



# LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT

YOUR GUIDE TO GROWTH™

## MOVING MOUNTAINS

How a compelling  
company vision  
can help you  
attract the  
best team  
and achieve  
your goals.

April 2015

[landscapemanagement.net](http://landscapemanagement.net)

A NORTH COAST MEDIA PUBLICATION



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ON THE COVER: ILLUSTRATION ©ISTOCK.COM/RETROROCKET

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### NEW VIDEO ON LANDSCAPEMANAGEMENT.NET



➔ Are you asking employees the right questions to move your company forward? In his latest video, consultant Jeffrey Scott expands on how the questions you ask employees make you a reactionary leader or a proactive leader. Watch all episodes of "Growing your business with Jeffrey Scott" at [LandscapeManagement.net/video](http://LandscapeManagement.net/video).

## APP PICK

### OverDrive

Dust off your library card and put it to use with OverDrive.

The app allows you to browse, borrow and indulge in free e-books, audio-books and more from your public library's digital collection. Looking for some good business book recommendations? Scope out the *LM* February 2014 cover story, "The book that changed my business" ([buff.ly/1Gylwi3](http://buff.ly/1Gylwi3)).  
**iOS, Android: Free**

# OverDrive®

## BLOG IT OUT

Due in part to Scotts Miracle-Gro Co. developing a strain of genetically modified Kentucky bluegrass, the topic of genetically engineered (GE) organisms is stirring debate in the green industry. Gregg Robertson recently opined on the controversy in his government affairs blog at [LandscapeManagement.net](http://LandscapeManagement.net)—head here to read the full article. Here's an excerpt:

*"The gap between what the GE technology can produce and what the public is comfortable accepting is Scotts' challenge. ... If it is successful in getting the public to accept its new Kentucky bluegrass seed, more GE landscape plants surely will follow."*

### FACEBOOK FEEDBACK

Our February Step by Step feature on how to prune young trees created some buzz on social media. Here's what a few Facebook followers added:

*"Also, never top trees (and) check out PlantAmnesty.org."*

—JOSEPH MACHCINSKI

*"Proper pruning in the next few months is an important maintenance practice to keep your young trees healthy."*

—MRW LAWNS



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# EDITOR'S NOTE

**MARISA PALMIERI**  
EDITOR

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mpalmieri@northcoastmedia.net



## Seeking satisfaction

**D**o you know the story of the tourist and the fisherman? You may have heard it from a motivational speaker or read it in a chain email along the way.

I don't recall where I first heard the tale, attributed to German writer Heinrich Böll, but I often think of it in relation to the spectrum of landscape professionals I encounter doing my job.

There are one-man operators who keep their businesses small so they can be their own bosses and still get their kids off the bus. They may not be making millions, but they're OK with that. There are the guys who unapologetically want to be the biggest, the best and make millions. And there's everything in between.

“We're all entitled to want what we want and to decide the best way to achieve it.”

Like any good parable, the story of the tourist and the fisherman has been retold over and over and has many variations, but the message is always the same.

I thought April—during a hectic period some people in the landscape industry call the “100 days of hell”—was a good time to share this story here. I'll paraphrase it from the story's Wikipedia page ([buff.ly/1CRsUsh](http://buff.ly/1CRsUsh)):

*A wealthy tourist is taking photographs on a beach when he notices a local fisherman taking a nap in his fishing boat. The tourist is disappointed*

*with the fisherman's apparently lazy attitude toward his work, so he approaches the fisherman and asks him why he's lying around instead of catching fish. The fisherman explains that he went fishing in the morning, and the small catch would be sufficient for the next two days.*

*The tourist tells him that if he goes out to catch fish multiple times a day, he would be able to buy a motor in less than a year, a second boat in less than two years and so on. The tourist further explains that one day, the fisherman could even build a small cold storage plant, later a pickling factory and make millions.*

*The nonchalant fisherman asks, “Then what?”*

*The tourist enthusiastically continues, “Then, without a care in the world, you could sit here in the harbor, doze in the sun and look at the glorious sea.”*

*“But I'm already doing that,” says the fisherman.*

This story also crossed my mind during keynote speaker David Horsager's talk at the Professional Landcare Network (now National Association of Landscape Professionals) Great Escape conference in late February. He cited research showing that the more people seek pleasure, the less of it they have. “Seek satisfaction, not pleasure,” he said.

So, which man in the story is right? Neither. Or both. We don't really know. We're all entitled to want what we want and to decide the best way to achieve it. The point is not to miss out on what gives you satisfaction because you're too overworked or stressed to see it. ☺



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# Q+A

### Any tips for creating a company vision statement?

"First of all, don't make it complicated or it will fail."

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#### MORE ONLINE

See more great advice and complete answers from our Editorial Advisory Board in the online version of this feature at [LandscapeManagement.net](http://LandscapeManagement.net).

"Vision, mission and core values can change, so updating your statements is always possible."

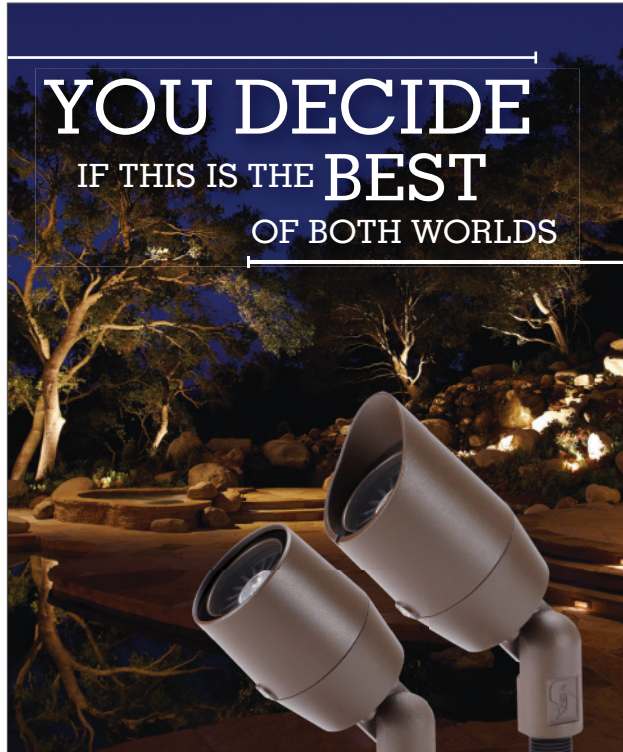
"Have leadership teams engage in visioning exercises together and focus on a specific time frame."

"Organize an off-site managers' retreat. Bring in a facilitator for awesome results!"

"Employees need to know what the future holds and the vision should answer that question."

Check out the cover story!

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# BIG PICTURE

## GARDEN OASIS

**LOCATION** Washington, D.C.

**COMPANY** Botanical Decorators, Olney, Md.

**THE DETAILS** The clients wanted a modern garden to serve as the main entrance to their newly renovated townhouse. The space needed to accommodate the needs of three dogs, two cats and two urban professionals amid satisfying the uses of dining, cooking, entertaining and gardening.

Botanical Decorators installed artificial turf for the pets, and a tree grows up out of the turf to enhance the natural atmosphere. Because traditional hardwood mulch is messy in this kind of site—and too appealing to the cats—it was replaced with a finely textured river rock.

The side yard now is an outdoor grilling area, bedecked with lush but simple plantings such as espaliered camellias, clump form bamboo and a coral-barked Japanese maple. A cobblestone arc visually expands the narrow space and bridges the area between the flagstone tiles and the back door.

**PHOTO** This Pennsylvania flagstone set in concrete is solid and clean, but its staggered pattern suggests a loose, sand-set pathway.

*See more photos from this project, which earned a National Landscape Awards of Excellence Grand Award from the National Association of Landscape Professionals, at [LandscapeManagement.net/BigPicture](http://LandscapeManagement.net/BigPicture).*

PHOTO: JASPER COLT





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# NEWS + HOW-TO'S

LANDSCAPE  
INDUSTRY  
TRENDS,  
VIEWS  
AND TIPS

RECOMMENDER

BRUCE'S VIEW

STEP BY STEP

NEW STUFF

SAFETYWATCH

## LATE NIGHTER



**L**ike many landscape companies, The Greenwood Group in Wentzville, Mo., has the goal to get all crews out in less than 15 minutes every morning.

"We've been trying to do this forever, naturally," says Pete Schepis, owner and VP. "The yard is where we burn the most time."

One way it's found to cut down on lost time is to assign each of the company's six managers to stay late one night per week. The "late night guy" is responsible for ensuring all crews get back without any problems, tagging any damaged equipment and working with each crew leader to refuel equipment and trucks. It adds about two hours onto his day.

The late nighter is quite busy (the company runs 20 crews per day), but Schepis says the process works and ensures the company isn't racking up overtime.

"It's his only night to worry about being there late and it pays off in the morning," he says. "It saves so much money, it's incredible. We've got 75 people on our payroll, so it adds up fast."

“We're keen to getting out in 15 minutes so we beat the traffic, which saves time, money and fuel.”

BROUGHT TO YOU BY



JOHN DEERE



## RECOMMENDER

# Paver products

## Which do you prefer and why?



Pine Hall Brick's StormPave product



### SAM DUFF

PRESIDENT, TIMBERWOOD LANDSCAPE CO.  
DUBLIN, OHIO

"Unilock is my preference for the wide range of pavers, and the accents are second to none. Their territory managers are extremely helpful, always available and provide amazing sales support. I have to say that in terms of quality products and working relationship, there is no other manufacturer that even comes close."



### ZAC TUTTLE

BRANCH MANAGER, THE ARRIMOUR GROUP  
HUNTINGDON VALLEY, PA.

"We mainly use E.P. Henry, Techo-Bloc and Unilock. E.P. Henry is a quality paver, Techo-Bloc has a more rustic paver and Unilock seems to be growing in popularity. Their Umbriano paver is highly requested by customers. Overall, all three companies have a good selection of pavers, it just depends on the customers' taste and budget."

## BRUCE'S VIEW



BY BRUCE WILSON

The author, of the Wilson-Oyler Group, is a 30-year industry veteran. Reach him at [bwilson@wilson-oyler.com](mailto:bwilson@wilson-oyler.com).

## CAN WE PAY MORE?

**H**ow can we afford to pay more for our employees when our customers want to pay less for our work? Wow, it's the million-dollar question. Especially in the landscape maintenance industry, which is more price-driven than ever. And if we did pay more, would it be worth it? Here's what I observe in the industry:

- We hire at the lowest cost to us as possible.
- We pay good employees more, and they become well paid.
- We continue to hire at the lower rate.
- We get some employees that scheme to take advantage of us.

What I believe and what I do:

**Better is better.** If you hire the right people, it can pay off with better-aligned, better-empowered people who produce and perform at better and higher levels.

**Go wide and don't settle.**


You can't just pay more; you must interview a selection of people and not settle for someone just because there's a hole to fill.

**Find the "eagle."** Hire people you feel are a cut above, who differentiate themselves by experience and work ethic—with the latter being more important.

**Mistakes happen.** If you make a bad-hiring call, cut your losses immediately.

**Expect.** Hold team members and colleagues accountable to be what they profess to be.

**Raise the bar.** Raise standards for performance and stretch comfort levels.

**Coach.** Develop potential and grow high-performing people at all levels to increase productivity across the board. 



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\*Based on 2015 manufacturer list price.

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## STEP BY STEP

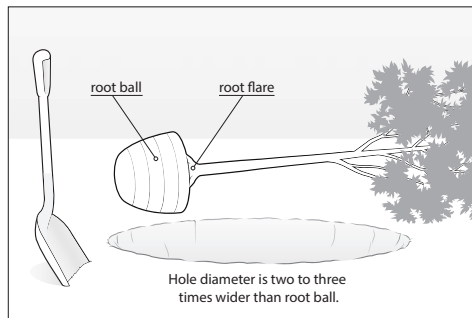
# How to properly plant trees and shrubs

**DOWNLOAD IT**

Visit [LandscapeManagement.net/StepbyStep](http://LandscapeManagement.net/StepbyStep) to download a PDF of this page to use as a training tool for your team.

**P**lanting a tree or shrub that will be healthy for years to come requires proper planning, selection and installation.

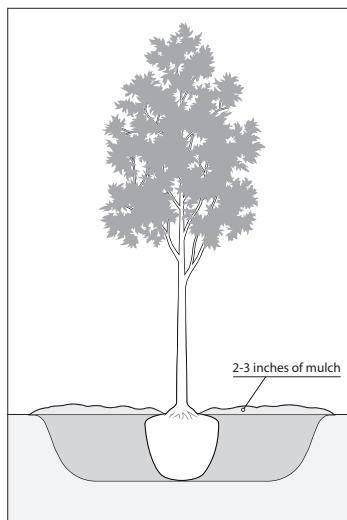
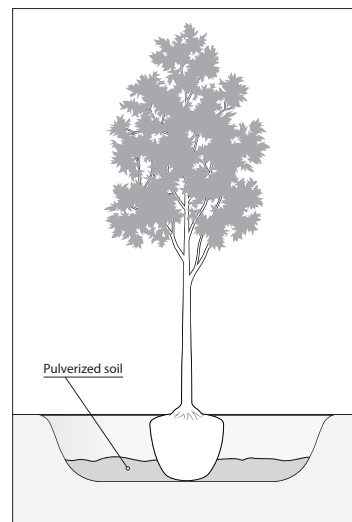
- Start by looking at the site conditions to evaluate soil volume, drainage, growth restrictions (above and below ground), shading, soil pH and nutrition. Use that information to find a tree or shrub that will thrive in the setting.
- The keys to a good planting hole are depth, diameter and backfill consistency. Depth should relate directly to the tree's root flare or topmost lateral root. This topmost lateral root should be positively identified and set flush with surrounding soil grade or slightly higher than surrounding grade after the tree has fully settled.
- The planting hole should measure two to three times larger than the diameter of the widest portion of the tree's root ball. Scarify the sidewalls of the planting hole to help with root penetration.
- Pulverize the soil removed from the hole to use as backfill. Soil amendments, if used, should never exceed 20 percent of the total backfill volume.
- Before standing the tree up in the hole, remove hardware, stakes or shrink wrap. If the tree was container-grown, remove the container and address all circling roots as needed by shaving, slicing or selectively cutting. For field-grown trees, remove the strapping and at least the top third of the burlap wrap and wire basket. (Removing all is optimal, but if the root ball is unstable, some material may need to remain.)
- Handling the tree or shrub primarily by the root ball, stand it up level in the planting hole and stabilize it by layering the bottom third of the hole with prepared backfill. Water in the first layer of backfill and level the tree. Continue layering, watering and leveling—adjusting the tree by the root ball as necessary.
- Once settled, cover the entire backfill and root ball area with a 2- to 3-inch deep layer of mulch or pine straw. Mulch should not contact the tree's trunk. 🌳


**STEP 1**

Dig a hole that's deep enough for the root flare to be lined up with or slightly higher than the soil grade. The width should be two to three times larger than the widest diameter of the root ball.


**STEP 2**

Handle the plant by its root ball, and stand it up level in the hole. Layer the bottom third of the hole with pulverized soil. Water this layer. Continue layering, watering and leveling the tree or shrub.


**STEP 3**

Cover the backfill and root ball area with 2 inches to 3 inches of mulch or straw. Don't let the mulch touch the tree's trunk.



SOURCE: Colin Conner, city forester, Hoover, Ala.



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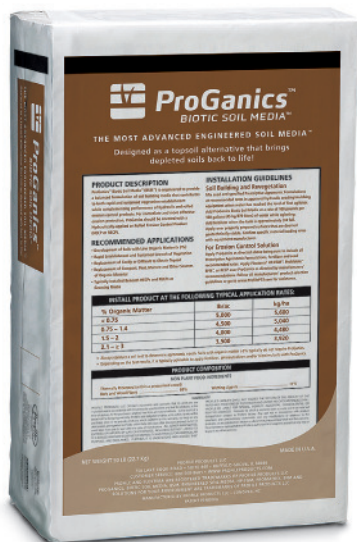
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## NEW STUFF



### 1. PROGANICS BIOTIC SOIL MEDIA

**COMPANY:** Profile Products

**URL:** ProfileProducts.com

This topsoil alternative is designed for projects where soils have low organic matter, low nutrient levels and limited biological activity. ProGanics complements the performance of hydraulic and rolled erosion control products. It's applied like hydraulic mulch and mixes quickly into a viscous, dark-brown slurry. Its loading rate is 100 lbs. per 100 gal. of water.

### 2. DS 2400 H HEDGE TRIMMER

**COMPANY:** Efco

**URL:** EfcoPower.com

The DS 2400 H's cutting system adjusts to 12 positions through 180 degree angles. It includes the Easy On device composed of a double spring in the starter cover and a driver with two ratchets that allows for easier start up. A gear hand grip provides user controls. The trimmer's steel blade is 19.6-in. long, with a total machine length of 71 in. It also features a professional-grade drive shaft; antivibration bushings; and a 21.7-cc, 1.2-hp engine.

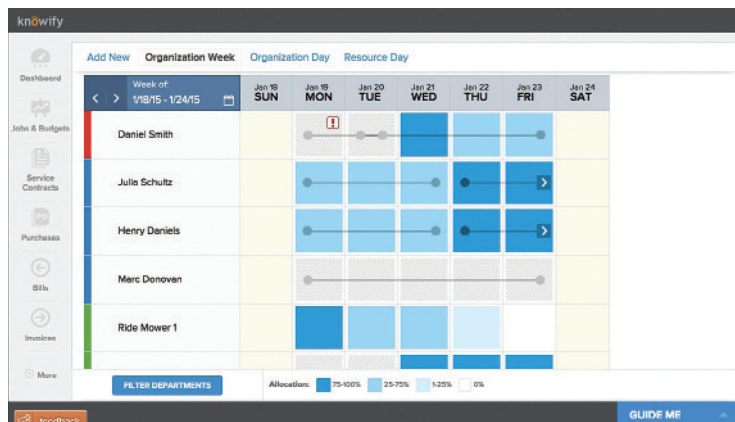
### 3. BRUTUS HDPTO DELUXE SIDE-BY-SIDE UTV

**COMPANY:** Polaris Industries

**URL:** Polaris.com/BRUTUS

The BRUTUS side-by-side utility vehicle line offers two new configurations and a cargo box utility spreader attachment. The updated HDPTO model allows users to configure the cab enclosure to the job, and the HDPTO Deluxe (pictured) offers a dramatically improved in-cab experience. Both models include a new Tier 4-compliant, 24-hp Kohler diesel engine.





4



5



6

## CHECK OUT MORE NEW STUFF ONLINE

To stay up to date on all the latest landscape industry products and services, visit [LandscapeManagement.net/tag/product-news](http://LandscapeManagement.net/tag/product-news).

## 4. KNOWIFY BUSINESS MANAGEMENT TOOLS

**COMPANY:** Knowify

**URL:** Knowify.com

Knowify's business management tools allow users to set up one-time or recurring service agreements, schedule crews and invoice clients. The platform's integrated modules let business people run their companies from the office or the field, according to the software developer. Tutorials and free trials are available.

## 5. BOXER 900HD COMPACT UTILITY LOADER

**COMPANY:** Morbark

**URL:** Morbark.com

The Boxer 900HD, powered by a 48-hp Tier 4 Final diesel engine with diesel oxidation catalyst, features dual pattern operator controls and a 94-in. hinge pin height, so users can dump material over the side of a 6-foot truck bed. It has an operating capacity of 939 lbs. Cab features include dual pattern joystick controls, a spring-cushioned operator platform, front and side padding, electronic engine display, a 12-volt auxiliary outlet and more.

## 6. IRRIGREEN GENIUS MOBILE APP

**COMPANY:** IrriGreen

**URL:** Irrigreen.com

This app allows contractors to manage an IrriGreen Genius Irrigation System from any iOS or Android smartphone. It provides interactive zone mapping, with a display of the shape of each irrigation zone and the distances of sprays from each sprinkler head. The software automatically calculates spray distances, sets mapping points, sends data to the server and controls watering patterns to match the lawn shape.



## SAFETYWATCH

➔ This photo was staged to show several safety hazards or dangerous work habits. How many can you identify? Flip to page 55 for a list of potential hazards.

### DOWNLOAD IT

Visit **LandscapeManagement.net/SafetyWatch** to print a PDF of this page. Post it at your facility, and encourage your employees to challenge their hazard-spotting skills.

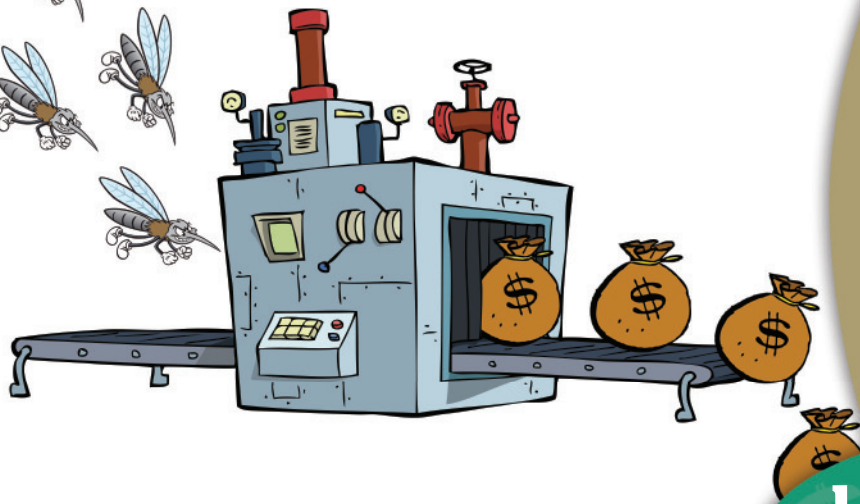
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## READY, SET, CONTROL

Follow  
three steps  
for optimal  
weed control in  
landscape beds.

➤ PAGE 18



# Ready, set, control

Follow these steps for optimal weed control in landscape beds.

BY MARISA PALMIERI

## STEP 1 SANITATION AND SITE PREPARATION

- The best time to control perennial weeds is before planting.
- If possible, prevent the introduction of weed propagules to the bed and prevent weeds from going to seed.
- Next, prep the site by fumigation (rarely used), solarization (rarely used) or with a glyphosate application. Remember, glyphosate is a nonselective, systemic herbicide that kills the shoots and roots of most weeds. It will control most perennial weeds, but some will return.

## STEP 2 PREEMERGENT WEED CONTROL

- Mulches are your first defense against annual weeds. Options include:
  - Organic: pine bark, pine straw, hardwood bark, etc.;
  - Inorganic: rocks; and
  - Black plastic or landscape fabrics.
- How much mulch?
  - Organic mulches: 3-4 in. (They're the only option for annual color beds.)
  - Inorganic mulches: 3 in.
  - With a geotextile: 2 in.
- Preemergent herbicides are your next tool, as some weeds like growing in mulches.
  - Timing is everything for effective control. Timing depends on a weed's life cycle, but applications need to be made about 2 weeks before weeds germinate.
  - Choose the right product by considering the following factors (in this order):
    - 1.) Safety to the ornamentals in the bed;
    - 2.) Efficacy on the weeds;
    - 3.) Formulation\*; and
    - 4.) Cost.

\*Granules often are preferred in beds for plant safety and convenience.

## STEP 3 POSTEMERGENT WEED CONTROL

- Labor (hand weeding, etc.) is one option.
- Postemergent herbicides are another choice.
  - There are few options for selective control.
  - Nonselective herbicides include both contact and systemic options.
- Contact herbicides do not translocate. Systemic herbicides translocate from the application site to the target site.
- Nonselective herbicide alternatives include:
  - Vinegar, which has a contact-type action.
  - Flame weeders—almost as effective as contact herbicides and good for hardscapes but not for pine straw.
  - Hot foam and steam, which has a contact kill, but requires expensive equipment (up to \$40,000).





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## CONTROL BY THE CALENDAR

Here are some guidelines for when you should pencil in your landscape bed herbicide applications.

### Winter

- Install mulch.
- Apply first preemergent application for summer annual weeds.

### Late spring/early summer

- Apply second preemergent application for late germinating summer annuals and nutsedge.

### Late summer/early fall

- Apply preemergent application for winter annual weeds.

Note: Preemergents can be applied any time of year, just not to frozen ground. Irrigation or rain is needed following an application.

Sources: Jeffrey Derr, Ph.D., professor of weed science, Virginia Tech; Joseph Neal, Ph.D., professor of Weed Science, North Carolina State University



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## NEWSFEED

### FUNGICIDES AVAILABLE

Nufarm Americas' Cleary 3336 EG and F fungicides now are available in low-dust extruded granule and flowable formations, respectively. In addition, the Environmental Protection Agency approved Nufarm's 3336 for use on select greenhouse vegetables and transplants, herbs and backyard fruit.



### WEED MAN EXPANSION

Stephen Hillenmeyer Landscape Services purchased Weed Man franchises in Lexington, Ky., and Nashville.

### NEW SPREADER-SPRAYER

Turfco rolled out its T3100 Spreader-



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## MOWING+LANDSCAPE MAINTENANCE

# Leveling the playing field

**Manufacturers explain why nongas handheld equipment is nearer than ever to the performance of gas-powered competitors.** BY SARAH PFLEDDERER



Manufacturers say lithium ion will continue to serve as a sound power source for nongas handhelds, such as this Stihl HLA 85 hedge trimmer.

**J**osh Flowers' first few years of heading up Eco-Lectric Landscape Maintenance, located in Bradenton, Fla., were less than ideal. He was using consumer-quality handheld products to serve a 90 percent residential client base.

"It was horrible," he recalls. The power and necessary runtime just weren't there.

But to stay true to Eco-Lectric's sustainable name and vision, Flowers had no other choice than to wait for the commercial-grade nongas handhelds market to grow.

"It quickly picked up," he says, thankfully.

Almost unanimously, manufacturers concur it was in 2011 when they truly targeted the commercial market with nongas handhelds. And with the demand for such products higher than ever, due in part to noise and emission ordinances, there are more options available in this segment.

"It's a good thing because we will see performance and runtime continue to improve," Josh Huffman says.

To that end, landscape professionals—including Flowers—finally are seeing the performance level of nongas handhelds as "acceptable" alternatives to their gas-powered counterparts, says Huffman, director of global product marketing for Oregon.

"The performance gap between gas and battery is as small as it's ever been, which means more and more professionals are making the switch," he says.

In terms of closing that gap, manufacturers chiefly are narrowing in on battery technology.

### BACKING LITHIUM ION

Shain Brady, senior vice president of product marketing at GreenWorks, says it's lithium ion technology that has allowed the nongas handheld market to "level the playing field with the gas guys."

"This is one of the areas where it's very easy for manufactures to get better," adds Daniel Pherson, product manager at Stihl. "We see lithium ion as a very powerful part of the future."

A reason for that trend is lithium-ion batteries perform at full power until they stop, not sacrificing performance as the charge runs out. Plus, runtimes for nongas handhelds are only as long as an operator has his finger on the trigger versus, with gas, it being on all the time after the operator pulls the cord.

The two zero-emission teams at Strathmore Landscape, a full-service, commercial landscape company in Montreal, have experienced this firsthand, Vice President Jessica Milligan says.

The two-person maintenance crews drive electric trucks equipped with Stihl nongas handhelds, including a hedge trimmer, chain saw, blower and string trimmer (see Web Extra). The products are limited for use only on properties that are less than 20,000 square feet, as their batteries run for roughly 60 to 90 minutes, Milligan says. Typically, the zero-emission teams take two to three extra batteries with them for an eight-hour day.

*Continued on page 24*

## NEWSPEED

### ASSOCIA ACTION

The Brickman Group and ValleyCrest Landscape Cos.—soon to be rebranded as Bright-

View as part of their merger—are now the exclusive landscape service provider for Associa, among the



world's largest community association management firms.

### RUPPERT GROWTH

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opened a new branch in Mableton, Ga., and appointed Thor Grenier to branch manager.

### MILITARY DISCOUNT

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Rewards Program, current and former military members now can receive a free, two-year Platinum membership.





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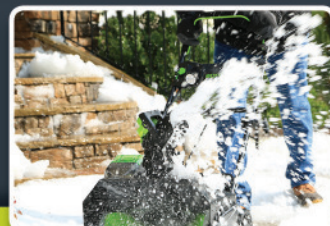
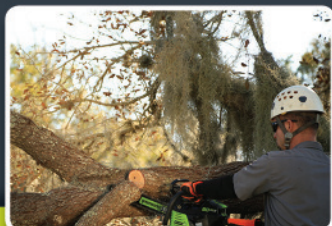
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## MOWING+LANDSCAPE MAINTENANCE

*Continued from page 22*

One benefit of sticking to a single brand of nongas handhelds, Flowers says, is that batteries and chargers are fairly interchangeable.

Though, Flowers doesn't fully reap that perk because he owns multiple brands—Core string trimmers, an Echo blower, Ryobi edgers and Stihl hedge trimmers. He goes through roughly three to four batteries per day per piece of equipment, with those taking around 20 minutes each to reach a full charge.

"Right now I have so many batteries," Flowers says. "It's a bit of a hassle."

Since purchasing its nongas handheld inventory three years ago, Strathmore Landscape has yet to replace any of the batteries. And while the initial investment was higher than gas-powered equipment, due to battery and charger costs, Milligan says the company saw a return in fuel savings after using the tools for about 14 to 15 months.

For some perspective on battery life spans, Oregon and GreenWorks market their batteries as lasting up to 1,000 charges. Stihl says 20 percent of a battery's capacity is lost after 500 charges.

Mean Green Products President Joe Conrad justifies it this way: "Look at the battery as the fuel for life for that piece of equipment."

### A PUSH FOR BACKPACK BATTERIES

Among the newer players in the non-

gas handheld market, Mean Green is evolving from electric mowers to debut its first line of nongas handhelds this year. It will include trimmers, a pruning chain saw and a blower.

All the units can be powered by a backpack battery—a growing necessity for nongas handhelds, Conrad says.

"The biggest concern for anybody that wants to convert to electric is that there's not enough power and it won't last long enough on a battery," he says. "That's why we came up with the backpack battery system."

Other manufacturer reps, such as Stihl's Pherson, concur there's "a big push for pros using a backpack battery."

This especially is the case for blowers and other handhelds that are more "power hungry," Huffman says.

"Moving air takes a lot of energy," Brady adds. "That's why fuel tanks on backpack blowers are so large because they need that much fuel to operate for long periods of time."

### LESS LEAN TOWARD LITHIUM ION

While many handheld manufacturers are homing in on lithium ion as a reliable battery technology, Core Outdoor Power combines it with its motor technology that replaces wiring with a new approach that's much like printed circuit board technology.

"Power and runtime are the two key metrics that have hurt nongas products,"



**Strathmore Landscape saw a return in fuel savings after using its nongas handhelds for about 14 to 15 months on its zero-emission teams.**

says Lincoln Jore, vice president of development. "Our motor designs allow us to cost effectively offer more power in a smaller package. That's what's allowed us to go after the commercial market."

Core has in the past implemented the technology on trimmers, Jore says. But due in part to MTD Products acquiring Core in January, the manufacturer is in developmental stages on "a full suite of handheld equipment," including blowers and chain saws.

### WHAT'S TO COME


Much like Mean Green, GreenWorks also is focusing on the commercial market in 2015. It's releasing its 80-volt nongas handheld line—one of the highest voltage offerings in the industry.

Until now the manufacturer offered only a 40-volt product, mainly for homeowner use with up to an acre lot size.

GreenWorks is pushing the limit on nongas handheld specifications, offering an 18-inch chain on its 80-volt chain saw—"the largest bar and chain on a battery-powered tool," Brady says.

Likewise, Stihl and Oregon are redefining standard product specs.

Stihl recently debuted "the world's first lithium ion cut-off machine," its TSA 230 saw for a variety of application. Oregon released its new DL 30 blower, which has a "turbo" setting that reaches 130 mph and more than 500 cubic feet per minute.

In addition, Oregon continues to refine the self-sharpening Power Sharp feature on its nongas chain saw to push its philosophy that a well-kept machine can directly correlate to runtime. 

### WEB EXTRA

To get a look at Strathmore Landscape's zero-emission maintenance crews, visit [LandscapeManagement.net](http://LandscapeManagement.net) for more information and a video.

Though Eco-Lectric Landscape Maintenance has a slew of nongas handheld product brands, it sticks with Mean Green Products' mowers.





### OVERVIEW

During sales presentations, focus on the big picture and don't get bogged down with details.



# Prepare, present and close

Master the tricks of a perfect kitchen-table presentation. BY JODY SHILAN

**P**ublic speaking or giving presentations is a nerve-wracking experience for most people. It requires confidence, concentration and knowledge of your subject matter. It also requires experience. If you're not comfortable making a presentation to a customer, don't worry, you're not alone.

Over the years I've literally given thousands of presentations to homeowners to sell landscape design/build services. I've also made thousands of mistakes. Fortunately, I've learned from my experiences and want to share some trade secrets that will help you succeed.

Most landscape designers/salespeople present our plans and proposals at our clients' kitchen tables. The perfect kitchen-table presentation includes three parts: preparation, presentation and closing. Each part consists of several steps you need to follow if you want to develop, improve and be successful. If you're too nervous, too cocky or don't know what you're talking about, there's



an excellent chance that you'll have a difficult time selling.

### PREPARATION

One thing most salespeople overlook is preparing for their presentations. Believe it or not, you're not supposed to just show up and wing it. Although, I suspect that's what many of you do.

A simple act like calling to confirm your appointment gives clients confidence that they're working with a professional, and it takes less than 30 seconds to do. Plus, it gives them the opportunity to reschedule need be and saves you from making a wasted trip if they forgot.

Take 10 to 15 minutes to review the plan and proposal at the office (not in the truck). It allows you to refresh your memory while also checking for mistakes. Not knowing what's in the design or

proposal can make you look foolish and be very costly. Too many "umm, umm, umms" and you're done, done, done. Regardless of how experienced you are, take this time to practice your presentation. Lastly, check the schedule so you know when their project could begin.

### PRESENTATION

There are many reasons a presentation may succeed or fail. Some are more obvious than others.

There's nothing like a great big smile and hearty handshake to set the tone for your meeting. Take off your shoes whether or not they're muddy. Even if the client says not to worry about it, do it. It shows you care and are respectful.

Before you begin your presentation, start off with some light conversation. As far as seating goes, make sure your

## NEWSPEED

### JCB LINEUPS

JCB unveiled several pieces of new land-

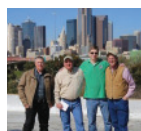
scape construction equipment at a press event in Savannah, Ga., last month, including new



backhoes, compact excavators, skid-steers and wheel loaders.

### NONPROFIT REPURPOSED

Preservation Tree Services and Texas Landcare, both



based in Dallas, joined forces to help a local nonprofit, OurCalling, renovate a dilapidated

building into its new outreach center.

### TEREX DEBUTS

Terex added the R260S and V350S to its Generation 2 skid-steer line, plus it released its TC16 and TC29 compact excavators.



## DESIGN/BUILD+INSTALLATION

clients sit across from you and not to your left and right. You want to be able to look at them while you're presenting and quickly glance from one to the other to keep eye contact. If one is on your left and the other is on your right, you have to keep turning your head back and forth, which literally can make you dizzy. It's easy to lose track of your presentation when you're constantly swinging your head around.

Also, use a drawing tube to protect your plan and to present a professional image. Make sure to roll your plan backward in the tube so it will lay flat on the table when you unroll it.

For the presentation of the drawing itself, I like to work in a clockwise motion starting in the front yard and working my way around the property. I also recommend you present the big ideas and not bog down your prospects with details, which can be confusing (see sidebar, "Details, details.>").

Keep your proposal in your bag and not on the table; it's too distracting. Once you've presented the drawing, then you can take it out and present it, as well. Make sure they understand what they're paying for along with the payment schedule, including the initial deposit.

*Continued on page 28*

Jody Shilan



### Details, details

Many landscape salespeople think details are important and help them stand out from the competition. In reality, they bog down your sales presentation and clients get caught up in the minutiae that doesn't matter to them anyway. For example:

#### SAY THIS:

"In the corner is your beautiful raised patio, seating wall and evergreen privacy screen, which is perfect for when you host barbecues or entertain friends out here."

#### NOT THIS:

"In the corner is an EP Henry Dakota Blend, Coventry Brickstone paver laid in a herringbone pattern on 4-in. of Q.P. and 1-in. of sand, with a matching Dakota Blend Coventry Wall, which is 22-in. high with universal caps attached with construction adhesive. The evergreens are 7- to 8-ft. Arborvitae 'Green Giants' planted 36-in. on center."



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## DESIGN/BUILD+INSTALLATION

Continued from page 26

### CLOSING

If you've done everything correctly, closing should just be another step in the sales process, not some battle of wits to see who flinches first. After you've reviewed the plan and proposal, simply ask your clients if they have any questions (about anything). Keep asking until they don't have any left. Now you can simply say, "OK, since you don't have any more questions, all I need is a signature and a deposit and we can get you scheduled."

Assuming this goes according to plan, don't make this your last interaction. Leave the signed check and proposal on the table, and tell them how excited you are about the project as opposed to taking the money and running. Let them know what the next steps are and who's their point person. Remind them of the tentative start date and explain how the utility companies will be doing a mark-out. Ask them again if they have any questions. If they do, answer them. If not, thank them and say goodbye. 📞

Shilan is editor of FromDesign2Build.com. Reach him at [jshilan@gmail.com](mailto:jshilan@gmail.com).

### What if they're not ready to sign?

If you get through the presentation and ask for a signature and deposit, only to have the homeowners hesitate, don't panic. But do consider where you went wrong.

Did you screen the candidates properly on the phone before creating a plan and getting to the presentation meeting? Did you make an error in creating a plan that met their goals and objectives? Did you design something outside their budget range?

If they say they need to think it over, don't just give up immediately. Ask them what they're unsure or uncomfortable about. If it's the design, that can easily be modified. If it's the money, offer solutions such as changing to a less expensive hardscape product, smaller plant material, removing the lighting for now or substituting specimen trees for something similar at a lower price point. They may not have known changes were possible and that's all they needed to feel better. Whatever you do, don't *just* drop your price.

If they still resist, don't push it. Just ask them if it would be OK if you followed up with a phone call in a few days. And make sure you do.

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## IRRIGATION+WATER MANAGEMENT

# On budget

**With water budgets, contractors can demonstrate and document good water stewardship.** BY EMILY SCHAPPACHER



**W**hen it comes to sustainability, few people are under more pressure than irrigation contractors. With droughts drying up entire regions throughout the U.S., municipalities are mandating that property owners significantly reduce their water usage—or even stop irrigating their landscapes altogether. Coming up with those savings often falls on contractors' shoulders.



Brent Mecham

All this gives Brent Mecham "heartburn." The industry development director for the Irrigation Association (IA) knows there are ways for contractors to be part of the solution, rather than the problem. Water budgeting is one of those ways that allows contractors to demonstrate and, more importantly, document their water stewardship while still doing their jobs.

"It's a best-management practice," Mecham said during an IA webinar about water budgeting. "It's the right thing to be doing, and if we do it correctly we'll be able to document and prove that we're good stewards of water."

A water budget provides a framework for determining the minimum amount of applied water required to produce the social, economic and environmental benefits of an irrigated landscape, according to the IA. Determining the correct inputs is a critical step in creating an effective water budget. Inputs to the water budget must be tailored to local conditions and based on sound science.

Contractors need to understand not only the plants, soil and workings of the property's irrigation system, but also the purpose and function of the landscape, Mecham said. Then, they need to match the landscape's demand to the

available water supply, which will vary depending on location. Some locations have flexible water budgets, which change with the weather, allowing more water usage during hotter months and less water during colder or rainy months. Other locations have fixed water budgets, which are based on historical demand and do not respond to changing weather.

"If there's a limited amount of water, then the landscape designer or architect needs to figure out what plants they'll use, what kind of turfgrass and if it will be useful and purposeful, and then balance all of that," Mecham said. "What we're able to do dictates the look and style of the landscape."

### HOW TO CALCULATE

To calculate a water budget, contractors need to know several figures (see sidebar on page 31). The first is the Reference Evapotranspiration Data ( $ET_o$ ). Next, they need to know the Adjustment Factor (AF), which is the percentage of the Reference ET they're going to allow for the landscape. Most of the time, this factor is 0.6 in areas that are water challenged and 0.8 in areas with high rainfall and more water available. The next factor is the Landscape Area (LA), the square footage of landscape to be maintained

with irrigation. Lastly, they need the conversion factor (0.623) to convert all the units into gallons. Multiplying all these figures together determines the Landscape Water Allowance (LWA). This can be calculated monthly, annually or before every irrigation event.

In areas with poor water quality, an optional figure to include is the Leaching Factor (LF), which accounts for the extra water needed to push salts or other elements that could be detrimental to plants out of the root zone. This can equate to 20 percent to 25 percent more water than the ideal, Mecham said.

The next part of a water budget is the Landscape Water Requirement (LWR). To calculate it, multiply the Reference ET in inches by the Plant Factor (PF) and subtract the Effective Rainfall ( $R_e$ ) in inches. Multiple that figure by the Landscape Area (LA) and the 0.623 conversion factor, then divide by the Irrigation Efficiency (IE). The IE is the amount of additional water needed to compensate for an irrigation system's lack of efficiency. For example, if a system is 90 percent efficient, which can be achieved with drip irrigation, it takes 10 percent or 11 percent more water than the ideal to maintain the landscape. If a system is 70 percent efficient, which Mecham said "sounds pretty good," it will use 42 percent more water.

"In the end, what we're striving to do is see if the water requirement is less than the water allowance, and if it is, we're doing a great job," Mecham said. "However, if the water requirement exceeds the water allowance, then management decisions need to be made."



## HOW TO CALCULATE THE LWA AND LWR

$$\text{LWA} = \text{ET}_o \times \text{AF} \times \text{LA} \times 0.623$$

$$\text{LWR} = \frac{((\text{ET}_o \times \text{PF}) - R_e) \times \text{LA} \times 0.623}{\text{IE}}$$

LWA = Landscape Water Allowance (gallons)

ET<sub>o</sub> = Reference ET data (inches)

AF = Adjustment factor (0.60 to 0.80)

LA = Landscape area (square feet)

0.623 = Conversion factor for gallons

LWR = Landscape Water Requirement (gallons)

PF = Plant factor

R<sub>e</sub> = Effective rainfall (inches)


IE = Irrigation efficiency

0.90 = 11% more; 0.80 = 25% more

0.75 = 33% more; 0.70 = 42% more

Mecham says these decisions can't be made unless contractors measure how much water they use. While many irrigation systems, particularly on residential properties, don't have dedicated water meters, Mecham said you can purchase one for about \$100. They can be a good investment for contractors who are serious about water budgeting and want to measure water usage over long periods of time, he said. Rain gauges are also an effective tool to measure water usage from one irrigation event to the next.

Mecham knows that beginning the water budgeting process can be a challenge, as "people aren't paying us to be good water managers yet.

"I walk around feeling like there's a target on my back because I represent the irrigation and landscape industry, and past behavior and past performance sometimes merits the fact that the target is there," Mecham said. "But this target is an opportunity to hone in and hit the bull's-eye on how to do things better." 

Schappacher is a freelance writer based in Charlotte, N.C.

## NEWSFEED

### CALIFORNIA DROUGHT

The California State Water Resources Control Board gave water agencies a gut check March 17. If agencies don't enforce water restrictions by May, they'll be faced with a two-day-a-week watering restriction. Cities that already have restrictions must maintain those.

### IA AFFAIRS

The Irrigation Association (IA) confirmed the dates



and locations of the 2016 and 2017 Irrigation Show & Education Conference, with those being held in Las Vegas Dec. 5-9 and Orlando, Fla., Nov. 6-10, respectively. In addition, the IA mapped out its webinar schedule for 2015, comprising three series—"Bringing Water to Life," "Point of Connection" and "Knowledge Network."

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# MOVING MOUNTAINS

How a compelling company vision can help you attract the best team and achieve your goals. **BY JEFFREY SCOTT**

**A**ttracting, motivating, focusing and retaining great employees starts and ends with a compelling vision.

To attract the very best team, you must create a compelling vision for the future, and to retain top talent you must develop a method and habit for communicating your vision. A powerful vision will help you hook and hire new employees. By continually reminding your employees of your progress on your vision, they eventually will buy into it, love it and live it.

*Continued on page 34 →*





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*Continued from page 32*

On the other hand, if you ignore your vision—even if it was compelling when first written down—it will wither and die along with your company energy and focus.

Your company vision is like a big, green, welcoming front lawn. If you take care of it, it inspires everyone who sees it, drives by and comes into contact with it. But if you leave it alone—forget to mow it, never water it, never put down nutrients—then it turns into messy, weedy, overgrown dirty-brown shambles.

### **‘DO WE HAVE TIME FOR THIS?’**

Reaching your company’s true potential takes more than just a few memorized words repeated once a year or so. Communicating the company vision is a vital leadership role. And if you’re the owner, CEO or a leader within your company, it’s the most important part of your job because of how it drives and focuses all the other employees.

Sometimes company owners buy into what I’m saying, but they wonder to themselves, “Do we really have time for all that touchy-feely stuff?”

And when it’s time to talk with their employees, they say things like: “You guys know what to do. Get to work.”

I used to make that same mistake when I ran my business. I was so focused on efficiency and getting more production that I didn’t make much time to think to create and refine my vision and I didn’t take the time to communicate my vision to the people who worked for my company. As a result, we didn’t grow as fast and effectively in those early years as we could have.

You must develop your vision to become a destination company—one that good people want to work for. If you don’t do so, you’re relegated to running a company that’s reactive in nature. In a reactive company that lacks vision, employees show up for work motivated to do two

*Continued on page 36*

## **START WITH A STUMP SPEECH**

If you’re like many leaders, you’re ready to be the visionary for your company, but you may not be sure how to do it. The good news is there are dozens of ways to do this. The simplest and possibly most effective way is by developing and giving a stump speech to the whole company. Here’s what it should include:

### **1 Where you’re going, in broad**

**strokes.** Talk about the “why” while referencing your company values and emphasizing the kind of future you envision the team building over the next few years. For instance: “Our goals are to keep our clients consistently happy, to respect each other, to respect our equipment and tools and to make sure we’re always working in a safe environment. We never compromise safety. And as a company we must hit our budgets, so the company can continue to grow and we can all continue to prosper. Within two years we will double our service base and shift our client profile from townhouses to commercial sites. We will expand our facilities so we have a new building with twice the square footage, and we have the space to do really great work together.”

**2 The historical perspective.** Remind people where you’ve come from and how much progress you’ve made. For instance: “Two years ago we had X number of employees, we were at Y revenue and we were operating at Z% efficiency. ... Now we have ...”



**3 Celebrate the progress.** Discuss a recent victory or set of victories. Pick a specific event from the past week that makes the point of your progress. Teach by highlighting the positives. Praise in public. Save corrections for private conversations.

**4 Set the priorities.** Say something like, “In order to stay on track, we need to do A and B over the next week (or two, or month or quarter).” Make it clear exactly what you want to see more of, and during what time period you need to see it.

**5 Ask for volunteers.** At certain times you’ll need volunteers to help support certain priorities. Say: “To achieve our goals, we need help with X. Who’s willing to take that on or help out?” Wait for someone to raise a hand. Often, the “volunteer” is agreeing to do something for which he or she’s already has responsibility.

Help volunteers set a **5 Ws** action plan:

- 1. What** are they going to do?
- 2. When** are they going to do it?
- 3. Where** are they going to do it?
- 4. Why** are they going to do it (the benefits)?
- 5. Whose** help and support do they need?

Praise the person for volunteering, and remind the group why such-and-such is important. Guide the discussion that follows. Remember, it’s important to make the *why* bigger than the *how*. Once you make the *why* compelling, your employees will be motivated to help you figure out “how to.”



A person wearing a green hoodie and a black baseball cap is seen from behind, working on a wooden fence. The fence is made of horizontal wooden planks. In the background, there is a large agave plant with thick, pointed leaves. A small red and orange flower is visible near the base of the agave. The scene is outdoors with a clear blue sky.

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**“GOOD PEOPLE WANT  
A VISION OF THE FUTURE  
THEY’RE BUILDING FOR  
THEMSELVES AND FOR  
THE COMPANY.”**

—JEFFREY SCOTT

*Continued from page 34*

things: get a paycheck, and make it through the day. These are unhealthy motivations that become a tax to your clients, the owners and the remaining true believers in your employee ranks. Top performers won’t work for or stay with a company that is taxed excessively with a reactive attitude.

The idea that leaders don’t have time to create and share a vision is a myth. It takes *much* more time, effort and wasted energy to reactively run a company without a vision than it does to proactively run a company with a vision.

Whether we’re talking about hiring talent away from another company or holding on to the very best homegrown employees, I can’t stress enough that good people want a vision of the future they’re building for themselves and for the company.

There’s a saying in politics that “all politics is local,” which means people tend to care how politics will affect them personally, and they care less about the national agenda. For our purposes, keep in mind that “all company visions are local.” Your vision must answer the question “What’s in it for me?” (the employee). If your team members don’t buy into the company vision and can’t translate it into their professional growth and personal/family needs, they’ll eventually lose hope, vigor and interest in your company.

People have a better attitude, do better work and are more committed when they have a better sense of *why* they are doing something. It’s your job to supply that *why*.

Top performers are all about growth and improving the status quo—their company’s,

*Continued on page 38*



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*Continued from page 36*

their community's, their clients', their own. These people want to work in a company where they know they're going somewhere and making an impact. By sharing a vision of the future, you're telling your team what that future is likely to look like. If you give them a compelling enough *why*, they'll help you develop the *how-to*.

The vision you repeatedly lay out allows top performers to gain and revisit a road map that shows them how they're going to affect the future. Sharing the broad outlines of that plan for the company makes all the difference, because if your team members don't have that road map, they can't possibly be inspired to move in unison in the right direction.

### AVOID COMMON MISTAKES

Below are four common mistakes business owners and leaders make while they're mastering the skill of communicating their vision. Learn them, so you can avoid making the same mistakes at your company.

#### 1 "I already told them about this ... once."

Telling employees about your vision at the annual all-company meeting is not enough. It may remain in *your* head, but you can't assume everyone else remembers it. I know a quiet leader who has an extremely high IQ yet makes the mistake of believing that just because he thinks of something, everyone else intuitively knows it. He doesn't like to yell or be bossy—he wants his staff to be loyal and follow the program. The challenge

*Continued on page 40*

### TAKE ACTION NOW

Write down your vision for success. Start with a two-paragraph letter to yourself.

Paragraph one outlines an award your company has received 10 years from now based on achievements you've reached as a team. Paragraph two is a letter written to yourself a year from now, describing what a great job you and your team did over the past 12 months. It's specific and highlights your achievements and how it makes you feel both professionally and personally.

Ask your management team to do the same. Get together and have each person share their letters with one another to develop a shared vision.







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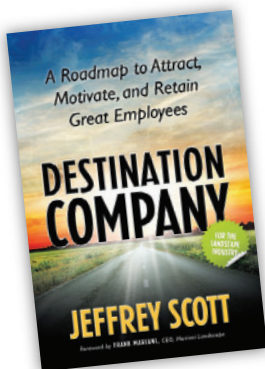
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Excerpted with permission from Scott's book, "Destination Company," due out this spring.

*Continued from page 38*  
is, his employees are not as focused as he is, and they can't read his mind, so they don't keep his vision "top of mind." They're distracted by their own lives, their own car payments, their own children and the work in front of them. This is why you have to say out loud what you're thinking and be willing to repeat it. Make the implicit *explicit*.

**2 Not specific enough.** I run into some companies whose vision is something simple like, "We'd like to grow." But what does that mean? Break down what you want to achieve into concrete chunks that your team can grab onto. (For instance, "We want to double our client base and increase our density through our client referrals and neighbor walk-bys.") If it's not specific, people have trouble buying into it, engaging with it, executing it and even remembering it.

**3 Playing "gotcha."** Some leaders think they're sharing the vision, but in fact they're leading by exception, playing "gotcha" with their staff. Avoid the syndrome where you're constantly telling people what they did wrong: "I caught you smoking." "Quality on the Jones property is never high enough." "You guys are over budget." "There's a dent in the truck."

When people *only* hear this kind of feedback, their heads sink down and their vision grows cloudy. Eventually, they tell themselves they can't win and the owner's vision is no vision at all, so they learn to keep their head down and focus on the work at hand.

## IF YOUR PEOPLE DON'T BUY INTO THE COMPANY VISION AND CAN'T TRANSLATE IT INTO THEIR PROFESSIONAL GROWTH AND PERSONAL/FAMILY NEEDS, THEY'LL EVENTUALLY LOSE INTEREST IN YOUR COMPANY.

**4 "Yeah, right."** If the vision is completely unrealistic and everyone knows it, you're going to have problems. There's a balancing act here, of course. You do want to get people engaged in attaining an ambitious goal, a "stretch" goal—but it can't be a goal that everyone quietly ridicules. The goal you set should be seen as attainable. The targets you set have to make both emotional and mathematical sense.

So if you tell people, "We're going to grow from \$3 million in revenue to \$30 million within the next three to five years," don't expect everyone to believe it. Many of your people are going to be asking both "How?" and "Why?" In this case, you have to explain why growing to \$30 million is beneficial for everyone involved, and how you envision getting there. If there are no compelling answers, you need to fine-tune the goal.

A good stretch goal is said to be one that has a 50/50 chance of being hit. Having said that, people like to know what their next steps are: What's the short-term goal?

Focus on that and you'll move mountains. 

Scott, who has a master's degree in business administration, specializes in growth and profit maximization in the green industry. He's an author, business coach and facilitator of the Leader's Edge peer group for landscape business owners. Learn more at [GetTheLeadersEdge.com](http://GetTheLeadersEdge.com).



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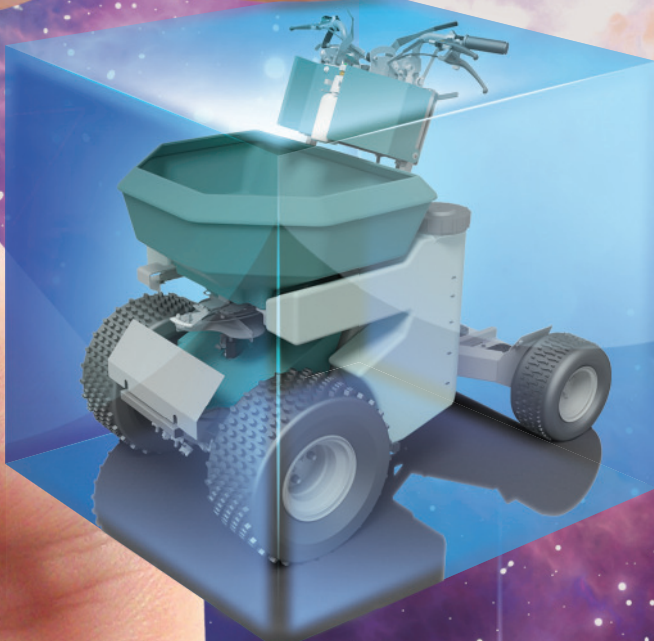
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# BUSINESS INSIDER

PRACTICAL  
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COMPANY

BUSINESS BASICS: PEOPLE

LET'S GROW

CASE STUDY: OUR WAY

## TARGETED APPROACH

McKay Landscape Lighting focuses on three client segments to maximize its marketing efforts.

▶ PAGE 48



**BUSINESS BASICS: PEOPLE**

# Avoid getting sued

**L**et's take a quiz. The results may save you from being embroiled in a costly lawsuit. Check off the boxes next to the questions you can legally ask job applicants either on your employment application form or in an interview:

- ☐ **1.** How many days were you sick last year?
- ☐ **2.** Have you ever been arrested?
- ☐ **3.** Have you ever worked for this company under any other name?
- ☐ **4.** What kind of car do you own?
- ☐ **5.** What clubs or organizations do you belong to?
- ☐ **6.** Have you ever filed a workers' compensation claim?
- ☐ **7.** How did you break your leg?
- ☐ **8.** Do you expect the leg to heal normally?
- ☐ **9.** Is there anything in your religious beliefs that would prevent you from working on a Saturday or Sunday?
- ☐ **10.** Since you've volunteered information about your condition, what accommodation would we need to provide were we to hire you?

Only three questions on the above list are legal: Nos. 3, 7 and 10. If you

passed with flying colors, congratulations! If not, read on.

Fifty-three percent of U.S. employers have been sued by job applicants, employees or former employees. Of those suits that go to trial, the employer wins only about 35 percent of the time.

**53%** of U.S. employers have been sued by job applicants, employees or former employees.

Many of these cases never would have been filed if the companies had used a standardized, systemized hiring process and the hiring managers had been trained in what they can and cannot ask during interviews. While your lawyer can make sure your job application form contains no illegal questions, is anyone monitoring every interview to make sure the questions asked in person conform to the law?

Unlike human resource professionals, most business owners and line managers are not well versed in

the fine points of federal employment law. Therein lies the liability.


Most of us have seen enough newspaper headlines to realize we shouldn't ask about race, marriage, religion, children and age. There are, however, two times these kinds of mistakes are typically made.

The first is when well-meaning interviewers start talking about themselves and their families. In an effort to break the ice, they ask questions more appropriate to a social setting. Many end up saying something like: "My daughter just joined the soccer team. How about you? Any kids in school?"

The second is when we get caught up in the interview and spontaneously ask the first question that comes to mind without a thought as to whether it is discriminatory or could be seen as discriminatory by the applicant.

Let's say you look at the job application form and notice this person attended the same high school you did. So, of course, you tell the applicant you share the same alma mater and say, "What class were you?" This innocent remark could make a case for age discrimination.

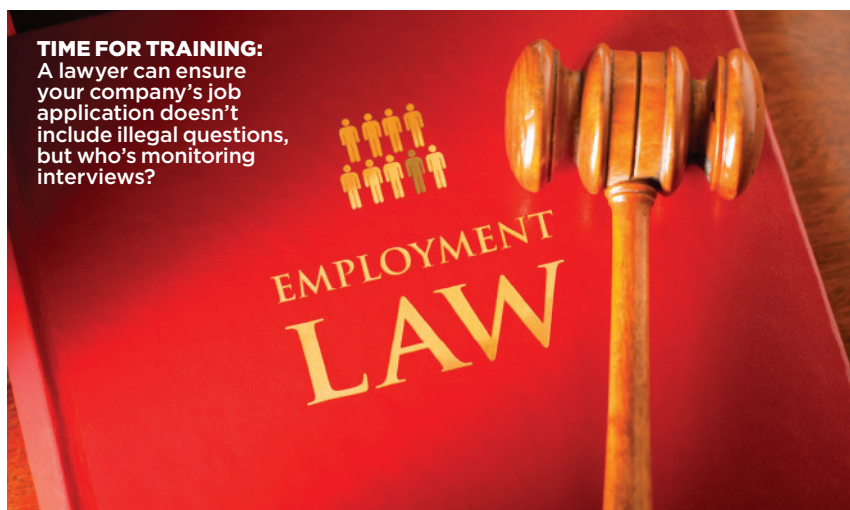
The bottom line is there are only two ways to limit your legal exposure when it comes to hiring: 1). A standardized interview question set; and 2). Interview training for all hiring managers/owners.

What every interviewer needs to know and remember is: If it isn't related to the person's ability to do the job, don't ask it. The best way to stay out of court is to just stick to the questions that tell you whether or not the person can do the job. 



**BY MEL KLEIMAN**

The author is the founder of Humetrics. He helps companies build high-quality, frontline, hourly workforces. Reach him at [mkleiman@humetrics.com](mailto:mkleiman@humetrics.com).

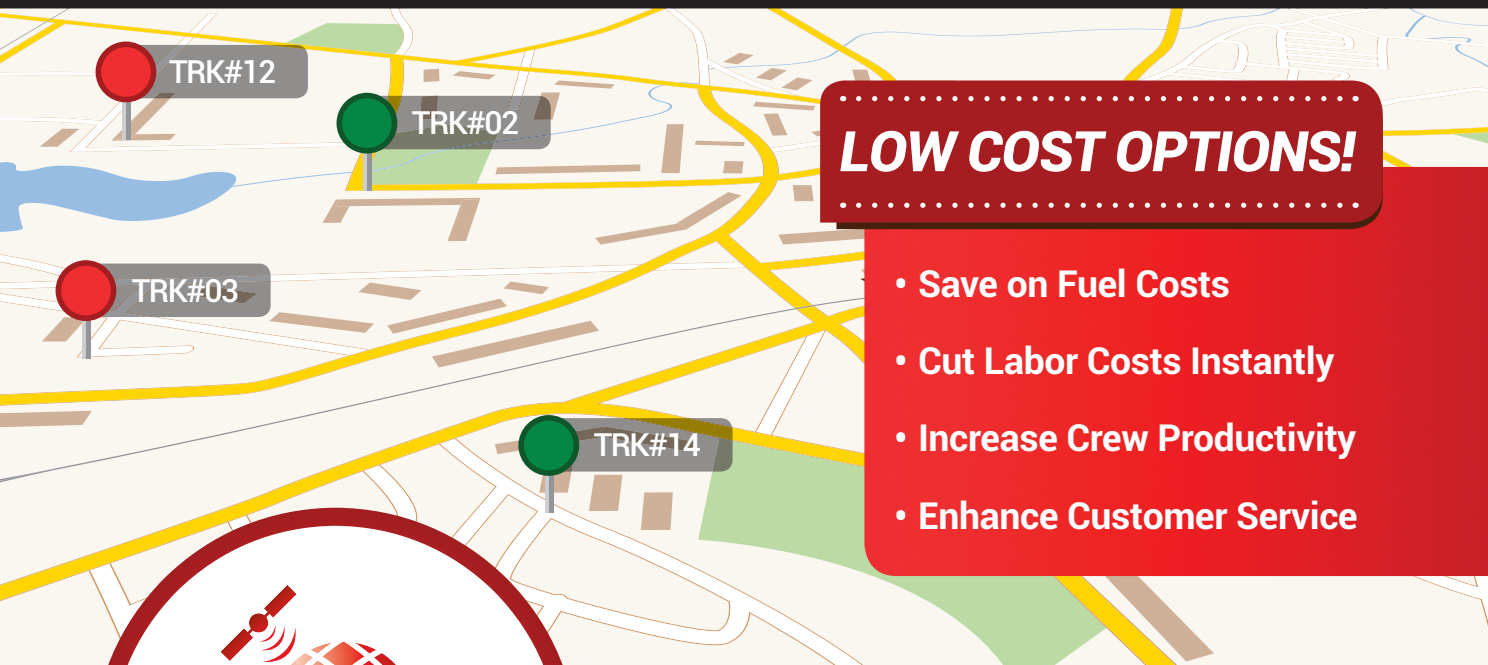




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**LET'S GROW**

# Optimize your website

**O**ften I'm asked for my opinion on creating a properly optimized website and what areas to focus on during the process. If there's one thing I strive to teach my students in every marketing class I teach, it's that what you or your coworkers want is irrelevant. It's all about what your consumer wants. Get the opinions of your typical clients or prospects and focus on the content and keywords they're looking for, as well as a structure they find easy to navigate to find what they need.

Persona research is a very useful tool in this process. Separate your potential consumers into similar groups, then interview a sampling of those consumers. What were they looking for online when researching the services you offer? What words (keywords) did they type into the Google search bar? Focusing on these questions can help you develop the content and keywords your website should focus on.

Finally, if you're redesigning an existing website, don't forget about the data that you've collected using your old site. Examine your analytics data to look at which pages performed well. Look at how users moved around your website and which pages caused them to leave.

Ignoring consumers' actions on your existing site can cause you to create a new one they don't like any better.

## PROPER SEO BUILDING BLOCKS

After taking your consumer research into account, you know which keywords to focus on and what content they want to see.

The next part revolves around developing a properly built website using this on-site search engine optimization (SEO) best practices checklist.

- Focus on one or two keywords per page. Never try to optimize an individual Web page for more than one word. Doing so may not only hurt your efforts, but it can confuse the Web reader with copy that's all over the place. Blogs are helpful because you can focus your efforts on individual keywords, creating numerous pages of content.
- Include the keyword in the URL and title tag. Always include the keyword you're optimizing your page for in the URL (website address) of the page. The title tag is what appears on top of your browser and is the "title" of the page. By using the keyword in these places, you quickly tell Google and website visitors



**BY SHAUN KANARY**

The author is director of marketing for Weed Pro in Sheffield Village, Ohio, and adjunct professor of marketing at Baldwin Wallace University.

that the page contains the information they're looking for. Here's an example:



Plans & Prices Lawn Se

- Include the keyword in your meta description. A page's meta description is the brief description that you see on a search engine results page, right below the page's title. This description should contain the keyword you're optimizing for and it should remain below 150 characters. If you exceed 150 characters, you risk Google shortening it by cutting off words. See the copy that starts "Tips and tricks..." here:

**3 Ways to Get the Best Lawn Care Service Pricing - Weed Pro**  
[www.weed-pro.com/blog/bid/174771/3-Ways-to-Get-the-Best-Lawn-Care-Service-Pricing...](http://www.weed-pro.com/blog/bid/174771/3-Ways-to-Get-the-Best-Lawn-Care-Service-Pricing)  
 Mar 15, 2013 - Tips and tricks to ensure you the best lawn care service pricing, and the right lawn care provider.

- Include the keyword in 3 percent to 5 percent of the page content and in the headers. When writing a Web page, always write with the consumer in mind. Using their language and simplifying complex words and concepts will help readability and improve the page conversions. However, for SEO purposes, you'll want to include the keyword the page is centered on in the page headline as well as throughout the page copy.
- Include alt tags behind your images. While you're creating content for your website, remember to use images on every page. If you were describing a beautiful patio to a customer, wouldn't you show them pictures, too? With that said, images speak a thousand words to the consumer; however, unless you include alt tags behind your photos online, Google won't see a thing. Alt tags provide a description of the image to the search engines.

Creating a properly optimized website is similar to creating a well-designed landscape plan.

No matter which one you're working on, keeping in mind your clients' needs and wants while balancing proper foundational elements will ensure a well-received landscape—or optimized website. 🌱



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**CASE STUDY: OUR WAY**

# Branding: the McKay way

**Why this lighting company focuses on three key marketing segments.** BY MARISA PALMIERI

**J**erry McKay loves marketing. The owner of McKay Landscape Lighting in Omaha, Neb., has a lot of ideas, but chasing too many of them doesn't always get the best results.

A few years ago McKay determined his best bet was to focus marketing and branding efforts on three areas: strategic partners, existing customers and new customers.

"We need to communicate to each group differently," McKay says. "It's a targeted vs. shotgun approach."

Vital to all these efforts has been bringing a marketing coordinator on board to keep everything on schedule, McKay says.

## 3-PRONGED APPROACH

Strategic partners are McKay's No. 1 focus. About half of its marketing budget goes to this segment. The goal is to strengthen relationships with current partners and add new partners, such as builders, architects or designers.

To develop new partners, McKay and Andrew Coleman, lighting designer and salesperson, start by identifying prospects. Next, they connect with them on LinkedIn and begin to form a relationship by inviting them to lunch, golf or another networking event. They also may offer to host a company Lunch & Learn, where they'll bring in a meal for the prospect's staff and spend an hour teaching them about landscape lighting.

"The goal is to add partners who will spec McKay only (for light-

ing)," McKay says. Between himself and Coleman, they like to add a few partners per year.

Existing strategic partners and prospects receive holiday gift baskets, Christmas cards and McKay Landscape Lighting calendars. Throughout the year, the team also may swing by their offices with oversized light bulbs filled with seasonal M&Ms to keep the company front of mind.

New this year, McKay has planned blog posts specifically to appeal to prospective partners.

Next, focusing on existing customers is vital for McKay, as this group accounted for more than half of the company's revenue in 2014. The goal is to retain these customers, while increasing their upgrades and improving their customer service experience.

The company reaches them with an email campaign several times a year. The format is a personal email from McKay, featuring professional photos from the company's recent projects to pique clients' interest for future purchases. Content may include security, safety, before and after photos, vacation homes and more. Similarly, blog posts appeal to existing customers with topics like service/maintenance, upgrades, add-ons and FAQs.

On a quarterly basis, the company's top 150 customers receive a one-page printed piece with recent project photos. In the highly competitive, digital age, sending hard copy materials with


## WEB EXTRA

Download a copy of McKay Landscape Lighting's quarterly marketing calendar worksheet.

beautiful photography is something McKay says makes his company stand out. "I want to be the guy who has a brochure that overwhelms people," he says.

McKay's final focus area is reaching new customers, including those outside of its immediate geographic region. Again, blog posts are important for search engine optimization. For example, the company blogs about its out-of-town projects to emphasize it does work in other cities and states.

One successful tactic in this segment has been a PDF document the company created called "The Essential Guide to Selecting a Landscape Lighting Professional." This lead-generation tool is available for prospects to download online in exchange for providing contact information.

Rounding out the new client branding and customer experience efforts is a Customer Care Packet, a leave-behind that outlines information on warranties, company contacts, service programs, FAQs and a small gift, such as the M&M light bulb. 

**McKay clients receive oversized, M&M-filled light bulbs as seasonal gifts.**



## BUSINESS BREAKDOWN

**COMPANY:** McKay Landscape Lighting

**LOCATION:** Omaha, Neb.

**ANNUAL REVENUE:** \$1 million-\$2 million

**SERVICE/CUSTOMER MIX:** 100% landscape lighting/90% residential; 10% commercial

**EMPLOYEES:** 13



# Introducing the all-new BOXER® 900HD

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The all-new Boxer® 900HD is the culmination of two years of preparations to build the most powerful and capable mini-skid steer available in the market. Designed from the ground up, the 900HD includes many class-leading features previously found only on full-size skid-steer models:

- **48-HP (36 kW), Tier 4 Final diesel engine** with Diesel Oxidation Catalyst (DOC) that does not require after treatment
- **94" hinge pin height** allows easy dumping over a 6' box side
- **939 lb. rated operating capacity** (at 35% tip capacity)

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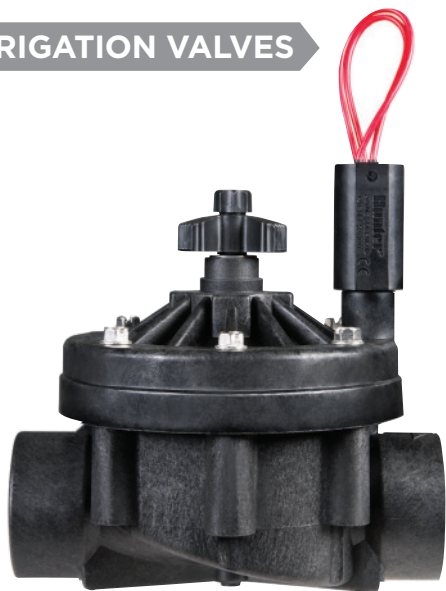
Contact your local Boxer distributor or visit [www.BoxerEquipment.com](http://www.BoxerEquipment.com)



Boxer Equipment is manufactured by Morbark, Inc.



## IRRIGATION VALVES



### HUNTER VALVES

**COMPANY:** Hunter Industries

**URL:** [HunterIndustries.com](http://HunterIndustries.com)

Hunter valves feature captive bonnet bolts, so bolts can't be lost. The Accu-Sync pressure regulation device, which fits all Hunter valves, installs beneath the solenoid to control zone pressure. Finally, the Filter Sentry diaphragm scours the filter clean each time it opens or closes, and it can be field-installed in all Hunter ICV valves.



### IRRITROL 100-S SERIES VALVES

**COMPANY:** Irritrol

**URL:** [Irritrol.com](http://Irritrol.com)

With the patented scrubbing feature, Irritrol 100-S valves clean the metering device for consistent valve operation.

Coupled with an EPDM diaphragm, seat seal and operation up to 220 PSI, these valves are designed to stand up to dirt, chemicals and chlorine, according to the manufacturer.



### MSSB STAINLESS STEEL VALVE BOX SERIES

**COMPANY:** Underhill International

**URL:** [Underhill.us](http://Underhill.us)

Underhill offers seven models in its MSSB series of stainless steel valve boxes for Mirage long-throw sprinklers. The MSSB boxes are designed for the Mirage M-180S, M-160, M-125 and M-115 sprinklers and can integrate with 300 Series sleeve valves or an isolation valve. These extra-large capacity boxes also accommodate quick couplers, electrical junction boxes and other sub-surface components, such as public address systems.

## EDGERS

### 1305 POWER EDGER



**COMPANY:** Turf Teq

**URL:** [TurfTeq.com](http://TurfTeq.com)

Model 1305, a self-propelled walking forward bed opener, features a 13-hp Honda engine. An opening blade to create or redefine landscaping beds is standard, with optional trenching blades available. The unit features a fully hydrostatic transmission with forward and reverse functions. In addition, Model 1305SP can be converted to a power broom, power rake, brush mower or plow blade.





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### WORX 56V MAXLITHIUM GRASS TRIMMER/WHEELED EDGER



**COMPANY:** Worx

**URL:** Worx.com

In-line wheeled edging on this battery-powered model provides a clean finish, according to the manufacturer. The wheels can be stored on the trimmer's shaft or removed entirely when not in use. Other features include Worx's Command Feed feature, variable speed throttle control and a 90-degree pivoting cutting head.

## LANDSCAPE EDGING



### PERMALOC EDGING

**COMPANY:** Permaloc Corp.

**URL:** Permaloc.com

Aluminum-constructed Permaloc edging will not rust, rot or break down, according to the company, and it will stay in the ground for the lifetime of the project. Permaloc offers seven product lines suitable for landscape bed edging.



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Technical speaker:  
**Dave Shetlar, Ph.D.**  
*The Ohio State University*

Shetlar is a professor of Urban Landscape Entomology at The Ohio State University where he performs outreach on turf and ornamental entomology, teaches general entomology and concentrates on turfgrass entomology research. He was a research scientist with ChemLawn Services from 1984 to 1990 and he joined Ohio State in 1990. He has coauthored several books on turfgrass insects and has a long list of research and outreach publications.



Business speaker:  
**Brad DeBels, Ph.d.**  
*Direction of Operations, Weed Man Lawn Care*

DeBels is a 16-year veteran of the green industry with more than 11 years of experience at golf courses across Wisconsin, five years completing a master's degree and Ph.D. at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in Soil Science-Turf Management and now beginning his second year at Weed Man Lawn Care in Middleton, Wis. He's responsible for the fluidity of all field operations at the Green Bay, Wis., Madison, Wis., Milwaukee, Elgin, Ill., and Rockford, Ill., offices.

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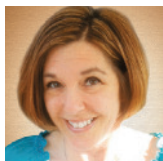
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## SafetyWatch list of hazards

The list of hazards in this photo includes, but is not limited to:

- Distracted driving (texting).
- Only one hand on the wheel.
- Not wearing a seat belt.

What did we miss?

We invite you—as employers and workers in the landscape industry—to share your expertise. Email your responses to LM Editor Marisa Palmieri ([mpalmieri@northcoastmedia.net](mailto:mpalmieri@northcoastmedia.net)). We'll publish your responses with the online version of this story.



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## Adam Linnemann

**PRESIDENT**  
**LINNEMANN LAWN CARE & LANDSCAPING**  
COLUMBIA, ILL.

### EDUCATION

Columbia High School  
Columbia, Ill.  
Class of 1999

Southwestern Illinois College  
Belleville, Ill.  
1999–2001

Southwestern Illinois  
Police Academy  
2003

### WORK EXPERIENCE

**1999–2001**  
Emergency medical technician  
Columbia, Ill.

**2012–2014**  
Owner/operator  
Rent Fun Now  
Waterloo, Ill.

**2003–present**  
Deputy sheriff  
part-time  
Monroe County, Ill.

**2006–present**  
Patrolman  
part-time  
Valmeyer Police Department  
Valmeyer, Ill.

**March 2010–present**  
Columnist  
Waterloo Republic-Times  
Waterloo, Ill.

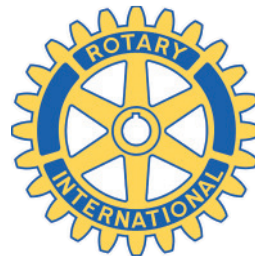
**1994–present**  
President  
Linnemann Lawn Care  
& Landscaping  
Columbia, Ill.

“My mom was a 911 police dispatcher, and that’s what my wife does now. Law enforcement has always been in our family and always has interested me.”

Adam Linnemann with wife Sahra and sons Wynn, 3, and Nash, 5.



“I’m pretty heavily involved in the Columbia Rotary Club. I joined the group strictly as networking, but it became a lot more than that.”



“I got started at age 14 with a push mower and a wagon. I was mowing about 10 lawns.”



“When I turned 16 my uncle loaned me some money to buy my first business truck. I was the only high school student driving around a brand new Ford F-150 pickup. That was pretty neat.”

“I specifically remember sitting inside the classroom thinking, ‘Man, I could be out there making money,’ so I gave it up.”



“I didn’t want to work holidays, nights and weekends, but that’s part of law enforcement, so I decided to do it part-time. I work three to four shifts a month.”

**WORDS OF WISDOM** “If you’re still working in the field, hire an office coordinator to man the phone and the office. It can take a lot of things off the entrepreneur’s plate.” • “Join some sort of networking or peer group to get your name out there and build relationships.” • “Put some trust in your people and delegate. You’re never going to be able to look over their shoulder all the time. You have to be able to let go and trust them.”





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