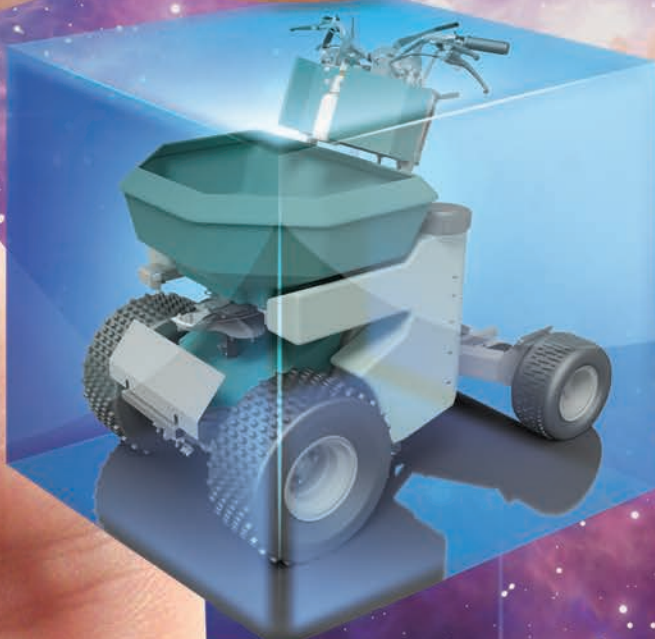


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**March 2016** VOL 55, ISSUE 3  
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ON THE COVER: PHOTO BY DAVID HANSEN



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# EDITOR'S NOTE

**MARISA PALMIERI**  
EDITOR

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mpalmieri@northcoastmedia.net



## Card 'em

**A**s I researched and reported on our cover story about the labor shortage in the landscape industry—and all service industries, really—I put in a call to our resident HR expert, our quarterly Business Basics: People columnist, Mel Kleiman. He's known for his practical advice on recruiting and retaining frontline associates, and he helps employers all over the country address these very topics.

He confirmed the landscape industry isn't alone when it comes to a labor shortage, but he noted it has been on the passive side of the recruiting spectrum, compared to other industries.

"The landscape industry is one that's used a hiring methodology I call 'post and pray,'" he says, meaning post a job opening and pray the right candidate walks in the door. "That's not going to make it anymore."

We need to think about hiring as an acquisition process versus a selection process like it used to be, Kleiman says.

Landscape contractor Chris Joyce, who is featured on the cover of this issue, has had success recruiting workers from restaurants, bars and hotels, which are a major force in the Cape Cod region, where he's based.

"I'm looking for people that are interested in coming into our industry," he says. "The hospitality industry is good for us (to recruit from) because of the hours. When people start having families, they don't want to be out at night. We've done very well there."

Kleiman advocates for employers like Joyce to create and hand out recruiting cards. They are business card-sized pieces with your name, title and company logo. One side says,

"I appreciate your great service! We're looking for people just like you to be part of the (company name) team. If you'd like to explore employment opportunities with us, please contact me at (email) or (phone number). And, by all means, keep up the good work!"

**"We need to think about hiring as an acquisition process versus a selection process like it used to be."**

—MEL KLEIMAN

This approach is effective for a few reasons. For one, young people and folks in the service industry aren't accustomed to being head hunted. They don't have recruiters calling them up or contacting them via LinkedIn, so it's quite flattering when someone singles them out and recognizes their hard work or good service.

And there's a good chance their current employer isn't laying on the compliments. Statistics show less than half of employees receive regular feedback on the job. So think about the impression an employer could make by approaching potential candidates in such a positive way with a recruiting card. Even if they're not ready to make a move right now, they might be someday—or they might know someone who is. And if nothing else, you'll probably make their day.

"People love recognition," Kleiman says. "Why not give it to them if they deserve it?" 📩



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### WEB EXTRA

Download a sample recruiting card in the Web Extras section at [LandscapeManagement.net](http://LandscapeManagement.net)



## EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD

# Q+A

### What *one* thing separates companies that are succeeding in recruitment from ones that aren't?



#### MORE ONLINE

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# BIG PICTURE

## BORN ON THE BAYOU

**LOCATION** Houston

**COMPANY** McDugald-Steele

**THE DETAILS** The client's objective was to integrate a new residence and landscaping into a natural, mostly undisturbed 7.5-acre site.

Construction was staged over more than five years in five distinct phases. This approach allowed the project to proceed in small working "envelopes" that reduced the impact of construction on the property. The site naturally drained toward Buffalo Bayou, and preserving the bayou banks required focused efforts during and after construction.

Pictured is a negative-edge water feature, which captures a reflective perspective of the architecture and the adjacent, tree-covered south end peninsula. Connecting it to the home is a limestone-covered terrace, flanked with a pair of limestone block benches and large, seasonal planters.

These and other aspects of this project earned McDugald-Steele both a 2015 Grand Award and a Judges Award from the National Association of Landscape Professionals' Awards of Excellence program.

*See more photos from this project at [LandscapeManagement.net/BigPicture](http://LandscapeManagement.net/BigPicture).*

PHOTO: MCDUGALD-STEELE LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS AND CONTRACTORS



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\*\*\$800 off offer includes the \$400 Z930R national offer plus \$400 off with Platinum 1 GreenFleet Member discount. GreenFleet discount offer expires October 30, 2016. GreenFleet level savings are based on total units purchased. A member's per unit discount for an eligible sale will be based on the highest accumulated qualifying equipment purchased at the time of an eligible sale. See terms and conditions at [JohnDeere.com/GreenFleet](http://JohnDeere.com/GreenFleet) for details.



# NEWS HOW-TO'S

LANDSCAPE  
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VIEWS  
AND TIPS

RECOMMENDER

ISSUE BRIEF

STEP BY STEP

NEW STUFF

SAFETYWATCH

“It’s such a little thing, but it’s really handy.”

## TEXTING TOOL



**T**ext messaging is a preferred form of communication for many customers, but it can be cumbersome for office staff to keep up with and difficult to streamline if clients are texting multiple team members.

To solve these problems, Linnemann Lawn Care & Landscaping in Columbia, Ill., enlisted a land line texting service called Zipwhip, which allows the company to text clients and employees from a desktop computer. The message comes from the company’s existing landline phone number.

“It’s allowed us to not have to have our team use their personal phones, it’s easier for office staff to do on the computer and it allows us to look a little more professional,” says Adam Linnemann, president.

The company pays about \$20 per month for the service, but there are available add-ons, like mass texting for marketing purposes.

So far, Linnemann hasn’t gone that route. The company primarily uses the service to text appointment reminders to clients or to send notifications to team members in the field.

Another plus is picture messaging. Clients can text photos to the office with questions or concerns—or vice versa.

“It’s such a little thing, but it’s really handy,” Linnemann says.



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## RECOMMENDER

# What walk-behind mowers do you recommend and why?

Durability, quality of cut and ease of maintenance play into contractors' walk-behind mower preferences.



## JUSTIN SANDERS

OWNER, PRESTIGE YARDSCAPES & SNOW MANAGEMENT  
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"Exmark. I've owed all walk-behinds from them, but I'm about to get my first Exmark zero-turn. I've dealt with a lot of walk-behind mowers in my career, but Exmark is a die-hard brand. They start up on first pull no matter if they've been sitting for two months or over the winter. The next time they come out they're ready to rock and roll with no problem. That's why I'm an Exmark guy."



## TED PENDAGAST

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## ISSUE BRIEF



BY MISSY HENRIKSEN

The author is VP of public affairs, National Association of Landscape Professionals (NALP).

## H-2B RELIEF, SORT OF

In December, Congress authorized an omnibus spending bill, which provided H-2B relief for industries that rely on guest workers.

Through Sept. 30 the bill exempts H-2B returning workers from the 66,000 annual cap; addresses H-2B wages and allows the use of private wage surveys; clearly defines "seasonal" as 10 months; and prevents the Department of Labor (DOL) from implementing the provisions of the interim final rule related to corresponding workers and the "3/4 guarantee," requiring a set number of hours per week.

As of press time, federal agencies haven't made these program modifications. In short, the old paperwork and process guidelines do not allow for the new changes, complicating an already confusing, burdensome application process. The primary implementation challenges include:

- Continued processing delays. DOL is supposed to act within seven days of receiving submissions, but some companies are waiting for a response from DOL after several weeks.
- No assurance on how long DOL will take to review wage surveys. It's still taking 60 or more days for companies to receive prevailing wage determinations.
- Need for DOL to allow applications less than 60 days on an "emergency basis;" and
- Inaccurate language on the labor certification form and the workers' rights poster that employers are required to hang on-site.

None of these delays is acceptable. NALP will continue to work to ensure the new provisions are enacted as outlined in the omnibus bill and for longer term solutions to the guest-worker program. 📧





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## STEP BY STEP

# How to quickly install annuals

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

**S**pring is approaching, which means it's time to spruce up clients' properties with colorful annuals. But instead of having your crews spend hours hunched over miles of empty beds, use this method from Cartwright Landscaping, a full-service design, installation and maintenance company in Richmond, Va., to install annuals quickly and efficiently using only the plastic cells they're purchased in.

Begin by clearing old mulch and debris from the bed. Fill the bed with 1 inch of fresh topsoil compost. Separate the plants in their individual plastic cells from the flat. Carefully remove the plastic cell from the roots of the plant and set aside. Place the plants in the desired areas within the bed. Note that most cell-pack and container-grown annuals will have roots that are very well developed and dense, so it's a good idea to loosen the roots slightly before planting.

Arrange the plants in offset rows and space them as recommended by the individual plant listing or by the nursery. A general rule of thumb is to space annuals a distance apart that equals one-half of their mature height. From here, follow steps one through three to quickly finish the job and fill the bed with colorful blooms—no digging required. 📌

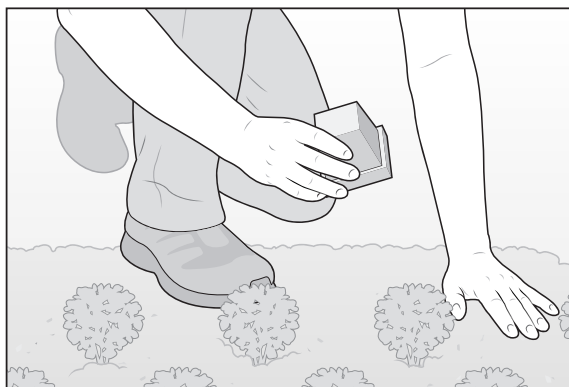
SOURCES: Cartwright Landscaping; University of Illinois Extension


**STEP 1**

Gently place the plastic cells over the plants, tucking all the flowers and leaves inside.


**STEP 2**

Add a 2-in. layer of loose topsoil compost around the plants, followed by a more compact layer of mulch.


**STEP 3**

Remove the plastic containers to reveal the newly planted annuals.





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## NEW STUFF



## 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).

### 1. SHARP SHOOTER SHOVEL

**COMPANY:** Corona

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

The 12-gauge-steel Sharp Shooter shovel has two models: the 78-in. AS 90100 (above) and the 42.5-in. AS 90110 Sharp Shooter, which has a 29-in. welded steel D-Handle. The 78-in. model has a handle that is 63.5 in. from the flange and covered with a nonslip vinyl sleeve. The shovel's narrow blade, long handle and weight are designed to help drive the tool into the ground, the company says.

### 2. BGA 100 HANDHELD BLOWER

**COMPANY:** Stihl

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

This 5.5-lb. handheld blower is the lightest in Stihl's line. Operating at 56 dBA, it's also the quietest. This blower uses Stihl's Battery Kombi-System, meaning no gas, no cord and no exhaust emissions. Instead of an on-board battery, the BGA 100 uses a Stihl battery belt or AR backpack battery. Features include a variable speed throttle trigger, three working performance levels, a rear-mounted air intake and a boost mode. Optional accessories, like the on-board harness mounting loops, are available.

### 3. COMMERCIAL SERIES V-TWIN ENGINES

**COMPANY:** Briggs & Stratton

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

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interview

# ONWARD & UPWARD IN REAL TIME

BY: PETER JULIAN

*"With the ability to track time, we are able to answer so many other questions about our business that make our next projects even more efficient and profitable."*

Rock Shelter Landscape Design & Construction has come a long way in a short and economically challenging time. Since its inception in 2004, this New York-based company has become one of the area's premier firms, dedicated to pairing quality craftsmanship with practical experience and using a creative spirit to elevate the simple, into sublime.

By recently relying on real-time technology, Rock Shelter Landscape Design & Construction has been able to focus on and improve their productivity, efficiency and sales. In return, this has led to a better customer experience and a long list of other benefits, which employees and clients can enjoy.

Peter Julian, President of Rock Shelter Landscape Design & Construction, Inc. shares his insight and talks about the success his company is currently experiencing at the present time:

**Q: Let's start with a brief overview of Rock Shelter Landscape Design and Construction. Tell us about the company's history and how you managed to achieve the success you're currently experiencing today.**

A: Before the economy took a turn for the worse, our services were limited to plant installs, lawn maintenance and masonry. Once the economy tanked, we realized that if we didn't become more diverse with our services, we were going to face tough times ahead. It was for this reason, we expanded our list of services to our customers, offering things like irrigation and lighting, snow and ice management, and fencing.

Not only did we gain a larger client base from diversifying, we also gained skilled employees in those areas, as well. (Their previous places of employment were shutting their doors by not diversifying). Our field of expertise is still with our landscape installs and masonry work, with all others growing fast – especially now that the economy is beginning to pick up again!

**Q: Has your company used or relied on real-time technology in the past? Why or why not.**

A: We really had no system in place (other than 'old-school' hand written forms), prior to using LMN – which is what we currently use and rely on. At the time, it seemed like other real-time programs were way too expensive for a company looking to keep its overhead low. In addition I was looking for one company to provide all the services we needed in one place, such as estimating and budgeting. Thankfully, we found LMN!

**Q: How has real-time technology contributed to your company's success? Also, what type of changes are you seeing now, compared to before, when your company wasn't using this technology?**

A: We have used everything - from LMN's database of forms, to online video training on how to use the software. The forms have been tremendously helpful in that they have helped us create a flow of paper work and an easy way of tracking things like incidents, employee reviews and material usage.

A great feature is the help videos found on learnlmn.com that are associated with each operation of LMN. Being able to click that help tab and instantly view a small tutorial on how to use that specific section has made the program that much easier to use. I still review videos over and over, always catching a new piece of information I didn't quite get the first or second time around. The most noticeable difference is with my staff. Everyone from the office, down to field laborers, have a much clearer line of communication. The managers are able to see exactly what estimators were thinking when putting proposals together, and field staff have all that same information at their fingertips. Crew notes are also easily accessible during the actual installation process.

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LMN has streamlined every aspect of our business - from productivity to estimating. With the ability to create easy-to-use budgets, we now know our cost of doing business and what we need to look like as a company in order to survive. From there, it just trickles down through the entire company. Our estimates are on point and very competitive, our office staff is way more efficient with paperwork, field staff are happier with the information they are given prior to starting projects, and the tracking of all of this has become a breeze. In addition, our clients have responded very well to the way estimates look and the different ways we are able to present them with information.

In the past, if there was a dispute with a client about time spent on a job or what was done at a particular time, it would take days of searching for information in order to verify to our clients that what we were saying was in fact correct. Now, within minutes, we can provide them with information and offer specific details in order to answer their questions.



**Q: Can you give us a specific example of how LMN's online tools, systems and training have boosted your company's success?**

A: Last season, I put a bid in on a very large project which involved just about every facet of our business. Not only was our bid very competitive - because of LMN's estimating tools - but I was able to negotiate knowing what all of my costs associated with the job were. I knew just how low I could go and still be as profitable as the company needed to be. The client was extremely impressed that I knew my numbers so well, and that I could respond so quickly.

Later in the process, the client revealed how impressed he was with the proposal itself and the detail we were able to provide. This continued throughout the project - with reports, time tracking and change orders. It was the first time I noticed how there were barely

any "fires" that I needed to put out along the way, from start to finish. My crew was much more efficient and happier with the information they were provided.

**Q: Please describe some challenges that your company has recently faced, and how LMN was able to help your company overcome these obstacles.**

A: Our biggest problem or area we lost money in was time estimation for completing projects. Too often, we would be awarded a project and feel that all we had to do was get it done. Where we failed was tracking the time spent on the job, and getting it done within our estimated time - or even sooner.

Now, it is very clear how long we expect a job to be completed in and if it's not, we are able to ask the question, why wasn't it completed on time? Was it poor estimating? Employee performance issues? Or, was it because additional work /client requests were added to our timeline? With the ability to track time, we are able to answer so many other questions about our business that make our next project even more efficient and profitable.

**Q: If you could 'forecast the future' - what do you see down the pipeline for your company?**

A: With the help of LMN software and services, we really feel we will see a tremendous growth in our business. In the end, this will give us the ability to be more profitable, and we can spend our dollars on things that will benefit our clients through better services, like, more efficient equipment on projects or additional skilled staff. We are also looking to open a second location which would allow us access to more clients.

*"LMN has streamlined every aspect of our business - from productivity to estimating. With the ability to create easy-to-use budgets, we now know our cost of doing business and what we need to look like as a company in order to survive."*

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Some companies have a formal reporting system for this information; others rely on an informal reporting system where staff simply tells their supervisor and co-workers.

In any case, team members must report a near miss every time. If you keep this information quiet, you're not sharing crucial information that might help you or a co-worker avoid a hazard in the future. There may be a weakness in your company's procedures that will allow the situation to occur again. Maybe next time you or your co-worker won't be so lucky and that near miss will be a serious mishap.

For every serious accident in the workplace there are usually many near misses. It's important to share this information to avoid an accident in the future.



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➤ PAGE 38





## TURF+ORNAMENTAL CARE

# What's in your bag?

Understand fertilizer choices to ensure you're not wasting time, money or resources. **BY EMILY SCHAPPACHER**

**F**ertilizer: If you've applied one, you've applied them all, right? Wrong. In fact, proper fertilizer selection can be a tricky subject, and industry experts agree that many lawn care operators (LCOs) aren't as knowledgeable as they could be about the fertilizers they use. Uninformed LCOs risk applying the wrong amount of the wrong products at the wrong time, wasting time, money and resources.

So, do you know what's in your bag? "Knowledge about what's contained in fertilizer bags is important because fertilizers are nutrients, and they need to be applied differently based on season, soil type and the needs of plants," says Eric Brown, field training manager for Massey Services, an Orlando, Fla.-based pest and lawn care firm with operations throughout the South.



Eric Brown

### LACK OF KNOWLEDGE

Lawn care experts say one reason there seems to be a lack of knowledge about fertilizers and their proper use is because of the green industry's labor challenges. In an industry where many companies employ seasonal techni-

cians, finding high-quality, long-term laborers can be difficult. Chris Derrick, national accounts manager for Koch Agronomic Services, a producer and marketer of fertilizer based in Wichita, Kan., says most company owners are knowledgeable about fertilizers and how they should be applied, but that information doesn't always trickle down to the applicators and technicians.

Derrick says this lack of knowledge can be detrimental for several reasons. First, he says all technicians should be able to answer any questions a customer may ask about what's being applied on their property. Second, he says many people—applicators and property owners—have misconceptions about fertilizer application techniques. More is not always better, particularly as technology evolves and improves.

"It's been drilled into LCOs' heads that you have to fertilize every time you're on a property so homeowners get what they're paying for," Derrick says. "We're trying to break the barrier that it's not all about putting product on the ground, but putting the right product down at the right time and in the right place."

### WHERE TO START

The best way for LCOs to choose the right fertilizer is to test the soil. Soil can differ



**WHAT'S INSIDE?**  
Not all fertilizer is created equal, lawn care experts emphasize.

region by region—and even by neighborhood. Some differences in soil types can be detected simply by looking at it. For example, soil texture and particle distribution affects nutrient retention.

"Knowing what the soil of the area being serviced contains is required, so you're not paying for nutrients that nature is providing for free," says Joe Welch, technical and training director of landscape services for Massey Services. "It all boils down to paying for what provides benefit to the plant and, therefore, the customer."

For example, most soil in Florida contains sufficient phosphorus, so LCOs may not want to pay for a fertilizer with high phosphorus content, Welch says. If a lawn's soil pH is low, a fertilizer with urea would be a good choice, but if the soil pH is high, a product with ammonium sulfate may be worth the extra cost, he adds.

"Nutrient applications should be based on a seasonal or yearly program, broken into multiple applications that

*Continued on page 26*

## NEWSFEED

### LEUENBERGER RETIRES

Chalet Soil & Turf Manager Bill Leuenberger will retire this month. After selling his com-

pany to Chalet in 1992, he joined the team and launched its lawn care division. He also founded the Illinois

Professional Lawn Care Association and is an NALP Trailblazer.

### SWINGLE EXPANDS

Swingle Lawn, Tree & Landscape opened a new Northern Colorado regional branch in Fire-

stone, Colo. The facility sits between Swingle's Denver and Fort Collins, Colo., offices, the company says.

### SIPCAMROTAM LAUNCHES

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entered a joint venture as SipcamRotam. Customers in the turf and ornamental markets now have access to their combined portfolios of plant protection products.



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## TURF+ORNAMENTAL CARE

*Continued from page 24*

supply plants with needed nutrients,” says Brown. “Only nutrients that are determined to be needed by plants after soil and tissue analysis should be applied, as many nutrients are available from the soil, water and atmosphere.”

LCOs can learn more about fertilizer options through local universities’ horticulture programs and county extension offices. Manufacturers and suppliers are another resource. For example, Koch created a handbook that breaks down basic fertilizer components.

“The responsibility really falls on the company owners to educate their customers and employees,” he says. “A basic understanding goes a long way.”

Chris Lemcke, national technical director for Weed Man USA, based in Oshawa, Ontario, says proper fertilizer

use was part of the company’s foundation when it launched more than 45 years ago.

While the formula has changed over the years based on new products and price fluctuations, a 65 percent slow-release fertilizer has long been the standard for most of the company’s programs. Lemcke says the slow-release fertilizer Weed Man uses is suitable for all soil types.

“We’re able to put less nitrogen down, and the plant can take it when it needs it,” he says, adding that technicians are routinely trained on fertilizer technology.

### PRICE POINTS

For most LCOs, price plays an important role in deciding which products to use. Being knowledgeable about the proper-



Chris Derrick

ties of different fertilizers and selecting the best product can save LCOs time and money in the long term.

The best way for a plant to use nitrogen is by “spoon-feeding” the plant while it’s actively

growing, experts say. So LCOs choose between making frequent applications of readily available nitrogen or infrequent applications of slow-release nitrogen to keep the turfgrass healthy.

Slow-release nitrogen fertilizers are pricier per application, Welch says. In areas where the soil has adequate nutrient-holding capacity and where the LCO visits lawns every six to eight weeks, paying for a product with a high slow-release content may not be beneficial or cost effective, he says. “The

*Continued on page 28*

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## TURF+ORNAMENTAL CARE

*Continued from page 26*

decision depends on how the LCO wants to operate his business,” Welch says.

When it comes to choosing a fertilizer, he says LCOs should consider the best nutrient source for the soil and the cost per pound of the nutrient being applied. Most LCOs tend to look at the cost per pound of nitrogen, but he says soil pH must also be considered.

For example, straight urea is 46-0-0 and ammonium sulfate is 21-0-0. If the cost per 50-pound bag of 46-0-0 were \$17 and the cost per 50-pound bag of 21-0-0 were \$14, the cost per bag of 21-0-0 would be less expensive, but the 46-0-0 contains more than twice the amount of nitrogen. In this example, 1 pound of nitrogen from urea (46 percent N) would cost 74 cents, and 1 pound of nitrogen from ammonium sulfate (21 percent N) would cost \$1.33.

Again, in some cases (such as high soil pH) ammonium sulfate may be worth the extra cost, Welch says.

“It’s very important to pay for the ingredients you need based on frequency of service,” Welch says. “It’s not just the fertilizer or the price, but also the active ingredients and the frequency of applications and marrying them all together.”

Lemcke says one mistake he sees LCOs make is paying for extra components that don’t improve the turf. For example, buying a fertilizer with 2 percent iron to add color to the lawn could add \$1 to the cost of each bag, but it takes a product with more than 10 percent iron to make a difference, he says. And those products can be cost prohibitive.

“You have to really understand the process, how it works, consider the cost and weigh the benefits,” Lemcke says.

With improved technology, new research and ever-changing environmental factors, experts agree LCOs should always be refining their fertilizer programs.

By being proactive and informed, professionals can choose the best fertilizers to create the best programs for their clients.

“The delicate balance between cost of the program and benefit of the results is continually being fine-tuned,” Welch says. “Personal knowledge increases, agronomic theories evolve and the price of nutrients over the years fluctuates. It’s constantly learning and looking at different and better ways to do things.”

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



Joe Welch

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## MOWING+LANDSCAPE MAINTENANCE

Breaking into the commercial maintenance sector can be tough, but it can provide lucrative opportunities for long-term success.

BY EMILY SCHAPPACHER



# Gone commercial

**BREAKING IN**  
Contractors need the right knowledge and relationships to transition into commercial work.

**W**hen it comes to landing commercial landscape contracts, it's often more about who you know than what you know.

"The commercial business is very relationship based," says Ken Thomas, principal of Envisor Consulting, a consulting firm based in Alpharetta, Ga. "Getting into the commercial market is a tough road, but it can be done."

Contractors and industry experts agree that establishing and maintaining relationships is the easiest way to break into the commercial sector. But knowing the ins and outs of the industry, presenting themselves professionally and, of course, providing high-quality work are also important steps for contractors wanting to make a good impression in the commercial world.

"Commercial work can provide so much opportunity for the contractor, and the accounts can be easy to manage once you get them," says Thomas. "Penetrating the inner circle of the network

is a diligent process of getting to know someone who knows someone else."

### A FOOT IN THE DOOR

Before reaching out to prospects, Thomas suggests contractors add a section about the company's commercial offerings to their website. This step adds credibility if a prospective client researches the company. Next, look for commercial opportunities within your network. Does an existing client own a business? Do any friends or family members work in property management or real estate? Is a local homeowner association accepting bids for a new service provider? Put out feelers and start collecting intel, Thomas suggests. Even failed bids help companies test their pricing.

Mike Fitzpatrick, vice president of U.S. Lawns, a \$170 million commercial grounds care franchise business headquartered in Orlando, Fla., says it's a good idea for contractors to start with jobs similar in size and scope to the jobs they're used to. This approach

makes the transition from residential to commercial easier by preventing contractors from having to reinvent the wheel, while still building a commercial resume and becoming familiar with commercial accounts.

Contractors also need to learn how to price commercial jobs before providing estimates or proposals. Brandon Moxam, director of brand development for U.S. Lawns, says residential contractors typically price based on man-hours. In the commercial sector, an accurate estimate should consider four parts: property measurements, production rates, man-hours and frequency of service.

"Proper pricing will show the client you did your homework and will ensure you're making money," Moxam says.

Most commercial property managers are astute buyers. While residential customers make decisions based on emotion and disposable income, commercial budgets are based on history

*Continued on page 32*

## NEWSFEED

### UPDATES FROM BOB-CAT

Bob-Cat updated its commercial zero-turn mowers, Predator-Pro and Procat. Both models feature new terrain-grip-

ping zero-T drive tires, bringing improved grip, puncture resistance, turn radius with minimal turf damage, an updated deck and self-cleaning.

### SHINDAIWA GOES CORDLESS

Shindaiwa launched a new lithium-ion, 56-v cordless lineup. The first three models—a string trimmer, handheld blower and hedge trimmer—will be available for the spring season.

### EFCO ADDS DISTRIBUTORS

Comet USA added Power Equipment Co. and WCS Distributing as distributors for its outdoor power equipment brand, EfcO. Power Equipment Co., in Cortland, Ill., will

represent Illinois and Indiana. WCS Distributing, in San Bernardino, Calif., will be responsible for California, Nevada, Washington, Oregon, Utah, New Mexico, Alaska, Idaho and Arizona.



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## MOWING+LANDSCAPE MAINTENANCE

*Continued from page 30*

and goals for the property, says Fitzpatrick.

"In the commercial world, a customer knows what happens if they don't pay enough, and they know what happens when they pay too much," he adds.

Distinct market segments, like office buildings, industrial complexes, HOAs, multifamily housing facilities, medical buildings and municipalities, exist within the commercial sector. Thomas suggests finding which market segment is the best fit and going after those properties. Multifamily apartments and HOAs can be easier to break into because those groups are often more price sensitive and willing to consider less experienced contractors, he says. Contractors can also bid on work through official requests for proposals, or RFPs. Institutions like schools, hospitals and municipalities often choose contractors this way and make their selection based on the lowest price.

Once a contractor selects a market segment, Thomas says, the next step is to identify the trade associations supporting that segment and become an active member in at least one of them. Joining an organization such as the Building Owners & Managers Association or the Community Associations

**"Getting into the commercial market is a tough road, but it can be done."**

—KEN THOMAS



Institute allows contractors to immerse themselves in their chosen market segment and surround themselves with the players who can open the doors to future contracts.

Robert Clickenbeard, co-owner of Integrated Landscape Management in Tempe, Ariz., swears by the power of networking through trade associations. It's the bedrock of his \$20 million company, which offers 55 percent maintenance, 40 percent enhancements and 5 percent irrigation services to commercial clients. Clickenbeard says being active in trade associations puts contractors in front of the right people while educating them about industry trends.

"Just passing out cards is going to turn people off," he says. "By getting familiar with people and building up trust, you're likely to be invited to bid on a contract."

### WHO'S WHO?

While face-to-face networking is the most effective, there are other ways for contractors to identify the decision makers for commercial opportunities. One method is to simply cold call receptionists at the properties contractors are interested in servicing, Thomas says. While it's not likely this gatekeeper will offer contractors immediate access to the property manager, he or she will often provide the manager's name and pass along the contractor's card. Once contractors have the property manager's name, they can do their own research to find out more information. Contractors also can request to be added to the property's bid list.

Professionalism is also important during these visits.

"People want to work with someone they see as a business peer," Moxam says. "Our franchise owners go in wearing dress pants, khakis, even sport coats."

Another way to identify a commercial property manager is to reach out to other contractors who share the same target list, Thomas says. A property's janitorial service or HVAC provider is likely to have the contact information the contractor is looking for and may be willing to share it since they're not offering a competitive service.

Contractors also can purchase CoStar, a service that provides names and contact information for the managers of 4.5 million commercial real estate properties. At about \$4,000 per year, it's a worthy investment for contractors who want to hit the ground running, Thomas says.

Ultimately, landing the job comes down to selling the company's services.

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# A business with a purpose

Anne Phillips followed her heart from banking to the landscape industry. She now leverages subcontracting—including a special needs crew—to find success. **BY SARAH PFLEDDERER**

**A**nne Phillips is proud of her maintenance crew. They're unmatched by her competitors, attests the owner of Go Green Gardeners, a design/build and maintenance firm in Van Nuys, Calif.

"They seem to really care about what they do," she says. "I don't have to worry about whether or not they really are where they say they are going to be or if they spend as much time as they said they are going to on a project."

"They" are a group of developmentally disabled adults who work for her under an arrangement with a nonprofit organization. Phillips has leaned on this staffing model for about five years.

A couple days a week, she runs a crew of three to four developmentally disabled people, supervised by a job coach without a disability who drives the truck and acts as a foreman.

Go Green Gardeners, serving almost entirely residential customers, offers about 85 percent design/build services. The rest of the business is split among

irrigation, lawn care and maintenance. Phillips expects to hit \$500,000 in revenue in 2016.

Like many landscape company owners, Phillips has struggled to retain a productive workforce. But the former investment industry executive has been resourceful. In addition to her unique maintenance crews, she leans heavily on subcontractors. She's parlayed her MBA and skills she learned in her first career into her role as CEO of a small business. And along the way, she picked up a gig contributing to the Huffington Post.

"A lot of the time in the landscaping business, because people don't have a business background, they're missing a little bit about how you need to operate in business," she says. "Working at the Capital Group, the first thing I did out of college, gave me a very good work ethic and how to behave professionally."

Her business motto is quite simple: "We make sure we do what we say we're going to do for the price and time we say we're going to do it."

## OUTSOURCING MODEL

Go Green Gardeners was born in 2008 as a DBA of Paradise Contained—a retail garden store Phillips opened in 1998. She's since shuttered it to focus on the landscaping business.

"I found myself always strolling around nurseries on the weekend," she says of finding her second career. "I thought, 'Well, where do I like to spend my free time? If I could plan my work around that, what would I do?' That's when I started thinking I wanted to do something with plants and designs."

So Phillips opened the retail store. Through her connections there, she picked up design jobs and launched Go Green Gardeners. The name is a testament to the company's environmentalism. It offers the option of electric-only maintenance services and uses only organic fertilizers and no pesticides.

Phillips says it was apparent early on that subcontracting was the best route for her design/build installations.

*Continued on page 36*



PHOTO: GO GREEN GARDENERS

## NEWSPEED

### UNIQUE REMOTE

Unique Lighting Systems' Light Logic Plus adds Internet access and a mobile

app to the company's Light Logic Wireless Control System. The app lets contractors and homeowners

control their lighting systems remotely.

### CAD FOR IPAD

Landscape CAD design for iPad is now available in the Pro Landscape Companion

app from Drafrix Software. The CAD component lets users measure and design the site in a scaled drawing on the tablet. Users also can transfer the design to the computer.

### SVL95-2 TRACK LOADER

Kubota's new compact track loader offers greater multi-tasking capabilities and more powerful hydraulics than previous models, Kubota says.





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## DESIGN/BUILD+INSTALLATION

**SUB IT OUT**  
Go Green finds success leaning on subcontractors for all of its design/build + installation work.



*Continued from page 34*

Currently, she has two employees: a project manager and an administrative person. She has two subcontracted crews she works with regularly and is looking to expand to others if it's the right fit.

"Those crews don't get paid on the hour; they get paid based on the job," she says. "It's up to them to get it done."

This model has been more successful than hiring hourly employees, she says, but building those relationships wasn't easy. Her partners need to be concerned with both efficiency and quality to ensure client satisfaction.

"You have to find people who take pride in their work," she says.

Subcontracting also requires a lot of oversight. The client's contract is with Go Green. So, the company closely

manages, and is on-site for, each project to ensure satisfactory work.

Traditional subcontracting works for installations, but Phillips outsources maintenance work to Villa Esperanza Services, a nonprofit service for developmentally disabled adults. Before enlisting the group's employment services, Phillips was a volunteer who taught gardening at its Pasadena location.

In addition to supplying the crew, job coach, equipment and insurance, the agency pays the workers directly. Go Green is invoiced monthly.

Phillips would like to expand her relationship with Villa Esperanza, but growth is limited to the number of job coaches it can find and retain.

"There's enough people interested in landscaping that are developmentally



disabled," Phillips says. "The struggle is finding job coaches to run the crews."

### STAYING IN THE KNOW


Customers are compelled to call Phillips for reasons beyond her atypical employment model. Her company is known for its expertise on California's water conservation rebate program.

"We were doing it before a lot of other people were," she says. "That's what people call us to do."

Phillips also gets name recognition for contributing to the Huffington Post. About seven years ago, Editor-in-Chief Arianna Huffington offered her the gig after they met in an elevator.

Amid her dispatches on landscaping trends, Phillips monitors the state of the industry to stay ahead of the curve—even when her business is fine, she says. For example, she's been prodding her customers about underground drip systems. Her research shows them growing rapidly in countries like Australia and Israel. She also tracks the economy so its ups and downs aren't blindsiding. A *Wall Street Journal* subscription keeps her in the know.

But no matter how many subscriptions she renews or trade shows she attends, Phillips says nothing beats what she learns from her clients.

"More than anything, people are going to tell you what they need and what they're looking for," she says. 

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Pfledderer is a freelance writer based in San Diego.

PHOTO: GO GREEN GARDENERS





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# Spring startup checklist



Startups may seem simple, but they require diligence. Follow this guide so you don't miss a step. **BY DILLON STEWART**

### ☐ 1. Schedule and price the job

Many companies price spring startups by the zone or by the hour. Tom Horn, president of All-n-One Outdoor Solutions in Jefferson City, Mo., calls his prices "middle of the road." The company charges \$60 for a residential property with four zones plus a \$3 to \$4 upcharge per additional zone. A commercial property costs \$85 for eight zones with a similar upcharge for extra zones. He occasionally charges by the hour, which is useful when he has previous experience on the property and knows the difficulty of the job. A residential system with four to six zones would take about 45 minutes, but commercial projects vary widely. The company charges \$48 an hour.

### ☐ 2. Check the soil

It may feel like spring above ground, but that doesn't mean the soil under the landscape has thawed. Use a shovel to make sure the soil is frost-free 12 inches deep. Starting the system while the ground is still frozen can damage pipes.

### ☐ 3. Test the backflow preventer

Since backflow contamination is a serious health risk to the potable water supply, most states require a yearly test conducted by a certified technician or plumber with a backflow preventer test kit. James Barton, operations manager of High View Services in Calgary, Alberta, says having a certified tester on staff is a worthwhile investment because it ensures the test can be scheduled with the startup appointment.

### ☐ 4. Boot it up

Controller and moisture sensor back-up batteries should be replaced once every six months. After replacing the battery, dust the mechanisms off and start them up. Make sure the timers, sensors and controllers are functioning properly. Reprogram the controller's schedule, date and time and other settings.

### ☐ 5. Run the zones

Run each zone and carefully examine each nozzle. Start with low water pressure so the pipes don't crack or burst from a high-pressure surge. Ensure the sprinklers rotate fully, properly distribute water and evenly cover the lawn. Contractors suggest spending a minimum of three minutes inspecting each zone, observing a full rotation of each sprinkler. Make sure heads are on straight, nothing is obstructing water flow and the heads aren't buried. A homeowner's water bill can increase by 10-60 percent from an improperly installed nozzle, experts say.

### ☐ 6. Make suggestions

Manufacturers are more focused on water conservation and efficiency than ever before. Check the age of certain components throughout the system, and make replacement suggestions if something is broken or outdated. If a nozzle is more than five years old, upgrades can bring 25-30 percent water savings. Add-ons like rain sensors and soil moisture sensors increase efficiency, too, Barton says. Plus, the installation of that upgrade is another sale.



To estimate how much water your customers could save by upgrading equipment or irrigation systems, try Rain Bird's Online Calculators at [rainbird.com/landscape/resources/calculators.htm](http://rainbird.com/landscape/resources/calculators.htm).



## NEWS- FEED

### IA DROUGHT REPORT

The Irrigation Association (IA) released the Drought Summit Discussion Report and Recommendations. The document provides a summary of an IA meeting on drought with policy and program recommendations. View the report at [irrigation.org/uploadedFiles/2015DroughtSummitReport.pdf](http://irrigation.org/uploadedFiles/2015DroughtSummitReport.pdf).

### CENTRAL T&I OPENS IN LONG ISLAND

Central Turf & Irrigation Supply, a distributor of turf care, irrigation, landscape, lighting and grounds care equipment, opened a new store in Copiague, N.Y. Located at 20 Marconi Blvd., the store offers delivery service throughout the area for professional landscape, lawn care and irrigation contractors.

### NEW TO THE APP STORE

HydroPoint Data Systems, maker of the WeatherTRAK smart irrigation technology, released the WeatherTRAK Mobile App 2. This free app provides additional features for remote control and central management for Apple iOS and Android devices. Available in Spanish, the WeatherTRAK Mobile 2 app features Google map integration, an active station run status with watering countdown timer and manual irrigation settings.

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# Employer of choice

To recruit and retain workers, smart landscape companies leverage culture, compensation and technology.

BY MARISA PALMIERI

Chris Joyce and Derek Varney, Joyce Landscaping, Marstons Mills, Mass.

Every morning, Chris Joyce greets every one of his employees. He stands in the parking lot, shakes their hands and says “hello” to each member of the team, which amounts to about 140 people in the summertime.

“I’ve been doing it since when I started and only had one employee,” says Joyce, owner of Cape Cod-based The Joyce Cos., a landscape, lawn care and irrigation provider with about \$13 million in annual revenue.

“It’s so important to start the day on a positive note, that’s why I continue with it today even with a much larger company,” he says.

*Continued on page 42*



PHOTO: DAVID HANSEN



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*Continued from page 40*

His goal? "You've got to romance your employees," he says. "They're more important than your customers. If you don't have good employees, you're not going to have customers."

Joyce's company has been—and would like to continue—expanding at 8-15 percent per year, but it can only do so if it gets the people it needs to support the growth.

That hasn't been easy.

"The industry has changed so much in the last five years," Joyce says. "Before, every year you could always pick up a dozen new employees, and six would stay and grow."

It was about two or three years ago that "someone turned the water off" on the new applicant faucet, he says. He's not the only one feeling the pain.

Bruce Wilson, *LM* columnist, industry consultant and part-owner of Conserve LandCare in Thousand Palms, Calif., says it's a widespread concern. He operates landscape industry peer groups with about 45 member companies of various sizes.

"I'd say 90 percent of those are struggling to find people," he says.

A study released by the National Association of Landscape Professionals Foundation last June showed 60,000 professional level positions and 240,000 labor positions in the landscape industry would need to be filled within the year—with the average company looking to add 17 laborers and one manager. Three-quarters of respondents said it was "very" or "somewhat difficult" to find qualified executives, managers and project managers with two-thirds saying the same about laborers.

With federal unemployment at 4.9 percent, compared with a 10 percent rate during the height of the Great Recession and its aftermath, the recruiting and retention game isn't going to get easier anytime soon.

One thing's for sure, employers have to get creative.

Whether they're going all in on culture, pay or technology, smart landscape company owners are experimenting with ways to become the employer of choice.

The bottom line, Wilson says: "You have to become a desirable place to work."

### What's changed?

Landscape professionals aren't surprised the labor market has tightened as the economy has slowly but steadily recovered from the recession. In 2009 there was one job opening for every 6.2 unemployed job seekers, according to an Indeed.com report citing data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). In 2015, there were only 1.7 unemployed job seekers for every vacancy.

Though they're not surprised, landscape employers are coming to terms with how conditions have changed in the industry from a decade or two ago.

There are many hypotheses about why there's a lack of workers in the trades and service industries in particular. Some bemoan an "entitlement" generation unwilling to do hard work. Some say there's too much focus on getting a four-year degree, which discourages some kids from learning a trade. Some point to the pay levels in the landscape industry, which, depending on skill level, straddle the national median annual wage for all occupations of \$35,540, according to the BLS.

The median hourly wage for landscaping and groundskeeping workers was \$11.68 (\$24,290 per year) in 2014. Median salary for first-line supervisors of landscaping, lawn service and groundskeeping workers was \$20.75 (\$43,160 per year).

Similar industries like construction pay higher and pull away some potential applicants.

Wilson says one reason it seems so difficult for some companies to find laborers is companies today simply need more workers because they have



## Retain 'em with tech

Austin, Texas, is known as a tech hub—and that fact isn't lost on Ben Collinsworth, CEO of Native Land Design, based there.

When it comes to foremen, account managers and other management roles, Collinsworth focuses on not hiring just anyone but hiring the best. He has an excellent pool of candidates for manager positions, thanks to the draw of the local economy and consolidation among other large landscape companies. To retain new hires at this level, he differentiates Native Land Design with a host of technology tools to make it a flexible, enjoyable place to work.

"A lot of people who come here say they do for the ease of working," he says. "They were working at the Brickmans, ValleyCrests and TruGreens before. They want to have flexibility. They got into landscaping because they don't want to be in an office all day."

Everyone has Apple devices down to the foreman level. Managers have MacBook Pros or Airs and the office is outfitted with Wi-Fi, large display monitors and Apple TV to allow team members to easily share their devices with others to walk through job photos, for example.

"I think it's a good investment in capital," he says. "You interact with your device so much during the day." Other tools the company leverages include:

- A file-sharing app similar to Dropbox that gives staff access to all their files at all times;
- Evernote, a web-based, note-taking app. The company

maintains a "notebook" for every client, which anyone in the company can access. It contains all the notes about a property, including the ability annotate photos and store them.

- Aspire mobile landscape business software; and
- Tapigo, a web and mobile app-based software, in which Collinsworth is an investor. It's designed to help landscape maintenance companies manage the irrigation inspection process with ease.

"The purpose of it all is to give guys more chances to be on-site in front of clients," Collinsworth says. "The technology we use gives them that option."



the ability to grow much faster than they did in decades past. He says current growth levels were "unheard of" in the 1990s.

"I've seen a lot of companies that started in the late 1990s that are already \$15 million-\$20 million companies," he says. "When I was at ValleyCrest (and its predecessor, Environmental Care, in the 1980s and 1990s), we grew 15 percent a year. My company grew 67 percent this year."

Facilitating this growth is access to financing. Even though it might be difficult to get a bank loan, it's easy to lease or finance equipment, freeing up cash to fund growth, Wilson says.

"Good companies have the ability to get bigger faster than they

used to," he says. "Now the question is, 'Can they get enough people?'"

### Shrinking labor pool

Immigration and guest-worker policies also have had an impact.

Contractors surmise there are fewer illegal immigrants working in the industry now than decades ago. These circumstances reduce the supply of legal workers, says Frank Mariani, CEO of Lake Bluff, Ill.-based Mariani Landscape.

"Without a doubt, there is a huge labor crisis, especially if you try to live by the rules of the federal government and hire legal employees or use a guest-worker program," Mariani says.

Speaking of the latter, the H-2B guest-worker program has had a

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## Pay to play

Spring 2014 was a tipping point at Mariani Landscape in Lake Bluff, Ill.

"We were turning over a couple hundred people a year—do you know how much training was involved in that?" says Frank Mariani, CEO of Lake Bluff, Ill.-based Mariani Landscape. "It was demoralizing for our team."

Going into the following season, Mariani management had a strategic planning session to consider its options—one of them was simply raising wages by a few dollars.

"A lot of our people felt there's no way we could afford to do this," Mariani says. "I said, 'There's no way we can afford not to do something.'"

The company gave the pay hike idea a try. It raised wages for entry-level laborers to the \$12.50 per hour range.

"It worked," Mariani says.

Turnover was about a quarter of the level it had been the year before.

There was a bottom line impact, but not as much as the team expected. An increase in productivity made up for some of the costs.

Mariani encourages other companies to consider this scenario, but only after considering other factors first.

"It's not just money," he says. "How is it to work at ABC Co.? Is it fun? Is it safe? Is it rewarding? Those are the things we have to sell," he says, noting company culture continues to be a focus at Mariani Landscape.



Frank Mariani



few rocky years, causing many companies—like Mariani's—to forgo using it due to administrative problems. Mariani Landscape, an approximately \$40 million company, used the program from the early 2000s until a few years ago when it didn't receive any of the workers it was anticipating.

Yet, the landscape industry continues to be one of the largest users of the program, which has been embroiled in federal regulatory and legal hang-ups. Visa levels are at half the number of those issued during peak prerecession years. That said, there may be an uptick this year, as returning workers (H2R visas) are being permitted, which hasn't been the case since 2007.

In Texas, the labor situation has been difficult during the past few years due to a strong state economy, says Ben Collinsworth, CEO of Native Land Design, based near Austin, Texas.

"We've had such a construction boom, so with that shared labor pool, it's been very difficult to keep, retain and attract workers," he says. "And it's been hard with the H-2B crisis and some of the things that have gone on."

Last year, the company's workers were delayed eight weeks, which created two months of seven-day workweeks

*Continued on page 46*

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Continued from page 44

for the rest of the team. Even with 100-120 H-2B workers expected this year, thanks in part to the returning-worker exemption, work will go undone.

"There's very little to no chance we'll fill all the slots we need to get the work done," Collinsworth says. At peak, the \$10.6 million company will have 200-225 employees.

At the same time, another government factor has come into play, potentially affecting the size of the labor pool: E-Verify.

E-Verify is the federal government's web-based system that compares information from an employee's I-9 form to data from U.S. Department of Homeland Security and Social Security Administration records to determine employment eligibility. It was launched in 2007 as an update to the Basic Pilot Program. As of 2015, more than 600,000 employers were enrolled in the system, compared with less than 25,000 who used Basic Pilot at its peak. Nine states mandate employer participation in E-Verify; others do so only for public employers or public contractors. Many companies elect to use E-Verify on a voluntary basis.

Continued on page 50

## Create a connected culture



Chris Joyce has always believed that the way to a successful business is through hiring good people and helping them succeed. He's done his morning staff greeting since he started his company and had only one employee (see page 40). And he does it today, now that the company has grown to well over a hundred team members.

It's difficult to scale so many personal connections, but that doesn't mean Joyce hasn't found a way to



Chris Joyce

try. The company requests personal information about every team member at its annual half-day orientation and kick-off meeting in the spring. Staff members are asked to update their personal information on a profile sheet, including their spouse's name, anniversary, birthday, children's names and more.

The human resources director stores the information in a database and sends Joyce a report every Friday afternoon with the following week's birthdays, anniversaries and other highlights, so he can mention them to employees.

"It's taken us awhile to get the system to where we are now, but now it's routine," he says. "It's part of the whole romancing the employee thing. It's one simple thing that helps people feel this is a great place to work."

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# 40 years in the making

## Industry recruiting event, the National Collegiate Landscape Competition, celebrates a milestone.

**W**hen students partake in the career fair and competitive events at the National Collegiate Landscape Competition (NCLC) this month, they'll be the fortieth group to convene in the name of landscaping education and camaraderie. And they'll be right back where it all started: Mississippi State University.

A program of the National Association of Landscape Professionals (NALP), the NCLC—formerly known as Student Career Days and ALCA Field Days—was founded in 1977 by Bob Callaway of Mississippi State, Roy Mecklenburg of Michigan State and Ron Smith of Ohio State. That year, these landscape/horticulture instructors brought a group of students together from five schools to learn from and compete with each other—and the tradition has continued for more than four decades, visiting 25 different schools, hosting more than 15,000 students

and doling out nearly \$1 million in scholarships to nearly 900 students.

Brett Lemcke, vice president of R.M. Landscape and NALP president-elect has participated in the event both as a student at SUNY Cobleskill and a chairman for three years. He signed up as a college freshman because he'd heard it was a fun way to get involved in his college program—and in the industry.

"This event can get student participants a grander perspective of our industry," he says. "The idea that the potential is endless within the industry is a very motivating thought." (For more on Lemcke, see page 64.)

This year, 800-plus students from more than 60 schools will participate in a 27-event competition that includes construction equipment operation, plant identification, landscape design and business-related challenges. Schools accrue points in an effort to win the coveted first-place trophy—the Robert

A. Callaway Award—and students compete individually to top the list of "superstars."

In addition to fun and friendly competition, a career fair exposes students to dozens of landscape companies that exhibit to recruit students for internships and job opportunities.

Justin Snyder participated as a student with North Carolina State University from 1999-2002, and he's involved today as a faculty adviser for the team from Graham, N.C.-based Alamance Community College.

"This event truly does become a life-altering part in many of our students' education paths, career paths and, ultimately, their lives," he says. For example, he walked into his first career fair with no plans or expectations but interviewed with Ohio-based Yardmaster and Walt Disney World. He received internship offers from both.

"It was amazing to me that a first-year student could walk into the career fair and ultimately walk out with two internship offers," he says, adding he spent the following summer in Ohio at Yardmaster. "It showed me the power of this event from a job placement standpoint."



Clockwise from top left: Landscape students participate in the NCLC's opening ceremony, a planting competition, career fair and take home an award for best team cheer.

PHOTOS: NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF LANDSCAPE PROFESSIONALS



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As the economy gets better, the labor pool shrinks, creating a difficult situation for landscape industry employers.




Those things take what's already a narrow pool and it really shrinks that pool down even smaller."

It's difficult but worth it to hire under these restrictions, Bland says.

"It's been challenging, but I firmly believe we have a better workforce than we did five years ago," he says. "It's more stable and productive because we're being more discerning about who we hire, and we're investing more into making them productive and keeping them around."

Bland Landscaping is also paying more—he estimates it's 10-15 percent more than a few years ago.

"The biggest take-home message is the days of being able to hire somebody and pay them miserable wages without benefits are gone," he says. "We got by as an industry with that for too long." 

#### WEB EXTRA

Associations and other groups are upping their games to help attract workers to the landscape industry. Read about some of these efforts in the Web Extras section at [LandscapeManagement.net](http://LandscapeManagement.net).

PHOTO: NATIVE LAND DESIGN

*Continued from page 46*

Bland Landscaping in Apex, N.C., started using E-Verify voluntarily a few years before the state made it mandatory for companies with 25-plus

employees. "Ten years ago our company didn't use E-Verify," says President Kurt Bland, whose company had about \$14 million in 2015 revenue. "We didn't do criminal background checks.



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## YOUR MOVE

Strategic plans are useless if they don't address where to start and who's responsible, Phil Harwood explains.

 **PAGE 54**





**BUSINESS BASICS: PLANNING**

# Make strategy relevant



**BY PHIL HARWOOD**

The author is president and CEO of Pro-Motion Consulting. Reach him at [phil@mypmcteam.com](mailto:phil@mypmcteam.com).

**O**ne of the biggest challenges with strategic planning is making it real on a daily basis. Just because a plan exists doesn't mean that day-to-day behaviors will change. Something needs to be done for there to be an impact on specific actions of individuals. Implementing strategy is where the rubber meets the road. The question is, what steps may be taken to connect strategy to behavior and, ultimately, to performance and the achievement of strategic goals?

**“Most plans stop at deciding what to do. They fail to address where to start and who's responsible.”**

There are serious negative consequences to failing to implement strategic plans. The effort and expense involved with developing strategy are often significant and may be wasted if you put strategic plans on a shelf to collect dust. In addition, those involved in strategy development may lose faith in the organization's ability to execute and begin to search out greener pastures. The loss of high-potential people is devastating to most businesses.

Best-selling author Patrick Lencioni provides an outstanding model for strategy implementation in his book, “The Advantage: Why Organizational Health Trumps Everything Else in Business.” According to Lencioni, “What leaders must do to give employees the clarity they need is agree on the answers to six simple but critical questions and thereby eliminate even small discrepancies in their thinking.”

Here are the six questions:

- Why do we exist?
- How do we behave?
- What do we do?
- How will we succeed?
- What is most important—right now?
- Who must do what?

The first four questions are addressed during most strategic planning processes. But questions five and six are often overlooked—and these are the points that lead to implementation and promote accountability for results. Most plans stop at deciding what to do; they fail to address where to start and who's responsible. So, the plans just sit there.


Question five is critical because it creates clarity around a singular, overarching organizational goal, called a thematic goal. If you could achieve only one thing in the next three to 12 months, what would it be? The thematic goal is a rallying cry or, to some degree, a manufactured crisis. Nothing brings people together like a good crisis. In my experience, most leadership teams are able to easily answer this question with some guidance, especially if questions one through four were adequately answered.

Once the thematic goal has been established, the underlying objectives required to achieve the thematic goal need to be identified. Lencioni refers to these objectives as defining objectives. By accomplishing these defining objectives, you will have met the thematic goal.

Defining objectives make excellent projects for leadership team members and should be reviewed each week at your leadership team meeting to create accountability and promote progress.

Of course, from mundane things like answering phones, opening mail and paying bills to more significant things like closing sales, maintaining accounts and keeping high-performing employees engaged, many things need to be achieved every day. But these things are not necessarily strategic. Lencioni calls these things standard operating objectives. They may be important, but they're the ongoing routine things that need to occur to keep the organization going.

While question five is a simple question that promotes focus, alignment and unity, question six has to do with organizational structure and accountability. I was glad to see Lencioni include this question in his book, as it's all too common for people to not be clear about their responsibilities. Additionally, there are often critical areas that are unassigned or have two or more people assigned, which creates confusion and leads to a lack of accountability. If two people are accountable for something, nobody is. By answering question six, organizations are able to clean up these errors and oversights.

There are two other beneficial actions to consider. One is to integrate strategic initiatives (thematic goal and defining objectives) into management scorecards. The other is to link incentive compensation to the achievement of strategic goals. When managers at all levels are required to focus on strategy, they will. And when bonuses depend on hitting strategic goals, managers will pay attention. 

**WEB EXTRA**

Visit the Web Extras section at [LandscapeManagement.net](http://LandscapeManagement.net) for Lencioni's one-page model, plus two examples of how thematic goals and defining objectives work in unison.



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# Just say yes

**I**magine you could say yes to every single request your clients make, no matter the request! How would it make your clients feel? And how would it make you feel?

The attitude of “just say yes” is how we grew our business from a one-product company—just swimming pools, no decks, no landscaping and no service—into a multidivisional landscaping enterprise serving some of the most successful and prominent homeowners in the nation. We responded positively to their requests, and we figured out how to get it done.

To better understand this approach, let's first dive into the reasons why you might want to just say no.

## REASONS TO SAY NO

**Too busy.** You're just too busy going in a hundred different directions at 65 mph, and if you take on one more request, you'll drop all the balls. You simply don't have time to say yes. Ah, but there's a problem with showing your clients that you're too busy: It makes them feel uncomfortable having to depend on you. If they think you're overwhelmed, they won't feel comfortable referring you to their colleagues and friends. They don't want to dilute the service you're

giving them by sharing you with others. What kind of impression are you leaving with your clients?

If you feel like you're too busy, you need to make a change. Don't let your clients see you sweat. Make it look easy, as if your capacity were overflowing when it comes to their requests. Be the one serene provider in a sea of rushed and incompetent vendors that are adding to (not subtracting from) their clients' stress. Be the company that's easy to do business with, by saying yes to their requests without complaints, a wrinkled face or a mutter under your breath. Do you smile no matter how you feel or how busy you are?

**Full schedule.** If your schedule is literally full, you need to work extra capacity into your schedule so you can handle these requests—especially from existing clientele. If you already use white space and it's a last minute emergency, you also can give clients a choice of paying for double overtime or waiting. Clients like choices, and you'll be surprised who decides to spend more money for quicker service and who decides to wait. (Though your top clients will expect miracles, so be ready!) Are you managing your schedule on a proactive basis?

**You don't do it in-house.** A homeowner once asked us to have a wild animal removed from his property. We balked, and because of that and one other incident, we lost him as a service client. That was too bad because he was highly connected with hundreds of our clients and potential clients. It's OK to say yes to something you don't do in-house, then proceed to help the client figure out how to get it taken care of, or simply place the call yourself to the outside vendor. You



**BY JEFFREY SCOTT**

The author is owner of Jeffrey Scott Consulting, which helps landscape companies grow and maximize profits. Reach him at [jeff@jeffreyscott.biz](mailto:jeff@jeffreyscott.biz).


should have a black book of trusted resources. Is your black book ready to handle the odd job?

**You don't agree.** Your client may call with a complaint or request based on a false assumption or based on bad horticulture. It's OK to say yes and let clients feel like they're right, while you discuss with them the larger issues at hand. Have you ever role played with your employees how to say yes in these instances?

## THE BENEFITS OF SAYING YES

By just saying yes, you keep the back door closed and you keep your phone number as the one and only number clients will (ever) need for their outdoor needs. My research shows that all contractors who've been in business for more than a few years have a client right now talking to one of their competitors for something to be done on his or her property. They're doing so because they don't know you do a certain kind of work, you acted too busy last time they called you or something's not keeping you top of mind with them. By always saying yes, and by being a joy to do business with, you'll retain more clients and gain more referrals.

Once you decide to “just say yes,” you have to decide how you want your employees to respond after they say yes. You also have to decide what systems need to be in place to support this attitude, what level of empowerment you need to give your employees and what work you'll do in-house versus sub out versus hand off to a vendor.

You need to be prepared to “just say yes.” It starts with an internal attitude, and it ends with good people and proven systems. 





**CASE STUDY: OUR WAY**

# Motivational Monday

What started as an email to a small group has grown into a nearly decade-long commitment. **BY CASEY PAYTON**



**Mark Svozil**

**W**hen Mark Svozil was promoted in 2007 from branch manager to regional manager for Davey Tree Expert Co. in Kent, Ohio, he sought a way to maintain connections with his former co-workers and clients. As a fan of motivational books, he came up with the idea to send an email blast with inspirational quotes each Monday morning. What started as a 12-person email chain grew into an audience of more than 800 readers. Now, if his email isn't out by 10:00 or 11:00 a.m., Svozil's readers start asking for it.

"Now that it's gone on this long, it has become a responsibility, and I take that seriously," Svozil says. "It's a small thing, but it has the power to impact peoples' lives. You never know which quote is going to affect someone."

In the nine years since he started the email blasts, Svozil—now senior vice president of commercial landscape services for Davey Tree—has never neglected his responsibility. If he has a flight early Monday morning, for example, he composes the email in advance so it's not rushed.

The ideas come from books, the Internet or readers' suggestions. The email comes out Monday mornings to kick start his readers' weeks. Svozil keeps a log of the quotes he's already used to avoid repeats. Constructing each email—choosing the quote, reflecting on it and creating a visual to accompany it—takes him anywhere from 30 minutes to an hour.

"This doesn't cost me anything other than time," he says. "But it's a commitment.

People are counting on me to read this each week, and it's important that I remain consistent and follow through."

Svozil has built an audience by keeping the effort consistent. His audience started with co-workers and clients, but it has expanded to family, friends and industry acquaintances. People have shared it with their own personal networks. As his audience grows, he says, it's important to be open to both positive and negative feedback.

"When Monday morning rolls around, everyone has a choice in front of them—a choice of what kind of week they want to have," Svozil says. "There are always going to be those that just hit 'delete' and never read the email. But those who choose to take a few minutes to read it are usually the same people who are motivated to set themselves up for a good week. I like to think this might have some small part in starting their weeks off right."

## BEYOND THE QUOTE

While it's not just about him, Svozil acknowledges he gets a lot out of it.

Each email's quote is followed by his personal interpretation in a section titled "Beyond the Quote." Reflecting on each quote helps him start off his own week the right way, but he says his explanation is not necessarily "right." Each week he gets more than 10 reader responses sharing how they interpreted the message that week.

"Just because I interpreted a quote a certain way doesn't mean that's how everyone else will take it," Svozil says. "The whole idea is to consider how the quote relates to

the reader. How does it impact them? Life brings its ups and downs—and, of course, the stuff in between—and I never know how these quotes might have an impact. But if it can impact just one other person, I feel like I've made a difference."

Of all the quotes Svozil has read and shared over the years, his favorite is one from football coaching legend Vince Lombardi: "The man on the top of the mountain didn't fall there."

"That one always hits home with me," Svozil says. "No matter what you do in life, if you want to succeed, you have to put in the effort. You also have to live with the outcome should you decide not to chase your dreams."

If you'd like to receive the Monday email blasts, email Svozil at [Mark.Svozil@Davey.com](mailto:Mark.Svozil@Davey.com).

Payton is a freelance writer based in Philadelphia.

## BUSINESS BREAKDOWN

**COMPANY:** Davey Tree Expert Co.

**HEADQUARTERS:** Kent, Ohio

**REVENUE:** \$789 million (2014)

**EMPLOYEES:** 8,000-plus

**CLIENT/SERVICE MIX:** Not disclosed



## SKID-STEERS

### 260 SKID-STEER LOADER



**COMPANY:** JCB

**URL:** JCBNA.com

JCB's 260 skid-steer loader features the PowerBoom design that improves visibility by 60 percent, the company says. More than 30 attachment families provide year-round versatility. A standard universal mechanical hitch or an optional hydraulic quick hitch make changing attachments simple. A rear service door offers easy access to the engine and daily checkpoints.



### 236D SKID-STEER LOADER



**COMPANY:** Caterpillar

**URL:** Cat.com

The Cat 236D features radial lift design and significant drawbar power to deliver mid-lift reach and digging performance. When paired with a Cat pallet fork attachment, it offers stable and efficient material transportation on the job site, the company says.



### S595

**COMPANY:** Bobcat

**URL:** Bobcat.com

The 74-hp S595 is a 500-frame-size, skid-steer loader with a 2,000-lb. rated operating capacity (ROC). It's designed for professionals who need to lift and carry a large amount of material without moving up to a larger machine size.



### REMOTETASK SYSTEM

**COMPANY:** TORC Robotics

**URL:** TORCRobotics.com

TORC Robotics' RemoteTask remote control system is designed for Cat D Series Skid-Steer, Multi-Terrain and Compact Track Loaders. The system enables operators to precisely control the machines outside the cab, at a safe distance (up to 1,000 ft.) from potentially hazardous tasks and environments.





## SSV SERIES

**COMPANY:** Kubota

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

With standard two-speed travel and optional high-flow hydraulics, Kubota's SSV65 and SSV75 skid-steer loaders feature an ROC of 1,950 lbs. and 2,690 lbs., respectively. Both models feature an exclusive slide-up, front-entry door that rises overhead, a side light for better visibility and safe night operation, and a spacious cabin with climate control.

## SR240 & SV280

**COMPANY:** Case Construction Equipment

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

Weighing in at 7,400 lbs., the SR240 is an all-purpose skid-steer that offers an ROC of 2,400 lbs. Meanwhile, the 8,090-lb. SV280 offers an ROC of 2,800 lbs. Rated at 74 hp, these large-frame models deliver torque of 232 ft.-lbs. and a bucket breakout force of up to 8,680 lbs. Standard hydraulics offers 24.2 gpm and high-flow auxiliary offers 33.2 gpm.



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## G SERIES

**COMPANY:** John Deere

**URL:** JohnDeere.com

Four EPA Tier 4 Final G-Series skid-steers—312GR, 314G, 316GR and 318G (pictured)—and one compact track loader, 317G, were designed with direct customer feedback, Deere says. An optimized boom design enables lift heights over 10 ft. on the three vertical lift models and a 20 percent increase in breakout forces on the two radial-lift models.



## TS60

**COMPANY:** Takeuchi

**URL:** Takeuchi-US.com

With a 2,000-lb. ROC, the TS60 is available in both a vertical and radial configuration. It's small enough to get into tight areas, light enough to transport easily and powerful enough for professional landscaping applications, the company says.

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## TURBINE-STYLE BLOWERS

**COMPANY:** Buffalo Turbine

**URL:** BuffaloTurbine.com

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**URL:** BillyGoat.com

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**COMPANY:** Nufarm

**URL:** Nufarm.com

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### IMIDACLOPRID T&O 2F

**COMPANY:** Quali-Pro

**URL:** Quali-Pro.com

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## Gone commercial

Continued from page 32

"Your greatest value to a commercial customer is how you can make their life easier," Moxam adds.

### MAINTAINING THE ACCOUNT

Landing a commercial account is only half the battle. Contractors then have to work to maintain it. Many factors go into maintaining a commercial account, but poor communication is a key reason contractors lose contracts, Moxam says.

"You're actually more likely to lose customers from poor communication than poor quality of work," he says.

Clickenbeard regularly touches base with his clients, but he also goes above and beyond. He hosts happy hour events and golf outings, takes clients to golf tournaments and sends them Christmas gifts. He even sent a moving crew to help a client who was relocating.

"You spent all that time building those relationships. It's important to maintain them," Clickenbeard says. "It's a long run-way to establish that relationship. If you ignore it, those contracts are in danger."

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

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# BACKSTORY

INTERVIEW BY DILLON STEWART



## Brett Lemcke

Lemcke and his wife, Denise, have three kids: 5-year-old Anna and 2-year-old twins Brooks and Tessa.



Lemcke's father and uncle founded R.M. Landscape in 1973. Lemcke fell in love with the business in high school, when he worked as a crew member, planted trees in the nursery and served as a foreman.



As a student, Lemcke competed in NALP's Student Career Days, now called National Collegiate Landscape competition (NCLC). Pictured is Lemcke with his teammate and current NCLC Chair Ed Furner of Mariani Landscape.

### VICE PRESIDENT R.M. LANDSCAPE HILTON, N.Y.

#### EDUCATION

Aquinas Institute  
Rochester, N.Y.  
Class of 1998

SUNY College of Agriculture  
and Technology at Cobleskill  
Associate degree,  
landscape development  
Class of 2000

SUNY College of Agriculture and  
Technology at Cobleskill  
Bachelor's of technology  
Class of 2002

#### WORK EXPERIENCE

**1994-1998**  
R.M. Landscape  
Crew member  
Rochester, N.Y.

**2000**  
G&M Landscape Services  
Crew member  
Nantucket, Mass.

**2001**  
Gachina Landscape Management  
Intern  
Menlo Park, Calif.

**2002-2005**  
R.M. Landscape  
Design/sales/maintenance  
division leader

**2005-Present**  
R.M. Landscape  
Vice President

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"During my craziest times, I fall back on how much I love our business and how much I love this industry. I couldn't see myself doing anything else."



**1999-Present**  
National Association  
of Landscape Professionals  
Student Member (1999-2002)  
Industry recruiting committee/  
chair (2002-2009)  
Co-chair of NCLC (2009)  
Chair of NCLC (2010-2013)  
Director at Large (2012-2015)  
President (2016, starting in May)

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