Slam dunk, landscape style

A
n employee of Quail Hollow Coun-
try Club is eying one of the upstairs
ballrooms suspiciously as she goes
about her daily routine. And, from
an outsider’s point of view, it’s un-
derstandable. So far as she can tell,
the group inside is composed of
adults. Yet the noise coming from the room suggests
there’s a bunch of crazy kids inside.

But they’re not kids. They’re all employees or owners
of landscape companies, and
they’re all taking directions from
Green Industry consultant Jim
Paluch of JP Horizons, Inc.,
Mentor, OH. First, they’re told
to howl loudly like wolves. Then,
the adrenaline-laced song “Dr.
Who” starts playing, and every-
one is asked to perform “The
Wave.” Paluch then asks if every-
one can give the person closest to
them a high five and a back rub.

These are guys who mow
grass? Yes. But this is the Leaders-
ship Jam 2000, where landscape foremen and front line
supervisors can learn new skills to advance their careers.

Radical ideas?

As Paluch paces around in front of these landscape
professionals, he advocates workforce behavior that sadly
would seem radical to some: saying to a fellow employee,
“I want you to plant these trees because you’re the most
awesome tree planter,” or simply smiling on the job.

“We’re so into this, I’m the boss and work is serious,
thing,” Paluch says. “If I smile, my employees will think
I’m making money and ask for a raise. If I frown, they’ll
think we’re not doing well.”

Perhaps even more radical is what Leadership Jam
speaker Steve Pattie, founder of The Pattie Group in
Cleveland, OH, said to do for an employee who has had
a fight with his wife. “Let him leave thirty minutes early
and give him $10 to buy flowers for her,” he says. “It may
not solve anything, but he’ll be happier coming to work.”

But Paluch and his industry friends aren’t just talking
about how to treat employees better and build a better
sense of teamwork, they’re also talking about going the
extra mile for customers. Marty Grunder, owner of
Grunder Landscaping Co., Miamisburg, OH, tells land-
scape professionals to do something they may never have
thought of. “If you finish a job a little early, ask your cus-
tomer if he or she would like his or her car washed,” he
says. Now that’s service.

Progressive thinking

An “old school” businessperson might watch these guys
slam dunk on a miniature basketball hoop and say to
himself, “This is nonsense. These people need to get back
to work.” But one gets the feeling that, in these high pres-
sure days of too much work, too little help, this kind of
employee gathering is just what the doctor ordered.

Every so often, we need to take a different approach to
something, however radical it might be. Now’s the time to
do it because times are good — we can afford to take
chances. Even if you experiment
with some new workplace phi-
losophy or way to deal with
employees or customers and it
fails, the work will still be there.

Don’t wait until tomorrow
to tell your employees
they’re awesome — tell
them today. And give
them opportunities to
bond and learn
more about
each other’s
unique attributes.

This all takes an open mind, which
can be created by something as big as
the Leadership Jam or as small as a
lunchroom meeting.

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These guys should be out mowing, not goofing
off...or should they?