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# Landscape MANAGEMENT

MAY 2003 / #5 / VOLUME 42

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# next month

WHAT'S COMING UP IN JUNE

## ■ Cover story:

### Brand to win

Make your company's name the one that customers remember

### ■ Say goodbye to callbacks

They're costly; they're annoying; read this and they'll be gone

### ■ Mowing patterns

Here's one strategy to use to separate your service from the pack

### ■ Student help survival guide

If you train and supervise seasonal student help, this is a must read

### ■ Biostimulants to the rescue

What they are, how they can help you, when to use them

### ■ Snow/ice management

Review next winter's equipment choices, management strategies

### ■ Defeat the drought

Lawn care pros share how they keep going when water is scarce

■ **Plus:** Bruce Wilson's "Best Practices," Ed Laflamme's "Business Beat," and the latest news you can use

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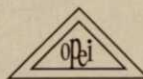
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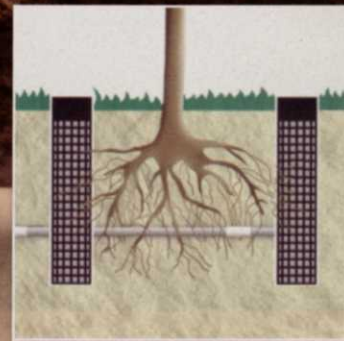
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BY JASON STAHL / MANAGING EDITOR

# Work with a sound heart

**A**s you send your teams out of your facility for a productive day in the field, don't feel guilty that you're not in Baghdad, helping our boys restore order. You've got your job to do, and they've got theirs. Now go do it. What you're doing is good for yourself, your employees, your customers and, ultimately, for your country.

If you're like me, you've been thinking how unfair it is for someone to be dodging bullets for your freedom while you're safe at home. I mean, if you love your country and what it stands for, shouldn't you be helping the cause?

### Life can be unfair

Just after the war started, I was surfing through coverage on CNN.com and clicked on "Casualties of War." I saw a picture of a man who died when two helicopters crashed over the sea. He was a young, good-looking guy with bright blue eyes and a great smile. The next photo stabbed me in the heart — it showed him and his wife with their two children, aged 10 and seven. I immediately had a vision of this man's son grown up, looking at his father's picture on the mantle, lamenting about how many games of catch and lazy Sundays they missed.

How unfair, I thought, that these kids will grow up fatherless while mine won't. I wondered why his helicopter crashed while the wobbly wheel on the two-ton dump truck I passed the other day stayed on.

Fortunately, I came to my senses a short while later and realized how ludicrous these thoughts were.

Our soldiers would expect nothing less than for us to continue doing our jobs at home, just like we expect them to fulfill their mission. They're the best trained

people for that job, as you're the best trained person to do yours. They enlisted in the service knowing that one day they might have to put their life at risk. You took all of your money and started a landscaping business, accepting that one day you might lose everything.

### Follow your path

We all have chosen paths in life, and we shouldn't look back after making those choices. Maybe the Vietnam War ended before one of you out there was called up for duty. If you had been drafted, how would your life have been different? There's really no point in trying to figure that out.

I'll tell you what you can do. Hug your kids every day. Don't grumble too much about losing a bidding war for a big commercial account. Be glad you were there to give it a shot anyway. And don't ever take for granted the smell of freshly cut grass again.

Compared to what our boys are doing in Iraq, our jobs and lives aren't that difficult. In that light, taking a reaming from Mrs. Smith for running over her daylilies with a mower isn't such a big deal.

Go do your job, and do it proudly. And when our boys come home, make sure their lawn is neater than the captain's quarters.

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We need to ask ourselves, "How do we get the consumer to purchase landscaping with so many other choices?"



## Sell value, quality of life

**I**t's amazing when you look at what's going on this year: lowest interest rates in 40 years, people afraid to put money into the stock market and war. With so many advantages on our side, I would guess that 2003 is treating most landscapers well.

Many of you reading this are probably thinking that I've taken one too many whiffs of compost lately. Obviously, low interest rates are fantastic because homeowners can borrow money as low as 4.25% on a line of credit. Or even if they refinance their home, they can save hundreds of dollars per month from the higher rates of 9% to 10% that were the norm. If you do the math, every \$100,000 of mortgage refinanced from 9% to 5.5% will save you \$237 per month, based on a 30-year mortgage. With rates this low, homeowners can refinance and borrow 40% more than they currently owe and have the same payment they're used to!

On your next appointment, give your customers the name of a good mortgage banker. Help them to see the benefits of refinancing their home so that they can afford a beautiful new landscape, including that backyard patio where they can entertain their friends.

### Investing at home

Another advantage of being in the landscape business is we're helping people invest in their homes. Over time, home values continuously rise from 3% to 5%, depending on the area. In these conservative times, people will invest in their homes instead of the stock market. You can help them see their landscape as an investment because making 3% is a lot better than losing 30%.

Due to our war on terrorism and the war with Iraq, people aren't traveling as much as they have in the past. However, they still want the quality of life they're used to. So sell them on relaxing at home by having their very own retreat, spa or waterfall. I believe we tend to be negative about certain situations, but we need to become positive and stop talking about how bad things are. Sell and make things happen!

### Changes needed

So, with all these good things, why did many landscapers have a slow 2002? I believe that we have to change the way we advertise and market ourselves to the customer. We're competing for consumers' money because they have so many choices of how to spend it, including remodeling their homes or purchasing home entertainment systems, new cars, boats and hundreds of other big-ticket items. We need to ask ourselves, "How do we get the consumer to purchase landscaping with so many other choices?"

Most landscapers rely on word-of-mouth promotion. In my opinion, word of mouth (referrals) is the best form of advertising, but we do little to promote our referral business. Small ideas that have worked for my company are sending newsletters to existing customers, telling them of all your services and asking them to refer their friends to you or even give you a list of friends who are thinking of landscaping.

— The author is President of the Ohio Landscapers Association and owner of Sagamore Soils and BET Trucking in Sagamore, OH. He first wrote this column for the OLA's "Growing Concern" publication. He can be reached at 330/656-5720.