



AT A GLANCE

NAME: Bill Hildebolt, Ph.D.

COMPANY: Nature's Select Premium Turf Services

LOCATION: Winston-Salem, N.C.

YEAR FOUNDED: 1994

INDUSTRY INVOLVEMENT:

I authored *The Professional Entrepreneur, When Cowboys Grow Up*. All proceeds go directly to the PLANET Academic Excellence Foundation (AEF).

BUSINESS PHILOSOPHY: Our tagline is "Our Service Reflects Our Good Nature."

FAMILY: My youngest son works for us and my oldest son has his own business with his wife. I also have two beautiful grandchildren.

HOBBIES: Golf and wood-working

WEBSITE: www.naturesselect.com

Ethics may not be as valued today as they once were, but successful businessmen and women should hold themselves to high standards, says **Bill Hildebolt**, owner of Nature's Select Premium Turf Services in Winston-Salem, N.C. The No. 1 promise the former president of the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) makes his customers is "integrity, honesty and respect," and he feels those values still are appreciated. Hildebolt talks about challenges, running an ethical business and what it's like to see the finished product.

How has the industry changed since you first started?

The technology and equipment have really improved. When I started the business almost 20 years ago, I based it on biological and renewable farming procedures. Peoples' reactions were "What is this?" But now, almost two decades later, you can't even pick up a magazine without hearing all about those practices. That's how everyone is operating nowadays, and though some companies make it sound like a new idea, it's something we've been doing from the start.

What's the most important lesson you've learned?

I've learned that I will not let my competition drive or change my ethics. I was in the corporate world for 20-something years and even though we were dealing with trade secrets and had steep competition, it was an ethical

environment and nobody would think of trying to get ahead by stealing or cheating. That was back then. Business was built on ethics. Then I started my own business and the whole ballgame changed. I had competitors stealing from us or putting Roundup on our lawns. It was like the Wild West. You want to retaliate, but it's better not to go down that path.

Do you see that as the biggest challenge the industry faces?

How to compete against low ballers and still maintain your high standards is the big challenge. It's important to maintain your personal and business integrity by practicing good ethics. In this day and age, customers are using social media or services like Angie's List to find out about you. In the past you had one person aggravated if you cut a corner, but now that one person goes online and tells the

world. The ultimate advice is to deliver the best quality service possible so your customers won't even think of looking anywhere else.

Do you think the lawn care segment in particular faces any challenges?

Marketing and sales are the biggest challenge for the lawn care business. With the housing market and economic crisis, it's very difficult to add on new clients. We've become so frustrated with marketing that we have put our money into getting referrals. That's been the best way to get new customers.

What's your favorite part of the business?

I think one of the most satisfying things about lawn care is seeing your finished product. In the Green Industry, after we do a lawn renovation, we get to drive by those properties and see a magnificent-looking green carpet and know that we did that work. It's an amazing sense of accomplishment.

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Payton is a freelance writer with seven years of experience covering the landscape industry.