and support.

Organizations should have written investigative procedures necessary to collect, evaluate and document all relevant facts of each claim in a fair, thorough and timely manner. The entire investigation should be reviewed by the company management team.

Additionally, adept organizations will possess employment practices liability insurance to serve as legal defense if the response procedures yield an ineffective outcome.

In closing, it is obvious that the once-singular topic of sexual harassment has transformed into a multi-dimensional theme that can no longer be dismissed as a joke, simple misunderstanding or casual contact. It is the business owner's responsibility to assume a leadership role on this issue by addressing it holistically, strategically and sincerely as a system for protecting their employees, their organizations and their reputations. **L&L**



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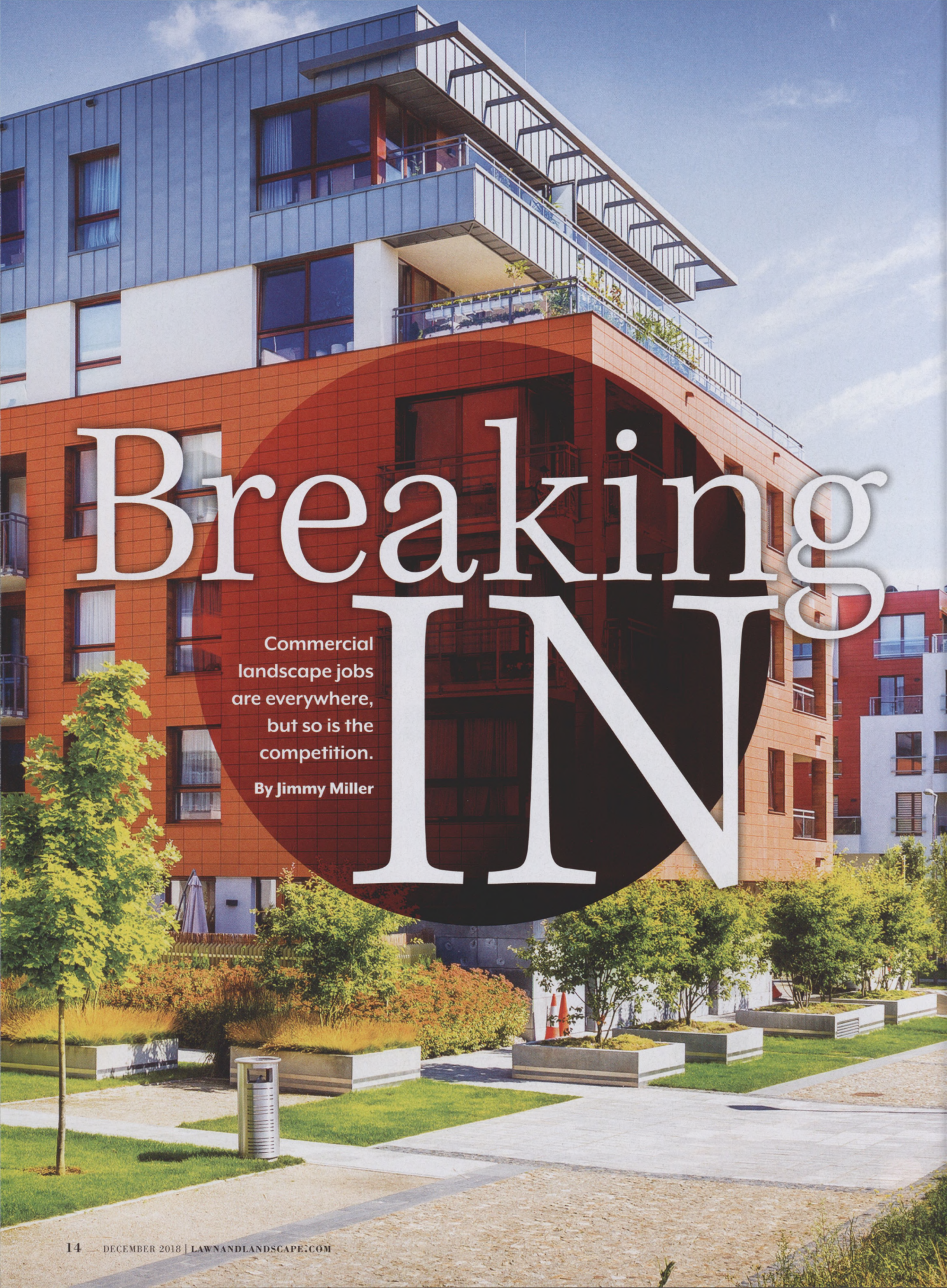


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HONDA



Breaking IN

Commercial
landscape jobs
are everywhere,
but so is the
competition.

By Jimmy Miller

As commercial property managers incessantly handle daily responsibilities, the last thing they want to take care of is a minor landscaping hiccup.

That's what Marc Fisher says. Fisher, president and CEO of InspiRE Commercial Real Estate Services, has worked as a property manager for over 25 years.

"You want to be a solution provider," Fisher says. "What you really want to talk about is how you can reduce headaches."

Commercial landscaping can be quite lucrative, but it comes with responsibilities and challenges unseen in residential work. For one, there's plenty of competition because the jobs are highly desired. One contract alone could be worth more than \$100,000.

Then there are the heightened expectations that accompany large-scale jobs. Property managers might meticulously demand the highest quality from your crew.

Still, if property managers can trust your company to take landscaping concerns off their plates, chances are good you can land and successfully manage the jobs. "This is a relationship business, just like anything else," Fisher says.

IDENTIFYING THE RIGHT CLIENTS. The first step to landing a potential commercial client is figuring out exactly what kind of property you can service. Finding the right match can be tricky. Each type of property has different objectives, so the landscaping needs will vary between accounts. A hospital,

for instance, will likely demand more from its landscaper than a "blow and mow" apartment complex just looking to keep the lawns clean.

It's best to be realistic with yourself before making the pitch. Fisher says one size of service does not fit all, as smaller landscaping companies without enough labor or equipment may not be able to service a top-level property that demands keen attention to detail.

If you're thinking about getting into commercial landscaping, close your eyes, take a picture and find out what that means to you, Fisher says. "Rather than just go to a meeting and approach different potential clients, I think it's important to really think about what are your skill sets, and where do you fit into the commercial marketplace?"

MAKING THE BID. Understanding what a company wants is especially important when you're submitting a bid. While every company will initially ask about cost, potential clients might care more about the appearance or quality of the final product than the price tag. Some clients might want you to run everything by them first, while others might ask that you just take care of problems, like a dead tree, and alert them later.

Small details can set you apart from your competition. For example, if a company's mission statement includes a line about sustainability, it wouldn't

hurt to include an explanation of how your company stays sustainable, too. Maybe you mulch excessive waste, or perhaps you can point out how your crews limit water use in irrigation.

"You really need to do your homework about every single opportunity that's presented in front of you," Fisher says.

RETAINING BUSINESS. Fisher says quality service is the best

way to keep the job. He says at the lowest level of a buyer-seller relationship, there's little loyalty involved at all. Meanwhile, at the highest level of buying, which Fisher tabs "joint planning," it's all about value and trust. The buyer and seller collaborate on a shared vision, and price is no longer a concern.

"I think one of the most important things to do is to put in your mind this mantra of, 'If

(you) owned or managed the building, what would you do?'" Fisher says. "That's the way you want to approach almost every building you're responsible for."

Fisher also says that when you're first entering the commercial industry, you may need to take a job that doesn't make a profit or even take a loss simply to build trust.

People talk, Fisher says, and when you've done a quality job

and built a lasting relationship with a property manager, new jobs could open up to you elsewhere.

If a manager leaves to take another job, you could follow them to that new business. You could even ask managers to recommend your landscaping company to other businesses, although Fisher says that may already begin happening after you've established a relationship.

Fisher adds that another great



Meet your **MARKET**

Find ways to get out in front of current and potential customers to boost your business.

By Lauren Rathmell

SIX DEGREES OF KEVIN BACON:

In the same way that almost every actor is somehow connected to Kevin Bacon, Marc Fisher says getting on LinkedIn helps him because he always knows somebody tied to the person he needs to reach.

thing to do is to get plugged in on LinkedIn. He compares his list of connections to the game Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon. Much like how every actor is in some way connected to Bacon, Fisher always knows somebody who is tied to the person he needs to reach.

"I just have to dig hard enough to find what that connection is," Fisher says.

Ultimately, Fisher acknowledges it's not always easy to make and keep connections. Sometimes it takes extra steps like showing up at HOA meetings or small courtesies, such as ensuring your crew turns down blowers when

people at those properties pass by.

Still, going the extra mile will go a long way to landing your dream commercial accounts and keeping customers happy.

"You may be trying to get into that contract, and you may be unseating somebody who has been in that contract for 10 years," Fisher says. "There's relationships that have been built; there's connectivity that has been built. This is not something that's going to be that you decide tomorrow and get a \$200,000 contract ... It's going to take a lot of work to get to that point." ●

BOB GROVER, president of Pacific Landscape Management in Portland, Oregon, says he's cheap, but with a customer base primarily made up of large commercial accounts, it's come in handy with marketing strategies.

"We don't advertise," he says. "We're trying to get our message out with interactions through people." For a landscaping business that has a focus on commercial accounts, Grover suggests a healthy mix of self-promotion, networking and dedication to enhancing marketing efforts.

"I like to try to find things that I can do that are effective that don't (cost) money, so that I can spend money working on my service or potentially creating a profit for my organization," he says.

If you want people to think you're great, Grover says you probably have to tell them. And he doesn't worry that it might come across as arrogant. "You can do it in a variety of ways, and it's usually pretty free," he says. "If you do good work and no one knows you're doing good work, it's really hard to get credit for it."

Through this type of self-promotion marketing, Grover has been able to get his company recognized on the street, in industry magazines and on popular business lists.

BE VISIBLE. "The first thing I did – the first truck I bought – I created a brand with it,"

he says. "Whether it's your truck or your uniforms, do something that makes you visible."

Pacific Landscape Management is known for its orange branding from the trucks, to the uniforms to even some of the equipment. Grover's "team orange" strategy has led people to recognize his company as they drive from job to job.

"We refer to ourselves as 'team orange' because everything we do is around that orange color. It was our most identifiable trait early on," he says. Grover says that some of the larger national companies are transitioning to a color-focused solution for their vehicle branding too.

The orange theme doesn't end there. At marketing events, the company hands out oranges or orange candy. "Halloween is our favorite holiday," he says. "We can find and buy a lot of orange things to hand out."

The company even carries the color scheme into its proposals. Grover says he saves money by using a publishing software to design marketing materials and proposals.

"Today, everyone's got a color copy machine in the office," he says. "And I'm not even a super high-tech guy." Grover says the proposals at Pacific Landscape Management focus on images and colors, since that's what catches the attention of clients.

The company has even implemented a newsletter, and as technology has improved, it



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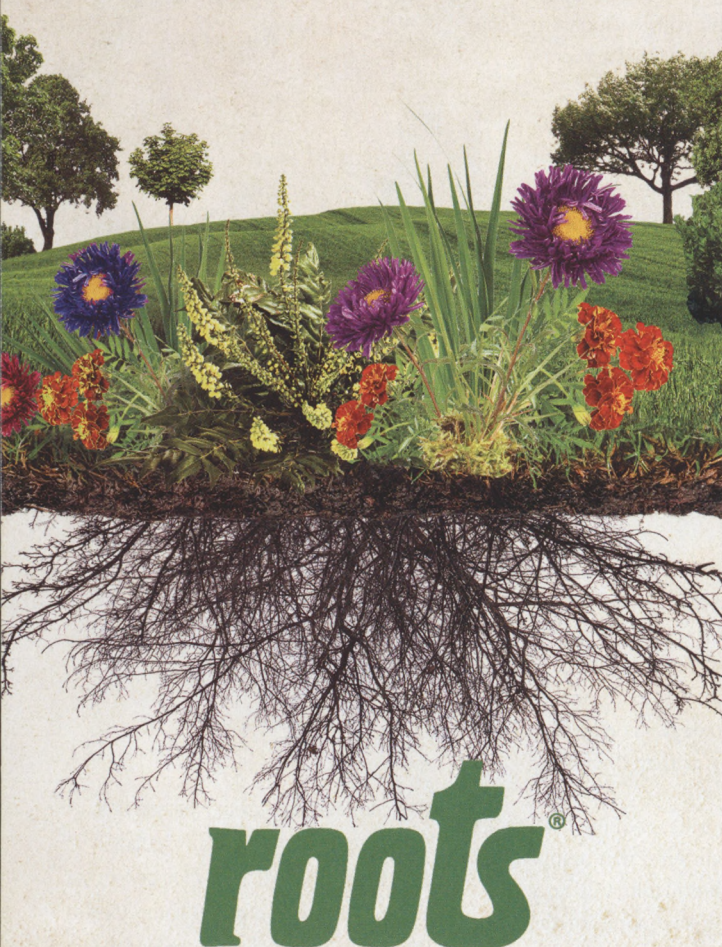
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GOING COMMERCIAL: MARKETING

has been adapted to keep up with the push toward digital content.

"We've had a newsletter since the beginning," he says. "Early on, it was printed. We paid to have it printed but then started printing it ourselves, but it's all been focused on color. We've gone to an online weekly newsletter, and I try to make sure that our logo is at the top with a picture and a headline. I'm not sure people scan down below the preview screen, so I want them to get the idea of what I'm trying to say through the visualization."

GO WHERE YOUR CLIENTS ARE. Being visible isn't just about a bright color scheme. Grover dedicates a lot of time to attending community events and board meetings. In order to narrow down the best places to dedicate time, Grover found out where ideal clients spent most of their time.

Most of Pacific Landscape Management's customers belong to the Institute of Real Estate Management (IREM). Grover says when attending IREM events, sometimes existing clients can introduce him to potential new clients, which can be a hard barrier to break through in the commercial sector. Another useful organization Grover pays attention to is the Building Owners and Managers Association.

"BOMA is a close second (to IREM) for us," he says. "There are a lot of property managers."

He also tries to get involved in events and associations that will draw a lot of facility managers. Attending expositions and trade-shows will help get face time with potential clients. Grover has even participated in golf tournaments and monthly meetings.

While at these events, Grover always makes a point to seek out the most important person in the room and introduce himself.

Outside of the industry, it's also worthwhile to get involved with the local chamber of commerce.

"You can't just join the organization," he says. "You have to be involved, go to their events and get involved in the communities."

BRING CLIENTS TO YOU. Showing your clients appreciation throughout the year can have a lasting impact. At Pacific Landscape Management, the team hosts social events where the clients get to be the guests.

Grover has found "lunch and learns" to be a hit.

"We tell them we can come in and help them and their property managers learn a little bit more about landscaping," he says. "So we bring them to lunch and it's a really great one-on-one with an individual property management group."

Happy hour events have also served the company well. Grover says they probably host two happy hours for every lunch and learn.

And, while it takes a bit more time and organization, Pacific Landscape Management also hosts a wine tour for its customers. The company provides a bus to a winery and spend the afternoon networking and tasting wine.

Hosting an open house draws a lot of people, too. It gives them a chance to show off and clients get to see first-hand how Pacific Landscape Management operates.

"I try to make it a social event," Grover says. "It's an excuse to get (clients) to come out and we can get a little bit of credit for the things we do." ●

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GOING COMMERCIAL: CUSTOMER LOYALTY

Brand loyalty

Everybody wants good customer relationships but cultivating them requires a long-term plan. **By Jimmy Miller**

ESTABLISHING CUSTOMER loyalty is like planting a tree. It's all about the long-term vision, says Pam Stark.

Stark has amassed more than 40 years of experience in the green industry. Now a consultant with Bruce Wilson & Company, she says forging the right bonds with customers takes forward-thinking leadership and great company culture.

"In order to be successful, you have to have a plan. You have to execute and you have to continuously manage that growing plant or that growing relationship," Stark says.

Stark says she always measures how successful her company's relationships are with clients based on what they write on reviews, even those that are anonymous.

Clients have written things like, "The relationships and trust built are the main reasons I enjoy working with your company," and "I like knowing that my assets are getting looked after."

These satisfied customers tend to be more forgiving during mishaps, especially if mistakes are rare, and they don't bid out work at the end of each contract, opting instead to stay with your company. Stark says company owners should know who their most loyal customers are.

"As owners of the business or as team leaders of the business, you should be catching your customers frequently in terms of communicating with them and trying to get a

read on exactly how you're feeling about your company," Stark says.

ESTABLISHING TRUST. There is a difference between loyalty and trust, Stark says. In this context, trust is the customer's belief that you will operate your company with honesty, integrity and character. Trust isn't just given — it's earned. And once a customer trusts you enough, they'll show your company unwavering loyalty with complete and constant support for your product.

"There's a lot that goes into trust," Stark says. "It requires some investment."

It's all easier said than done, she says. Most company owners would say they want customer loyalty, but exactly how to reach that goal isn't immediately clear. Stark says companies should build relationships gradually by evolving from a pure supplier level to a trusted adviser.

Stark says that at first, the professional relationship is strictly about goods and services, but then smart companies will focus on the client's business-specific needs before proceeding to more of a personal relationship.


Figure out what's going on in the clients' lives, like what types of pressures they face from their bosses or what kinds of small things you can take care of as their trusted adviser.

The work is never done when building these relationships, Stark says. Clients are constantly evaluating your worth relative to the competition, so it's vital to maintain your status as a trusted adviser once you get there.

"When you're striving to build a book of business of loyal commercial landscape contractors, you have to know that you never really get there in terms of the end result," Stark says. "You're constantly being challenged to understand how you can add greater value to a customer relationship."

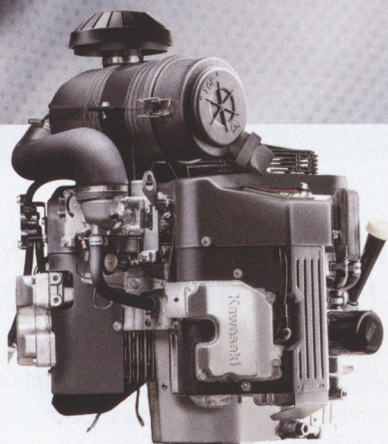
“Culture is like trying to nail Jell-O to a wall. It's kind of squishy and hard to put your finger on.”

PAM STARK, consultant, Bruce Wilson & Co.



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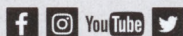


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START AT HOME. Stark says one of the most difficult parts of creating strong bonds with clients is establishing your own company culture. A client only sees so much of your company during interactions, but Stark compares company culture to the tip of an iceberg.

"Culture is like trying to nail Jell-O to a wall. It's kind of squishy and hard to put your finger on," Stark says. "But it's basically the beliefs and the processes, ways that you do business that underlie what the customer sees and experiences."

Stark says if you need to see your business through the eyes of the customer. What does your company look like to clients?

Making expectations clear to your employees and setting policies for client interactions is important, Stark says. For instance, creating a rule that asks employees to call clients back within a set number of hours helps ensure the customer feels valued. Consistently evaluating your employees is necessary, too, so you can benchmark your company's progress in creating a culture that truly focuses on the client first.

"It's important that the customer-facing employee ... understands how they're being measured and how they're being held accountable," Stark says.

Stark also says companies should be proactive with clients rather than reactive, approaching and handling potential problems or tasks before they even arise. She adds that you should recognize the problems each of your clients face and try to consider them in your decision-making process. For example, if hotels want their landscaping done on weekends to create a welcoming atmosphere for guests but your company only services early in the week, you're not offering client-specific help that's essential in establishing loyalty.

Ultimately, Stark says creating a sound commercial culture comes down to a company's leadership. Just as loyalty comes down to how much clients trust companies, changes to a company's culture all depend on how much the employees trust their bosses. This culture is vital to retaining key clients in your commercial portfolio, Stark says.

"You can (be) all fired up and ready to make things happen, but if the culture back in your organization does not support a focus on the customer, you're not going to get very far," Stark says. ●

LAUNCHING INTO COMMERCIAL ACCOUNTS

Switching to commercial clients involves a series of small tweaks that can lead to big accounts.

By Lauren Rathmell

WHETHER YOU'RE A seasoned commercial maintenance company or a residential company considering taking on some commercial clients, one thing is certain: You need to have a solid plan in place. Bruce Moore Sr., chairman and CEO of Eastern Land Management, says commercial business is a popular venture because it offers businesses a recurring revenue stream.

"It's not totally recession-proof, but it does give you some security and strength in your overall financial health," he says.

Moore got into the commercial aspect of the business because, frankly, he wasn't thrilled with the demands that his residential client base was making. He didn't enjoy taking calls at 8 p.m. or missing out on time with his family. He realized the commercial sector involved companies that had regular 9 to 5 schedules.

"When they left to go home for the night, they were done for the day," Moore says. "They weren't interested in calling their service provider unless they had to talk about business."

"(Commercial operations) are a bigger picture operation,

and they're a little different than residential," he says. Here are a few ways Moore has made commercial operations work for his company:

HAVE A PLAN. When you first get started in the commercial sector of the industry, you probably have plenty of ideas circling in your head. And Moore says that's great, but it's important to get those ideas down on paper.

"Especially when you have other people in the business with you, whether it's managers or salespeople, (it's important) to have everyone on the same page and rowing in the same direction," he says.

At ELM, the company hosts a strategic planning meeting in August. The meeting is held off site, and it always incorporates a little fun, too. "We spend about a day and a half with our leadership team (Moore, the current president, the controller, and branch managers)," he says. "And we have a facilitator to keep us on schedule."

NARROW YOUR FOCUS. There are countless avenues to the commercial market. Shopping malls, industrial parks, medical facilities and educational campuses all have their own needs. Most of the facilities even have a trade association that they fit into. Moore says homing in on the types of properties you're interested in will



NARROW IT DOWN: There are countless avenues into the commercial market and different types of properties all have their own needs. Home in on what type you want to service.

help the you develop key relationships.

Sometimes, you even have to say 'no' to new customers. "It's difficult to tell a customer no, but unfortunately you sometimes have to do that," Moore says. The customers you should turn down are the ones who will run your company dry without producing a profit. Sticking with those customers could end up wasting time and resources you could be providing to another client instead, he says.

Moore also recommends going after customers in a specific geographic location rather than spreading out. In fact, ELM found customers right down the street from their office.

"We really looked at targeting those customers who fit our profile and were within the geographic area," he says.

And it makes sense to cut down on gas and drive time, too.

You also want to narrow down your financial targets, which can be done in those yearly strategic meetings. Exploring what types of profit centers your company has will help provide the best service to your customers. If you offer enhancements, for example, that can be a profit booster.

"Identify what your targets are going to be and set sales goals and growth goals," Moore says. "Align your sales and operations so that you're not overselling. There's nothing wrong with making a stretch, but you don't want to create unnecessary stress because that leads to customer dissatisfaction."

BEEF UP YOUR ASSETS. If you're planning on servicing larger areas, you'll need to up your game when it comes to equipment and labor. You may need to buy more equipment or the latest models to get familiar with the new technology. Moore says it may even be time to invest in a larger building.

"Sometimes turning over old equipment on a regular basis is a better strategy," Moore says. Along with bigger contracts, more equipment and added labor, your company will also need to carry a higher insurance policy.

"Corporations want to make sure if something happens, it doesn't come back on them," Moore says. "There's much more risk and corporations want to be protected from

that. And commercial auto insurance, it goes without saying you need that regardless."

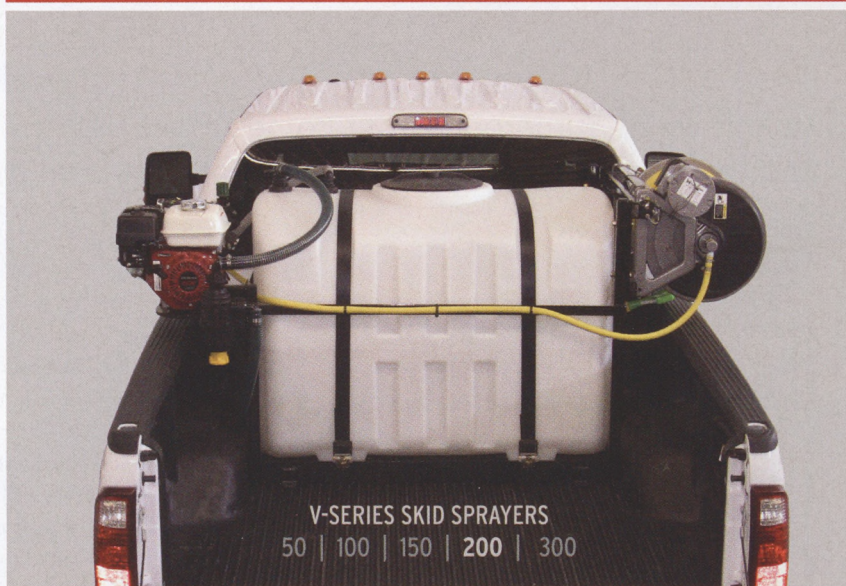
Adding advisers to your team can also help educate your company. "We've used

several of the industry's experts over the years," he says. "They get around to other companies and can educate you as to what's happening (in the industry) as well. **L&L**



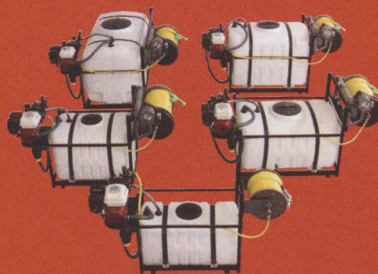
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As this year's Turnaround Tour comes to a close, the three winners and the Harvest Group give us a look at what's on the horizon.

Stories by **Brian Horn**

**KIMBERLY ROWE & LAMONT HESS,
OWNERS, OUTDOOR EXPRESSIONS PA**

OPTIMISTIC OUTLOOK

WHEN LAMONT HESS and Kimberly Rowe joined the Turnaround Tour, they hoped to build Outdoor Expressions PA to the level of success it had before they bought it in July of 2017 – a \$3 million company. While the couple made improvements in 2018, the year didn't go as planned. But that's not souring Hess for 2019.

That's because he has \$100,000 worth of new work booked next year. And because his crews weren't at full capacity, he will only have to bring on a couple of part-time employees to fill in the gaps. They can hit the ground running in 2019 with a better outlook for 2020.

Hess says a main lesson he took away from the project was knowing the cost of his jobs. He also learned the value of budgeting for new equipment. "I bought used stuff and I think new is probably the best way to

go if you can get it financed," he says. "You have to watch when you buy used stuff because I have a mower that's done nothing but cost me money."

Even though 2018 fell short of expectations, Hess is confident they will hit their revenue goals in a few years.

"I wouldn't doubt that we'll make somewhere near a million two to three years from now," he says. "We'll be close to where I wanted to be this year, next year and if we're on track for that, I should definitely do the same thing the following year. I bet at least another \$100,000 above that. I've got good connections now."

HARVESTER'S TAKE

LaMont and his wife Kimberly found out just how difficult operating a landscape business can be, even though they're seasoned business veterans. They experienced Murphy's Law throughout 2018. What could go wrong did go wrong. They had equipment, vehicle, people, customer and, to cap it all off, weather problems. This year proved to be one of the rainiest seasons in Pennsylvania's history. Just in the month of August it rained 42 inches.

Because of the obstacles the company faced, Kimberly took an outside job to support the family, which turned out to be a very wise move. In the meantime, LaMont persevered, working through and solving one problem at a time.

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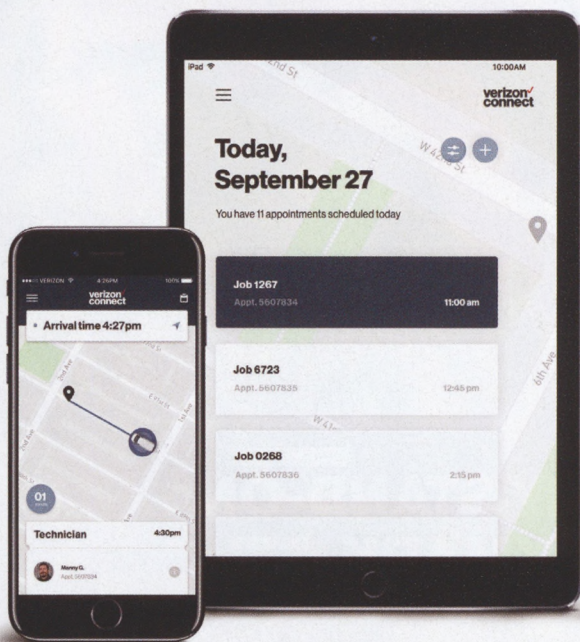
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Outdoor Expressions recently installed a new bed and shrubs at this property.

Most of the problems LaMont faced were inherited from the company he purchased. Although this company had en-

joyed a good reputation, they were experiencing a severe decline in sales. Many of the jobs were underpriced, the equipment

and trucks were old and in need of repairs and the employees were not up to par.

Despite these problems, LaMont finished the season and did quite well.

His overall sales goal was to go from \$200,000 with a 48 percent gross margin to \$375,000 but only reached \$240,000 with a 40 percent GM. Why? He dropped unprofitable jobs and lost weeks of work because of the rain.

He essentially reach his second goal of moving \$100,000 of re-occurring revenue to \$260,000 in that most all his work is now contracted maintenance work.

As for his crew, his goal

was to hire one new capable crew leader with a solid driver's license. He did that and also hired two additional crew members to finish up the season with six good people.

His last goal was to have no lost time accidents. However, he did have one accident that had to be reported where worker's compensation was used.

As for next year, he has multiple new contracts that were priced right and he's positioned to possibly double sales. Despite his problems, he did an amazing job and his cool head and tenacity in dealing with problems should be applauded.

MICHAEL MOULD & TIFFANY TUCKER, OWNERS, NEW VISIONS LAWN & LANDSCAPE

A BOUT WITH MOTHER NATURE

TIFFANY TUCKER and Michael Mould were operating at a record-breaking pace

when Hurricane Michael hit Panama City, Florida, putting a halt to the jobs New Visions was working on. For-profit work turned to helping neighbors, friends and family clear debris.

"It was more or less checking on the elderly and widowed and just making sure everyone was OK," Mould says. "Then, after that, just finding what type of service they need so we can assist them in that."

As of late October, Tucker

says operations are getting back to normal, and the company is on pace to close 2018 around \$850,000.

A big win for the company in 2018 was finding a manager for the maintenance side of the division, allowing Mould more time to sell instead of working in the field. He also implemented a quality control system to grade projects, since the high number of jobs the company performed meant some work didn't live up to Mould's expectations.

"Every aspect of doing business has changed," Mould says. "We knew we were doing OK

last year but we just didn't know how and where it was coming from. We couldn't put our finger on it. So being able to break it all down and start over and put in the work in the beginning as far as building the structure and becoming a business instead of just people offering the service and knowing the business – you can't put a price on that."

Mould and Tucker would like to hit \$1.5 million by the end of 2019 and possibly add chemical lawn care.

"We definitely want to be able to bring that in house instead of subcontracting the fertilization," he says.

HARVESTER'S TAKE

Michael and Tiffany were growing at too rapid of a pace entering 2018, so it's no surprise they surpassed their goal of \$600,000 and will land at \$850,000 to end 2018. But they fell short of the goal of

48-50 percent gross margin, only making 45 percent gross margin. They beat their revenue goal because Michael is a great salesperson and they are currently in a great market. The gross margin suffered because they had so many new people and inefficiencies.

Their second goal was getting Michael out of the field and having him focus on selling. A while ago, Michael assisted another landscaper with a flat tire and kept in touch, letting him know the door was always open to come to New Visions. Eventually he came over in a foreman role, but had the qualities for an account manager role for maintenance clients, which he is now in. You should always be recruiting and keep in the mind that the next person you meet can be your next star employee.

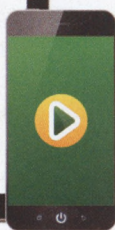
Michael and Tiffany also wanted to develop vision, mission, and core values statements and success

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New Visions had to focus on picking up the pieces after Hurricane Michael hit.

**GABE LOBATO, OWNER,
LA CHOLLA LANDSCAPING**

REASSESSING THE PLAN

LAST TIME WE CHECKED in with Gabe Lobato, he was going to meet with the new property manager of his lone commercial property. Unfortunately, the property manager decided to go in another direction and find a new landscaper, leaving Lobato, who was already skeptical about commercial work, even more so now.

So, he will focus on residential work in 2019, which has been doing well. Looking back on the year, the Turnaround Tour experience didn't go the way he imagined.

"All it does is reaffirm why I gave up pursuing this market a few years back, because the whole situation (with commercial work) is that clients prefer their own vendors and you just really don't have much opportunities unless you are already in with them," he says.

Lobato does feel more confident about figuring out his hourly average wage (HAW). He is in the process of implementing that for his residential maintenance accounts in order to figure out the cost of jobs on a daily and weekly basis.

While he won't hit his goal of \$1 million

at the end of 2018, he thinks he can hit his goal by the end of 2019. At the start of the Turnaround Tour, he wanted to sell the company in the near future, but now is reassessing that plan.

"My goal is probably in the next three to five years to be able to step aside and do something else but continue to own it and oversee it, but not be in it as much as I am at this point in time," he says.

HARVESTER'S TAKE

La Cholla's first goal was to increase overall revenue to \$1.1 million at 48 percent gross margin. While Gabe did not achieve the overall goal in revenue, we were aiming pretty high, in all fairness. Gabe started off by hiring his brother to help in the sales area; however, Gabe quickly found that this was not a good hire. He then tried a telemarketing program with very mixed results and he also scrapped that program.

La Cholla has gone back to its traditional source of leads through SEO Google searches mainly from the residential market.

Gross margins remained healthy and within the targeted goal. La Cholla also remains profitable within an acceptable range for net profit even with the added \$12,000 in sales costs. Family and business do not always work out. Gabe learned that hiring his brother was not a good match and made a quick decision to change course. Once you have determined a team member is unlikely to come around in

behaviors. After taking some time to discuss with each other what they wanted to represent as a company, they were able to develop those core components. Vision, mission and core values are must-haves for any company to have a successful culture. Employees also need to learn these so they have an idea of how they should operate when they leave for jobsites every morning.

Finally, the duo needed to have an established maintenance agreement signed by customers, which they did develop. This agreement is important because it details what they are doing for their customers as well as what the charges are. And if they want to sell the company one day, owners are not going to buy a company without contracts or agreement.

fairly short order, especially in a skill position, it's often best to make the change, especially if they are a family member.

The company's second goal was to add \$100,000 a year in new recurring maintenance revenue, which Gabe did not achieve. He has gone back to focus on his original lead source through his website. His focus will remain in the residential market. He will be trying other lead sources through mailers and referral programs.

His third goal was to sell more than 25 percent of recurring revenue in enhancements, which he is making progress on.

Gabe is also making progress with his supervisor Michael continuing to spend the vast majority of his time writing up extra work proposals for the existing base of homes they maintain. If they follow up effectively with these proposals, they will achieve this goal.

Finally, La Cholla had a goal of growing the commercial maintenance business and shifting to 95 percent commercial in three to five years. This isn't going to happen and Gabe's comfort zone is in the residential market. He will continue in this market and if the right commercial or non-residential jobs come his way, he will consider them.

Change is often very hard to embrace. If a company is going to embrace a change, it must start from the leader. If the leader does not have the buy in and make the commitment, change is even more difficult. Breaking into a new market was not in the cards for La Cholla at this time. **L&L**

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Rev up your engine maintenance program

We get it; you're busy.

But scheduling regular engine maintenance and training your team to watch for repairs will keep your business running efficiently.

By Kristen Hampshire

A **T SUN VALLEY LANDSCAPING** in Omaha, Nebraska, the equipment service area is divided into zones where a “tag out” space holds mowers and equipment that are waiting for service, and a red zone is occupied by broken equipment that need complete repairs. Chris Smith is the caretaker of all 26 mowers and other equipment the full-service commercial company operates. After 22 years in fleet management, Smith has engine maintenance down pat.

The No. 1 overlooked component, in his opinion? The air filter.

“It’s not the most important factor for a running engine, but you want to make sure the air filter is clean and clear, so you aren’t allowing contaminants to enter the engine,” he says. “Air filters tend to be out of sight, out of mind, hidden under a plastic cover. But if you’re in a dusty construction environment or it’s

dry, that air filter is sucking in dust, pollen and debris.”

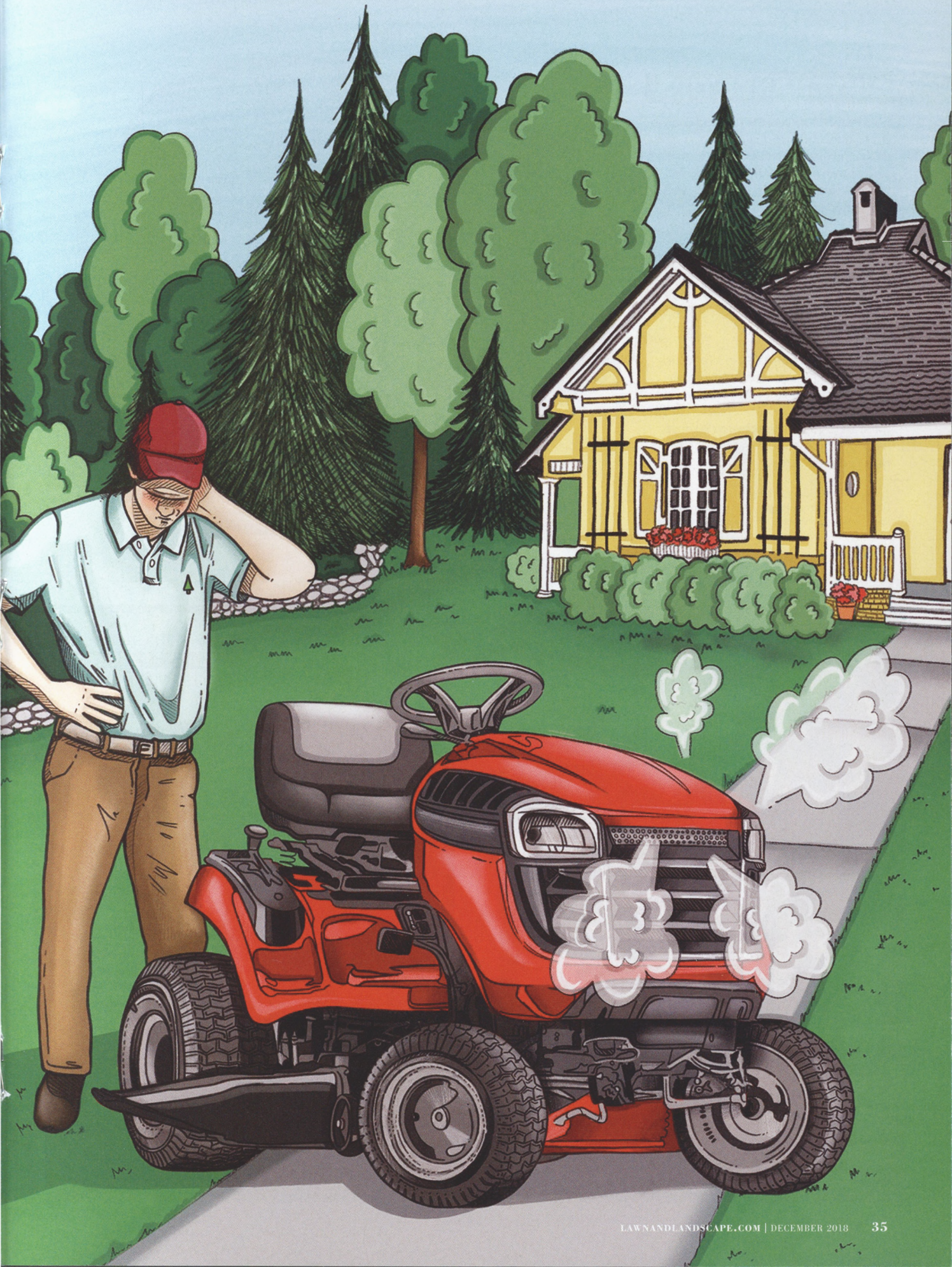
And when an engine’s starving for air, it runs hotter.

“Heat is an engine’s biggest enemy,” Smith says, adding that fuel flow and engine oil are other small things that can cause big problems if ignored. “We’re running these mowers full-throttle for hours a day, and if you’re low on oil, the crankshaft and rod bearings don’t get enough lubrication. When you build up too much heat, parts begin to warp and crack.”

For a couple of bucks invested in a quart of oil, and a few seconds to check the oil daily, a crew leader can help preserve the life of an engine.

But, the reality is, engine maintenance is often a challenge for busy landscape companies for several reasons. “In the past, we relied on crew leaders to bring the mowers in to be serviced when they needed,” says Rafael Gonzalez, shop manager, Gachina Landscape Management in Menlo Park, California. Gachina has





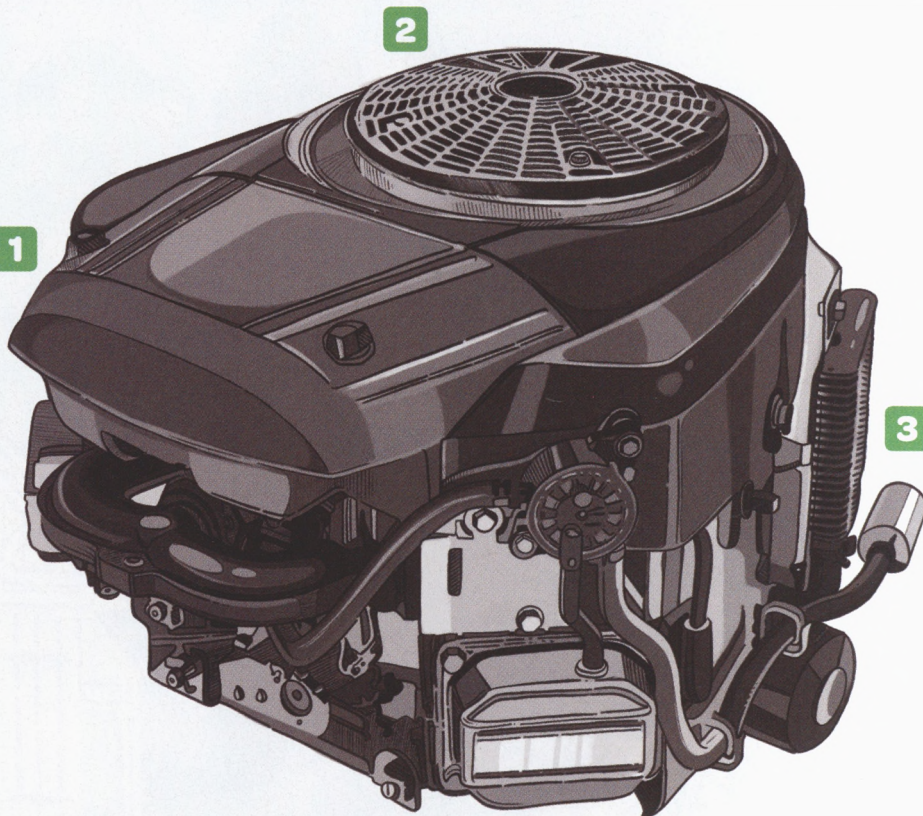
MAINTENANCE TIPS

1. REPLACE THE AIR FILTER and change the engine oil now to ensure the machine will be turn-key and ready to perform next season with no extra effort needed or trying to remember if maintenance was performed or not.

2. ALWAYS CHECK YOUR COOLING SCREEN on air-cooled engines before and after mowing. It takes a just a few seconds to wipe off grass or debris that has built up and it will help keep your engine running as cool as possible.

3. USE FUEL STABILIZER in all of your gas-powered equipment. It's especially critical for equipment that you're storing over the winter. Without stabilizer, gasoline will start to go stale in as few as 30 days, leading to time-consuming and costly repairs down the road.

Tips come courtesy of Tom Billigen, training manager, customer education, for Briggs & Stratton Corporation and Troy Smith, senior product development engineer for Kawasaki Motors.



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four regional branches, each with a shop mechanic. Overall, the company has 500 21-inch mowers and 225 trucks that require regular maintenance.

"We are in the process of updating our fleet management software and we are hopeful we can get on a better schedule with servicing intervals," Gonzalez says. The company tends to get long life spans from equipment. However, an improved fleet tracking system would help document and keep service on a smooth schedule, he says.

At Pericut Lawn & Landscape in Des Moines, Iowa, owner Kory Ballard says they follow

manufacturer recommendations. "That said, we certainly have fallen behind at times, but now we have a program in place that rotates units based on time (weeks/months) rather than tracking individual machine hours," he says.

The key: Make engine maintenance a scheduled activity – not a rainy-day project. "One lesson we have learned is to make service a top priority," Ballard says.

TIME OUT FOR MAINTENANCE.

At Gachina Landscape Management, crew leaders are trained to perform basic maintenance tasks, and each branch has a

shop manager. "Often, landscape companies don't invest in trained personnel to service the engines," Gonzalez says. "This causes engines to wear and tear more quickly."

Constant training updates are the key. "It's critical, especially because we have had challenges with our mulching mowers, primarily during the heavy leaf season and winter pruning," he says. "Training for new gardeners is critical to ensure that mulching leaves and small plant material is done correctly without placing too much stress on the mowers and engines."

Smith also relies on crew

leaders to identity potential issues with mowers. "A lot of our crewmembers have their favorite pieces of equipment – the mowers they always use," he says. "When their machines are not working quite right, they might not want to bring it in for a repair because they'll lose the mower for a day or two. I just have to say, 'Be mindful. If you let it go down, you'll lose the equipment and you'll have to use something else.'"

Maintenance "is a huge teamwork effort," Smith says. "There has to be communication between the fleet operations manager and the crews out in the

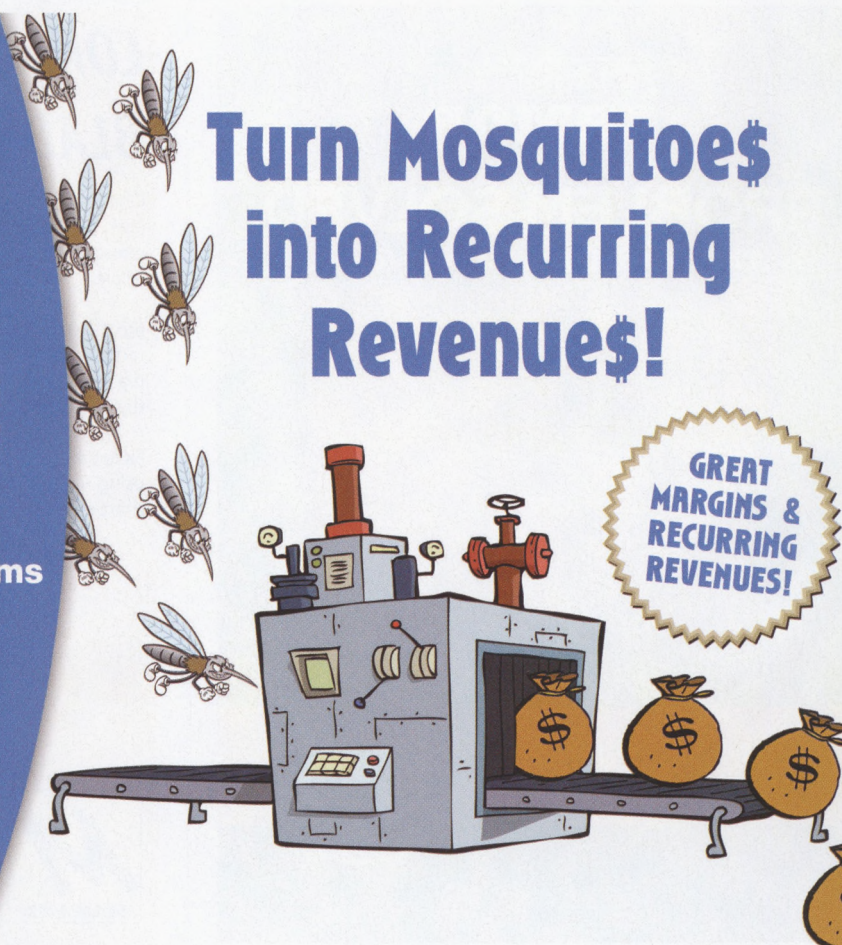


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field, because they're using the equipment every day. I know how a machine runs when it's perfect, and when it has been abused. They are running the machines every day and they know how it sounds and its motions – they can tell when it sounds or feels different, and let me know as soon as possible."

At Sun Valley, maintenance is based on the manufacturers' recommendations, but Smith takes it a step further and tends to perform maintenance more frequently. "As a landscape company, we are a heavy commercial user, so I put my own spin on the recommendations," he says. "Each mower is

mowing anywhere from 12 to 25 lawns per day."

For example, Smith says oil should be checked daily. Lubricating grease points weekly is also important. "There are a lot of moving parts on mowers – levers, actuators, blades, spindles," Smith says. "You've got to keep them greased up."

Gonzalez says crews constantly check air filters, blades, oil and hydraulics.

\$900 - \$1,200

Roughly how much a new engine for a 36-inch walk-behind mower can cost.

Squeezing engine maintenance in during busy mowing days is sometimes impossible. That's why many companies choose to service machines at night. "Adjust to evening hours for a mechanic if you need to, or in a small operation, pick your service day and stick to it," Ballard says. "Think of it as just as valuable as a work day in the field. Because, at the end of the day, the value may be even more."

Also, Ballard advises to "fix things as they break" instead of allowing repairs to build up. "They will accumulate and become overwhelming, and then

you have a bigger cost all at once," he says.

Set an example of how to care for equipment. A tone of operate-with-care starts at the top. "Employees tend to treat equipment the way you do, so set the standards and communicate those with your team," Ballard says.

REPAIR OR REPLACE? Do you repair or replace the engine, or just buy a whole new machine? "This decision can be made with data, a gut decision or combination of both," Ballard says.

Ballard considers the age of the equipment, hours on the engine,



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“Employees tend to treat equipment the way you do, so set the standards and communicate those with your team.”

KORY BALLARD, owner, Perficut Lawn & Landscape

condition and repair history, plus the expected life span of the machine. “With the rising cost of new equipment, we tend to lean on the side of continuous care and repair vs. replacing the entire machine,” Ballard says, adding that keeping up with replacement parts and repairs is beneficial for getting more value out of a machine when it is time to replace it. “If you sell or trade the unit down the road, you’ll get more for it at that point.”

Gonzalez says sometimes they wait too long to replace a piece of equipment, but the company tries to make repair that would be more cost-effective if they pur-

chased a new piece of equipment.

He looks at how long the machine has been in service, how many repairs were completed, and the cost of the repair compared to buying a new mower. “Occasionally, I will buy an engine to replace an inoperable one,” Gonzalez says.

Sun Valley usually turns over its machines every three to four seasons. But if the machine is still strong after several seasons, the company will continue to repair it. There is careful cost analysis. For example, a new engine for a 36-inch walk-behind mower can cost roughly \$900 to \$1,200, Smith says. A

brand-new mower could run about \$5,000. “If the mower has a good body, a good hydraulic drive train and it looks appreciative, then it is worth putting \$1,200 into it for a new engine,” Smith says

On the other hand, if the mower is beat up and looking aged, it’s time to move on. “A lot of people have a run-it-until-it-dies mindset, and we used to be that way,” he says. “But, as we grow, we have more of an established reputation with higher-end properties. You don’t want to pull up to a half-million-dollar house with a rusty mower.”

If mowers are still in good run-

ning condition, they can be sold. “We might put it on Craig’s list and sell it to someone who just needs to mow their big lawn every week,” Smith says.

At the end of the day, communication and training are just as important as doing the actual repairs. Setting expectations for how equipment should be cared for in the field, and teaching crew leaders and team members to do basic maintenance checks, goes a long way toward preserving an engine – and the entire machine.

“My best advice is to invest in good mechanics and train crew leaders on the basics of equipment maintenance,” Gonzalez says. **L&L**

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ON TAP

Learn how contractors are using service request apps to grow business. **By Kate Spirgen**

MORE THAN EVER, customers want everything delivered right away, including their lawn care services. We spoke to Jeremy Yamaguchi, CEO of Lawn Love, which works with more than 23,000 lawn care companies, to find out how contractors are using service apps and how the whole process works.

LL: Do contractors use the app as a primary source of business or a supplement?

JY: We've seen contractors use it in both capacities. The idea here is that the lawn and garden industry is a very large but highly fragmented market. The average company is about two people and most of them don't use all that much in the

way of technology to run their businesses.

These folks are really skilled tradespeople with deep domain expertise around lawn and garden care, but maybe they're not super sophisticated marketers or great at bringing technology to operate more efficiently.

That's essentially what we're trying to solve for these guys. We start by bringing them a ton of new demands for their service, so they spend less time hanging door hangers or navigating snake oil SEO salespeople.

They just pick up whatever jobs they want to start and that frees them up to spend more time on site, mowing lawns and earning more each week.

LL: How many jobs does the average contractor take from this kind of service?

JY: We see contractors initially dip a toe in and take five or six jobs a week to fill holes in their routes. The trend we see with the pros we work with is they just end up taking more and more work through Lawn Love, all the way up to the point that we have hundreds of pros running multiple crews on the platform doing 50-plus jobs a week with us. In those cases, we're substantially most of their business at that point.

LL: What's the average price of a job through the app?

JY: It varies heavily, as you might imagine. The average job across all jobs is about \$57. You'll have jobs as low as \$29 and as high as \$500, so it goes all over the map.

The vast majority of our

customers sign up for recurring maintenance services and often the job repeats weekly.

LL: What does the application process look like?

JY: When a lawn care provider signs up, they go through an initial screening process. We make sure that we're only working with talented, skilled lawn pros and we are rigorous.

You go through a questionnaire that is meant to demonstrate their expertise and illustrate that they can tell the difference between a zoysia and a fescue. Once we have those signals and it's clear that they'd be a good fit for the platform, they download the app and can immediately see all of the jobs available in their area.

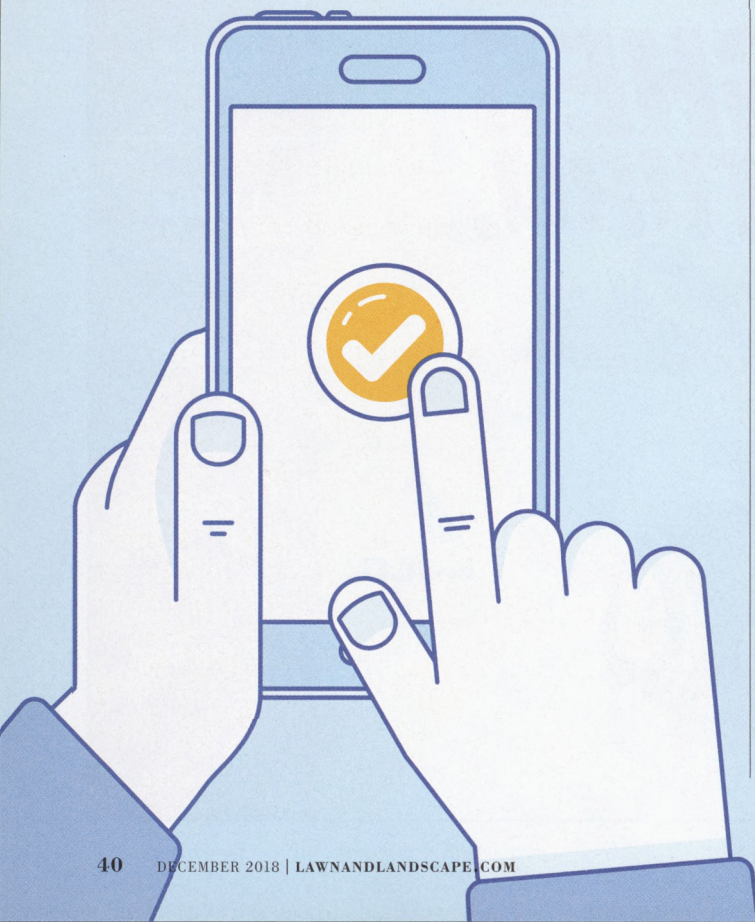
From there, they get access to the platform and can immediately start picking up jobs.

LL: How does the review process work?

JY: It's kind of a ranking system. Much like Uber where riders rank the drivers after the service, the customers rate the lawn pro's service after the work is done and then that kind of rolls up to a tier-based system. The companies that are highly ranked on the platform get the first look at jobs, they get first access to new jobs that show up on their route and they can alternately grow their businesses faster.

LL: Do you have a minimum number of jobs?

JY: Not at all. You can take one job or a hundred jobs. It's completely flexible. We see folks all over the spectrum. **L&L**





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ENHANCED EFFICIENCY FERTILIZERS:

How the advantages of EEFs can help you meet today's business challenges head on

IT'S THAT TIME OF YEAR once again. The days are getting shorter, there's a chill in the air, and lawn care business owners have the first chance in months to take a short, well-deserved break. Even so, there's still work to be done. The winter season is the ideal time to take a good, hard look at your operations and determine what's working – and what isn't – before heading into the spring season. Every expense or investment has an impact on your bottom line, and that includes the fertilizer you apply to your customers' lawns.

"It's a good idea to evaluate your fertilizer program every year based on fertilizer performance, turf needs, new research and available products," says Chris Derrick, field sales agronomist for Koch Turf & Ornamental (Koch). "Some typical signs of poor fertilizer performance include lack of adequate color and growth, which can lead to other problems such as weeds, diseases and insect damage."

Koch produces enhanced efficiency fertilizers (EEFs) that help lawn care businesses optimize plant and turfgrass performance with fewer resources. Fertilizer blends that contain higher percentages of these nutrient-rich EEFs offer better nutrition and less filler, which has little to no nutritional value. However, the benefits of EEFs extend far beyond turf appearance and health.

"While beautiful, healthy lawns are certainly important, green industry professionals should also evaluate their fertilizer performance from an economic perspective," Derrick adds. "It's no secret that lawn care businesses are facing many challenges today, and switching up your fertilizer program can lead to a number of economic advantages that can help alleviate those challenges."

LABOR SCARCITY. In the past few years, lawn care businesses across the U.S. have reported substantial growth; however, finding and retaining good employees continues to be a struggle. Because Koch's EEFs offer



From lowering total input costs to efficiently utilizing scarce labor and saving on equipment wear and tear, EEFs can enhance profitability and help you take your business to the next level.

extended longevities, lawn care technicians can apply them fewer times annually and still get exceptional results. That means employees can visit more properties each day or spend their valuable time on other revenue-producing tasks.

"Furthermore, because their employees are spending less time handling heavy bags of fertilizers, businesses that choose to apply EEFs can reduce their risk of workplace injuries and the costs associated with lost productivity," Derrick says. "That also has a positive effect on overall morale and job satisfaction."

RESOURCE ALLOCATION. While purchasing a cheaper bag of fertilizer may seem like a good way to keep business expenses down, it can end up costing more in the long run. As a result, lawn care businesses must purchase, store, haul and apply more bags of fertilizer to their customers' lawns than if they were using a blend with EEFs and a higher nutrient analysis.

"Higher-quality fertilizer blends may

cost more per bag, but they end up being a far better value over time," Derrick says. "Because of their extended longevities, you can apply them fewer times per year, reducing your total fertilizer expense, fuel costs and the associated wear-and-tear on your equipment and vehicles."

Another benefit? Applying fertilizer fewer times per year allows lawn care technicians to focus more on other tasks, like pre- and post-emergent herbicide applications, leading to greater customer satisfaction and fewer call-backs to the site for spot weed treatments.

ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP. Protecting the quality of our air, water and soil is a responsibility we all share. For lawn care businesses, that responsibility includes understanding how to use fertilizers in the right way to optimize nutrient efficiency and minimize losses to the environment.

Koch's controlled-release, slow-release and stabilized nitrogen EEFs can reduce nitrogen loss to the environment and slow

its conversion to nitrate, optimizing plant uptake over a longer period of time. In fact, using EEFs can decrease nitrogen use by up to 40 percent when compared to conventional fertilizers like urea and ammonium sulfate.

"When applied at the right rate, at the right time and in the right place, EEFs provide solutions that contribute to environmental stewardship," Derrick explains. "From a business standpoint, knowing how to use nitrogen more responsibly can also be a key selling advantage when talking with current or potential customers."

From lowering total input costs to efficiently utilizing scarce labor and saving on equipment wear and tear, EEFs can enhance profitability and help you take your business to the next level. Doing the proper research and consulting with an agronomic expert to choose the best possible option can have positive effects that resonate throughout your entire operation. Ask your distributor about Koch's EEFs and discover the difference for yourself.

When it comes to permeable pavers, it's not only what's on the outside that counts.

By Lauren Rathmell

OUTDOOR LIVING SPACES are recognized by their intricate pavers and designs, but what lies beneath is actually more important to the overall success of the design.

Before a contractor begins to lay a section of permeable pavers, a solid base or drainage system needs to be established. The different types of bases depend on the overall scope of the property, the location and the use.

"Within those permeable asphalt (installs) or concrete permeable pavers, there's different base systems that can be used and drains that go within the system," says Scott Shorror of Landscape Concepts.

WHY IT MATTERS. The job of permeable pavers is often to soak up the water on a property. These types of pavers can also be utilized to help divert water flow from structures like homes and prevent water damage in high-flood areas.

Shorror says drainage systems and permeable pavements have had the spotlight on them lately because of the push toward sustainability.

"Now, the big thing is getting the rain water back into the ground," he says. He also notes that proper drainage

systems are even a requirement on most structures.

"There's nothing more frustrating than having a new hardscape or landscape installed that creates drainage issues," says Joe Raboine, residential business manager for Belgard. "It's unwanted water that ends up in a basement, garage or pool on the surface can cost thousands of dollars to repair, and sometimes leads to unsatisfied customers and legal implications in some cases."

"If you have a house, the purpose of the downspout is to get water away from the foundation," he says. When you consider drainage and permeable pavements, the function is often the same.

UNDER THE PAVERS. The base layer of a paver project sets the overall design up for success when done properly. Shorror says it's important that a contractor first considers what type of property they are working on.

"Is it commercial or residential," he says. "And what kind of traffic is this going to be experiencing?" Raboine says that because some permeable pavers can be used for vehicular applications, the types of material used should be able to withstand that use.



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Typical Commercial Permeable-Paver Installation

"(Contractors should consider) the appropriate shape and thickness is based on project-specific conditions, including type of loading, base design and subgrade conditions," Raboine says. "With a complex project, it's crucial to determine the grades and current route of the water runoff that's falling on the site."

Typically, a permeable project is designed to withstand five times its area in water, Shorrow says. But, you don't really want excess water running onto a pervious pavement system, he notes.

WITH THE FLOW. With that in mind, contractors have to consider the rate that water will flow

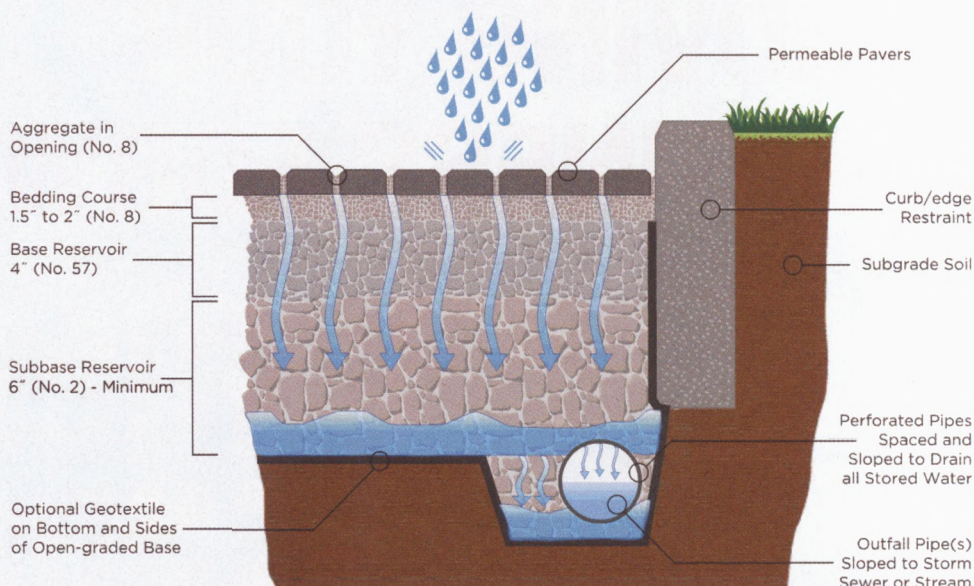
through the pavement systems. The flow rate also depends on the type of soil underneath.

"It truly depends on the ap-

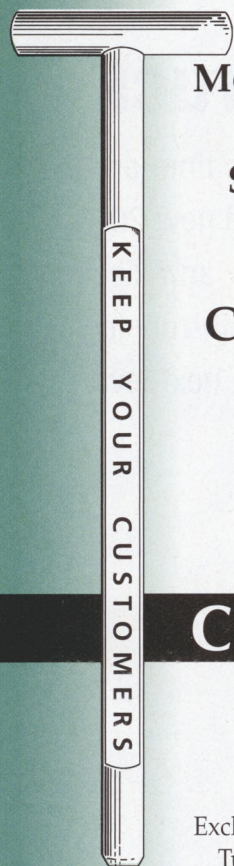
plication and soil conditions. If the water table is too close to the surface of the pavers, a drainage system may be required," Ra-

boine says. "If not, and the soil conditions warrant, a drainage system may not be required."

Clay soils will absorb water at



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“They know they can pull their driveways up, put down permeable pavers, and get their additions.”

SCOTT SHORROW, Landscape Concepts

a slower rate than other types of soil, Shorrow says. And, if the area of application is going to see an excessive amount of water, a larger, more complex drainage solution may be needed. For example, if the pavers are being installed around a pool, it's expected that more water might be flowing over the paver. Raboine says drainage solutions like catch basins or even a large network of drain pipes might be required.

The direction of the flow is also crucial. Water tends to flow downwards to the lowest point on a property, so diverting it from your client's home is obvious. However, paying attention to neighboring structures is just

as important, Raboine says.

The layers of stone aggregate underneath a permeable paver area act as the basic system of drainage. Different sized stones are layered on top of each other, typically with the larger grade stone at the bottom. While you may have 10 feet of stone to fill, Shorrow says that's 10 feet for water to flow and not just a big empty hole.

At the base of the install, before any aggregate or pipes are put into place, it might be necessary to lay down some geotextile fabric. The pipes are installed to direct water toward storm sewers or other nearby streams.

Another facet to the drainage

system, which acts as a finishing touch, is the polymeric sand that is spread to fill the cracks in between the pavers.

NOT A HARD SELL. Shorrow says he doesn't typically go into too much detail about the specifics of a drainage system unless the customers ask. “A lot of customers we do work for like to sit down and chat but they just want their addition built. They don't really care,” he says. “They know they can pull their driveways up, put down permeable pavers, and get their additions.”

The company had a job in the D.C. area, however, and the client was very invested in the work that

was being done. “We put a sump system in basically like (you would find) in a basement and then that kicked all that run off water into a system that then ran all the toilets in the house from the driveway,” he says. “So that's a little more on the green side and drainage.”

For some homeowners, creating a permeable area on their property can act as a credit on their property in order to build onto their homes or add another structure.

“If they have a 2,500 square foot driveway, they pull that out and make it permeable,” Shorrow says. “Now, they can add a 2,500 square foot addition to their house.” **L&L**

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high standards

Establishing quality control helps tree care providers stand out from the competition. **By Jimmy Miller**

BEFORE MARK CHISHOLM'S TEAM even picks up a chain saw, they're required to look around the yard and mentally note its appearance.

Chisholm hopes his Aspen Tree Expert Company leaves each work site without a trace, only leaving behind the results of the work they were hired to do. He says many homeowners don't sit around and watch his crews operate, so if his employees leave things behind like leftover limbs, debris or sawdust, clients will assume his company is just like every other tree care business in town.

"We want the yard to look as good or better when we leave," Chisholm says. "Every aspect of it – the lawn, the driveway, the walkway. Everything."

Getting to this point isn't an overnight process. Employees should be properly trained and held accountable for their quality of work, and Chisholm says it's important they also remain safe while being equipped with the best tools he can afford. Quality control in tree care services is meticulous but being conscious of your work standards can put your company a step ahead of the competition.

THE LONG HAUL. Jeremy Williams, owner of Tree Climbers in Arkansas says employee training never really ends. He believes establishing a company culture that prohibits laziness is essential. He has weekly



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your services and the products you use. Keep up-to-date on policy and regulations running the gamut from private and public pesticide property bans to specific restrictions on sales, use and display of fertilizers and pesticides. RISE is a national trade association of pesticide and fertilizer suppliers serving as a resource to help you keep these products in your toolbox and you out of the woods.

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in-house training sessions, plus he'll send his crews out for external coaching such as tree climbing competitions or specialized, hands-on classes on subjects like climbing and

rigging. All of his employees also get certified in CPR and take first aid courses.

Williams also says finding the right match for his company during the hiring process is

critical. He'll have experienced leaders work with new hires for a year or two to offer constructive criticism. He assigns trainee crew leaders to shadow with experienced leaders, who will score their apprentices on one of Williams' syllabus sheets. If an employee at any level repeatedly ignores the standards Williams sets, he'll let the employee go to find a better fit. The entire company also has an external audit on all of their protocols every three years.

"It all depends on the person and their attention to detail," Williams says. "It really boils down to establishing a company culture that we don't cut corners."

Chisholm acknowledges it's a prolonged training process with his roughly 30 employees. He says employees come to his company with varying levels of experience, so his involvement with on-the-job training might last around six months. He also asks employees what kind of training they might like to have and tries to help them register for it.

He recommends staying on the job site to guide employees through the process. Creating clear guidelines for what you demand as an owner will show new hires what you'll expect as they get accustomed to working on their own.

"It starts with good communication and setting the expectations with as much exactness as you can with each task you're giving them," Chisholm says. "You can't just say, 'Here's what you're doing' and walk away."

COMMON MISTAKES. Chisholm says quality control ultimately comes down to whether or not the client is satisfied. Though it's rare that customers call in complaints, he'll send crews back out to fix mistakes if a client is upset. Williams says a majority of callbacks or customer complaints come from a lack of post-job cleanup.

Another common mistake is that the customer and crews were on different pages when the service started. On the day of the job, both Chisholm's and Williams' crews thoroughly explain the work that's going to be done to the property owner. During client walkthroughs, Williams has his crews map



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“It starts with good communication and setting the expectations with as much exactness as you can with each task ...”

MARK CHISHOLM, Aspen Tree Expert Company

out the property, assigning numbers to all of the trees they're working on and telling the client what is going to happen with each tree. Chisholm does much of the same, adding that he asks his crews to limit how much industry jargon they use with the clients to make sure they know what's happening.

“We see the spec; we understand what we're supposed to be doing because of what we're told just from the paperwork, but then when you talk to the homeowner, you want to explain that again to them,” Chisholm says. “You want to make sure they understand what they signed off on so the expectations are set.”

Employee safety is an important factor to consider. Chisholm says crew leaders should make sure employees adhere to safety standards at all times. Any issues should be actively corrected as they arise, and meeting each week with your crews to remind them of safety protocol could keep your company from liability.

To Chisholm, every detail matters and is worth exploring if it makes a job more dangerous.

“It can be something very small, like not running two points of connection to a tree when running a chain saw, like a lanyard and a climbing system,” Chisholm says. “It could be a lot of different things.”

KEEPING UP. Part of keeping crews safe means owners keep their workers up to date with the latest technology and industry standards. Updating tools, especially saws or other cutting devices, and ensuring all those tools are still sharp when employees use them helps prevent workplace accidents.

Beyond updates, Williams says his company will adopt new technologies within a year or two of their releases. This means anything introduced to the industry will be brought in for their use so they don't fall behind the competition.

“We're trying to stay way ahead of the curve at making the job as easy as possible,” Williams says. “The right equipment goes a long way to the tiredness aspect of skipping corners. If a new technology comes onto the market, we're

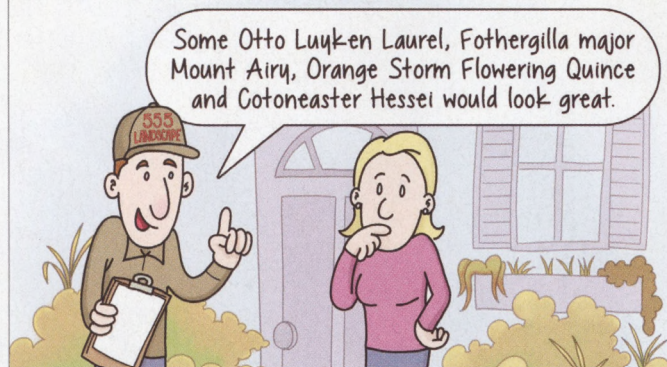
usually pretty quick to adopt that technology.”

He also recommends staying active in industry events and activities.

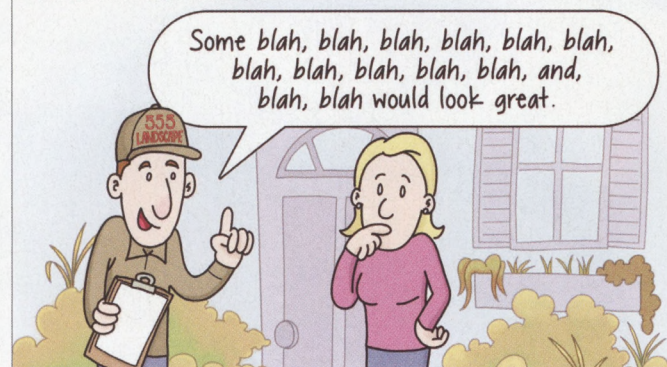
“If you're active, you're going to hear and

see stuff. That's probably the biggest thing I don't see people taking advantage of. They think they're good enough, and good enough is the killer of greatness,” Chisholm says. **L&L**

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Natural beauty

As clients aim to become eco-friendly, organic lawn care is growing increasingly popular across the country.

By Jimmy Miller

WHEN DAVE WALSH STARTED EcoGreen Lawn Care in 2011, he says he was the first to offer southeastern Pennsylvania a choice between traditional and organic lawn care. Today, his company is a BeeSafe applicator and can service clients with all-natural fertilizer, soil conditioners and more.

"I think nowadays, with all the resources available, people are just more aware and looking for alternatives with the keyword organic," Walsh says. "Every year I see more and more people are inquiring about it. Even in the last year especially, it's really been taking off."



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THE HOT TREND. Walsh says clients across the country are searching for organic options in everything from their food to their landscaping. For EcoGreen, people with

young children or pet owners are typical customers, but now Walsh sees just about everyone getting involved. Every demographic seems to be increasingly concerned

with their environmental footprint.

And commercial clients are getting in on it. Walsh says this surprised him. However, companies are finding that it's beneficial to market the fact they're environmentally conscious.

Chip Soltesz from Dyna-Green in Ohio says he got out in front of the organics craze before it hit a fever pitch. He just wishes he could take credit for anticipating the trend.

In 2008, petroleum spiked and the cost of fertilizer went up 400 percent in a matter of two weeks. Seeking a fast alternative, Soltesz tried everything. Since then, he's used organic-based products.

"I started checking anything everyone called organic. Everything that was slightly

feasible, I gave it a shot," Soltesz says. "I'd like to pat myself on the back that I did it to save the environment and going greener, but no, I did it for survival because

I can't have fertilizer going up and down on those wild swings anymore."

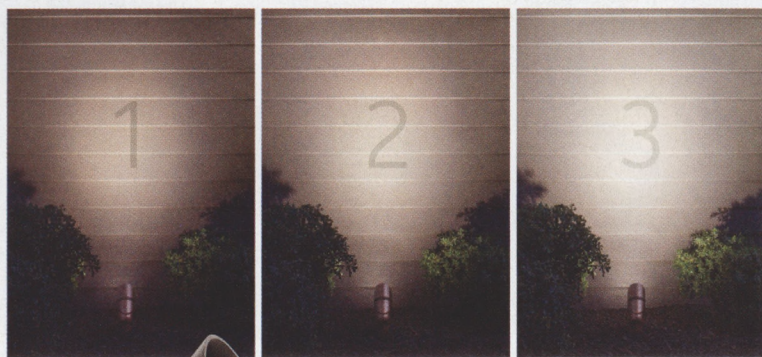
At that time, Soltesz says some people even criticized him for saying he was going organic. But now, he says offering organics is largely to thank for his company's growth, even if he was already aiming to expand beyond a two-truck operation over the last decade anyway.

What's more, many companies are including organics because of legal restrictions and limitations opponents continue to attack them for their part in contributing to hot-button environmental issues like algae blooms.

"I've definitely sold a lot of customers in a lot of areas that I might not have got the other way, but I've also been in the business a long time," Soltesz says. "A lot of it was, 'I have a really good product; I have a message.' Instead of keeping this thing under wraps, let's try to grow this thing."

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KICHLER

“It’s a commitment to go organic;
it’s not going to turn around overnight.”

DAVE WALSH, owner, EcoGreen Lawn Care

HOW IT WORKS. Rick Ross says finding success with organic lawn care is about the process, not the product.

Ross is the owner of Organic Footprint, an organic supplier in North Carolina. If applied correctly, Ross says organics should increase water and nutrient holding capacity, which means lawns will have a greater heat or drought tolerance. He also says organics release nitrogen slower and heighten microbial activity, both of which contribute to healthier soil.

One of the knocks on organic products is that they take extra time to make a lawn look healthy over synthetic fertilizer. Also, companies often charge more for organic lawn care because the products are more expensive.

Walsh, who provides both organic and traditional lawn care options, says he has to charge between 15 and 20 percent higher for the organic service.

Going fully organic may never happen for most companies. They say they must also offer traditional or hybrid services. Walsh says he hopes to do so in the next five or 10 years, but he also adds that he has a family to support, and the profitability just may not be there yet. Ross – who says he keeps his product price down because he wants organic products to become popular – acknowledges it may never be possible to supply only organics.

Walsh often asks customers to sign on for multiple years because the organic process can be time-consuming. He first uses a synthetic preemergent and then a chemical weed-killer, then the remaining four treatments are purely organic. This expedites the process, especially when a lawn hasn’t been cared for at all.

“It’s a commitment to go organic; it’s not going to turn around overnight. We look at it as a three-year commitment,” Walsh says. “Especially for a customer just starting out who hasn’t done anything with their lawns and there’s a lot of weeds, it’s a slower process.”

Soltész, who uses the synthetic-organic

blend, urges customers to remain patient throughout the process. It’s the same patience he practiced when he first picked up an organic product in 2008.

“The ones who listened, most of them are customers,” Soltész says. “The ones who didn’t and were impatient, we’ll get them back next year.” **L&L**



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EACH YEAR AT GIE+EXPO, green industry professionals can check out the newest tools and learn from some of the best and brightest. Here's a peek at what the show had to offer. Read more coverage of the expo at bit.ly/LLEXPO.

Compiled by Lawn & Landscape

STIHL INTRODUCES NEW BATTERY AND GAS-POWERED EQUIPMENT

The KMA 130 R KombiMotor is a combo tool that has the ability to trim, prune, edge, clean and cultivate with 13 optional attachments without gas or exhaust emissions. The external battery source shifts the battery weight

to the user's back or hips for comfort with all attachment options. Features include:

- Straight, solid steel drive shaft with a lifetime limited warranty
- Multi-function control handle can be adjusted with one hand

- Ergonomic rubberized loop handle for efficiency and comfort
- Toolless quick-release coupling system to switch between Kombi attachments
- Water-resistant design
- Vertical hanging slot for storage

Bjorn Fischer, president of STIHL, **above**, said the company has seen an increase in demand for more battery and electric equipment and productivity has

fueled the company to offer gas, battery, electric and robomowers.

STIHL BR 800 C-E Magnum and STIHL BR 800 X Magnum backpack blowers were designed for professional landscapers tackling large properties and heavy debris. Both BR 800 backpack blowers offer 20 percent more power than the STIHL BR 700 backpack blowers.

Other new products include the HSA 94R and HSA 94 T string hedge trimmers. The trimmers feature 24-inch dual-ground blades with a rotating multi-function control handle. The motor automatically reverses direction if the blades get struck with debris.

A first for STIHL, the company now produces a top-handle chainsaw. The MSA 161 T has a rubberized handle for better gripping and a built-in retractable carrying ring. The chain tensioner can be accessed on the side of the chainsaw for easy adjustments.

Two models of STIHL's robotic mower can be controlled by a smartphone. The RMI 422 PC-L and STIHL RMI 632 PC-L feature LTE technology.

"It's convenient for our customers to install these on properties, that way they can spend more time tending to something else like trimming," Fischer said.

The new MS 462 C-M and MS 462 R C-M chainsaws were engineered to be more powerful while weighing less. The chainsaws feature an anti-vibration system to reduce operator fatigue. The slim sprocket cover reduces weight and wood chip clogging, decreasing downtime spent removing wood chips from the cover.

HOW TO STAND OUT WITH AN ONLINE BRAND

A company's online presence isn't just about posting on social media. Jack Jostes said it's about crafting a brand that represents an organization's core values and what sets them apart from the competition.

Jostes, an author and president and CEO of marketing consulting business Ramblin Jackson, believes there's a major problem in the industry: Random guys in pickup trucks are lowballing potential customers and taking away business from landscapers. Clients are falling for the lower prices because they need reasons to trust landscaping businesses and need convenience. During his presentation at LANDSCAPES 2018, held by the National Association of Landscape Professionals in conjunction with GIE+EXPO, Jostes said Google searches on smartphones for "landscaping near me" have quadrupled in the last four years.

Clients just want to know their needs will be taken care of, Jostes said. Building that trust online requires deliberate steps toward building a modern brand.

"All sales are motivated by pain or pleasure, and it's way easier to sell against pain than it is pleasure," Jostes said. "The job of your branding is really to relieve these people's fears so they feel confident in you."

There are some easy immediate steps to take to build trust with clients. First, answer the phone – and if you don't, call back as soon as possible. Customers search landscaping businesses online and call the phone numbers that pop up, so fielding those calls is essential. If your company is particularly swamped, Jostes recommends a service called CallRuby, which permits live receptionists to answer the phones on behalf of your company.

"If somebody else answers the phone and books the appointment, they're like 10 times more likely to get the sale than the contractor who gets back with them a day or two or a week later," Jostes said.

In terms of building an online presence for recruiting clients and new employees, Jostes said companies should first work on building their brand before developing their website, SEO posts, and social media presences. Jostes said most every company will tell clients that they stand for integrity and craftsmanship, but these buzzwords only go so far now. Jostes said companies should dig deep to define a company's true mission and determine what makes them different from competitors. Figure out what your core values are, Jostes said, and let them be known.

Jostes said logos matter: Clients fear landscapers are just shady, but logos and website design can prove to a potential customer that your company does work worth the price clients pay. Jostes also recommends making websites responsive across all devices and inspire people to trust your company with lively photography of your past projects and your employees.

A company's online presence isn't just about posting on social media – Jostes said it's about crafting a brand that represents an organization's core values and what sets them apart from the competition.

NEW HOLLAND LAUNCHES COMPANY'S LARGEST CTL

The new C245 Super Boom compact track loader offers the highest level of performance in a New Holland Construction vertical lift machine. With a rated operating capacity of 4,500 pounds and breakout force of 9,188 pounds, it's the largest, most powerful New Holland compact track loader model yet. The C245 not only reaches higher and delivers more power and lift capacity, the rugged construction, smooth, stable ride and exceptional visibility allows operators to work with more confidence and speed.

"The trend in the industry is for larger machines that are capable of doing more work in a shorter amount of time," said Construction Product Marketing Manager Doran Herritt. "Whether loading gravel into a truck, stacking dense, heavy bales, placing pallets of brick, block or sod, or lifting and carrying other heavy materials, the bigger, beefier C245 is exceptionally productive."

New Holland's patented, vertical-lift Super Boom design provides high lift capacities, long forward dump reach, and fast cycle times. It reaches up and out to dump cleanly into the center of high-sided trucks and hoppers. Operators can empty the bucket faster and easier, which in turn increases cycle times.

CAB COMFORT AND VISIBILITY. The cab's visibility gives operators a clear view of the job site with lots of cab glass and the thinnest side screens. New steel front work lights with side lamps deliver extra visibility during nighttime operations.

"Comfortable operators get more work done," Herritt said, "and better visibility allows safer and more efficient work. This is an area where the C245 really stands out from the crowd."

The long wheelbase on the C245 allows operators to lift and haul more material, increasing productivity. The low-profile undercarriage design extends track life and provides a smoother ride because the steel-embedded tracks roll on the rubber instead of the steel.

"With a long wheelbase and a low center of gravity, New Holland compact track loaders are exceptionally stable," Herritt said. "Even novice operators can work with confidence."



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Mini skid-steers

The newly enhanced line of Ditch Witch mini skid-steers offers construction-grade durability and versatility to conquer a variety of complex landscape and irrigation jobs. The SK600, SK800, SK1050 and SK1550 units are equipped with powerful engines ranging from 24.8 hp to 44 hp.

The machines feature improved stability and deliver a smooth ride, providing operators with enhanced comfort during long hours on the job. And, all models feature an ergonomic operator platform with dual-lever ground drive controls, allowing for precise mobility.

The compact SK600 features a narrow frame for easy maneuverability in tight spaces, while the SK1550 has a leading 1,559-lb-rated operating capacity to lift heavy loads and complete tasks typically suited for traditional skid-steer loaders.



VP30 vibratory plow

The new VP30 is a pedestrian trencher ideal for residential fiber installation, cable and lawn irrigation in tight spaces. It features a 31-hp Briggs and Stratton engine and high-track design that won't tear up turf. It's ideal for going under driveways and sidewalks.

The VP30 is easy to use and low maintenance for enhanced productivity and increased uptime. Plus, the machine is equipped with heavy-duty, adjustable plow blades to meet fiber installation-depth requirements and improve longevity.

ROBERT BALLARD SHARES LIFETIME OF LEADERSHIP

Dr. Robert Ballard talked to a packed GIE+EXPO auditorium about everything from the movie "Avatar" to clams that grow up to be a foot long.

The oceanographer and retired U.S. Navy officer is most prominent for finding the wreckage from the sunken Titanic in 1985, though he's also led successful expeditions to discover the battleship Bismarck and the USS Yorktown.

Behind his anecdotes from his time underwater was his message to GIE+EXPO attendees who listened to his keynote speech: Adapt, even when you have a plan in place.

"You constantly need to reinvent yourself," Ballard said. "You've got to have a plan. For every five, 10, 15 years, you've got to have a plan."

But Ballard's plans often went wayside. He graduated after trying out four different

majors in college, which he said helped him change easily when the time came for it. One night, he received a knock on his door at 8 p.m. from a naval officer who told him he would no longer be in the Army – he'd be in the Navy because he was an oceanography major.

"That actually probably saved my life," said Ballard, who was completing the University of Southern California's ROTC program.

Ballard talked extensively about his experience aboard a submarine, detailing everything from the miniature size of the bunks to why he won't eat tater tots anymore. Ballard believes there's still so much of the ocean left to be explored, and that the waters are the world's best museum because there's an estimated 3 million shipwrecks still below the depths.

"I tell children that their generation will

explore more of earth than all other generations combined," Ballard said.

Sprinkled into his keynote were tidbits of advice applicable to everyone attending the convention this week, particularly about reinventing yourself. Ballard recommends looking at your place in the industry every 15 years or so to adapt with how things have changed, and said making those changes is critical to success in any given field. Planning for the future is important, but remembering to alter those plans as your surroundings change is vital.

Just take the planet we live on, Ballard said, which has always adapted, even before humans.

"That's why the earth is so beautiful. It's constantly undergoing a facelift," Ballard said. "The earth is still very much alive, and it will be for a long time." **L&L**

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For more information:
Arborwear.com

2. 3M WORKTUNES

The pitch: These ear-protective headphones allow you to stream the entertainment of your choice from your smartphone or other mobile device, while providing ear protection in noisy environments.

- The headphones feature a noise reduction rating of 24 decibels.
- The integrated microphone lets you make and take phone calls without removing the ear protection.
- 3M Worktunes headphones are equipped with Bluetooth technology to connect with Bluetooth-enabled devices.

For more information:
3M.com

3. HUSQVARNA ARBORIST HELMETS

The pitch: The new line of arborist helmets is designed for the professional arborist looking for comfort, safety and style.

- The helmets come as Class C or Class E variations, depending on if the user is working near power lines, and three different visor versions: clear, mirror and smoke.
- Both helmets meet ANSI and CSA requirements, are ventilated and come with universal fit and depth adjustment settings.
- Husqvarna Elevation – Class C Arborist Helmet and Husqvarna Spire – Class E Arborist Helmet are available.

For more information:
Husqvarna.com

4. ECHO SHIN GUARDS

The pitch: ECHO's pair of brush protection shin guards offers a solution for users who face dense trimming or brush-cutting environments.

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- They are easily cleaned for efficiency and their water-resistant feature will ensure users are not bogged down with extra weight in high moisture grass or brush.
- Exact measurements are 18 inches high and 9 inches wide. The shin guards fit up to a 23-inch calf circumference.

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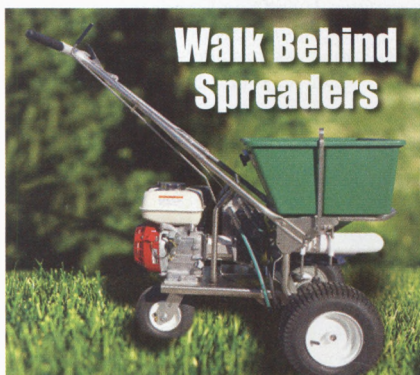
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HIRE POWER



THE MAIN ATTRACTION

By Kate Spirgen

• GOOD HELP ISN'T GETTING ANY EASIER TO FIND.

So we spoke with Joe Chiellini, president and CEO of ASI Landscape Management in Florida, to see how his Tampa Bay-area business is overcoming the challenges of a tough employment market.

Q: What tips do you have when it comes to creating a workplace employees want to work in?

A: Well it starts with culture, No. 1. And the culture's got to be built around the core values. And the core values have to be lived. That's one of the biggest things that we push at ASI is living our core values.

Two things happen – it attracts talent because word gets out and they hear about our culture and then it also helps in weeding out the people who maybe don't believe in our culture.

Q: What are your core values?

A: They're profit, loyalty and fun.

Q: What are your biggest challenges right now when it comes to recruiting new employees?

A: The Tampa Bay area is the second- or third-biggest boom going right now of construction. So with

that being said, our workforce, our average hourly rate at ASI is \$14 an hour for a maintenance position. Well, they can go make \$20 with no skill, no experience hanging drywall.

With that boom in our area, this is a big struggle, Amazon opened one of their distribution warehouse here. That brings a lot of jobs.

I just read an article about Amazon and they're moving their minimum wage to \$15 an hour and, by the way, you get to work in the air conditioning. So that's what we're up against and that's a regional issue.

They can go hang drywall, they can do concrete, they can do any of that just because they have a great work ethic.

Let's be honest, it's the Hispanic workforce we're after.

They've got a great work ethic and if you tell them they're going to make \$20 an hour and hang drywall

and then you throw in an Amazon distribution center for the Millennials who'd rather work in the AC and maybe learn a cool trade and we've got a double whammy going.

Q: What have been your most successful retention strategies?

A: We do BBQs twice a year; we do event outings; we've done hockey games. We bring the team members and we'll also mix in some clients so we'll use it for two different aspects.

That's a big thing in attracting the talent and our team knows that we – all the way up to me, the CEO – we have an open-door policy.

If there's something you need to talk about, or want to talk about, we have an open-door policy and I think that really helps that a production manager knows that he can walk into my office and sit in my chair and talk to me.

HIRE POWER helps you recruit, hire and retain the best talent for your company. We've got a rotating panel of sources ready to advise you on staffing.

One of the things that helps us keep people is, in a nutshell, they feel like they have a voice.

Another thing we do is we do a lot of training. And I think with the new group, and I hate grouping people, but with the Millennials of today, they want that. They crave training, they crave appreciation. It's not about money to them. It's about more time off and if I'm training them to do their job better, quicker, get home, those kinds of things, it just seems to keep them.

Q: What have been your most successful recruiting strategies?

A: We concentrate heavily on who we have, No. 1. We didn't do any layoffs this year.

Another thing that we're doing is we're opening branches and we're trying to build density.

In our world, the labor workforce that we attract, they live within commuting distance to your branch or your office. So what we've done is we're trying to save on time and travel and fuel.

Another thing we've done is we've taken our branches and strategically put them in places where we know that workforce is and they're not having to drive 20 or 30 minutes to our headquarters.

So we've got a branch 20 or 30 minutes across town and still within our town, but we opened another one over there and hopefully we'll attract some. All we did was move some of our trucks out of headquarters over there that can service that area anyways. I hate to say it, but maybe we're attracting the guy that can ride a bike. Maybe he doesn't have a driver's license, but he can ride his bicycle to us. **L&L**

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