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CONTENTS » MARCH 2013
VOL 52, ISSUE 3

DEPARTMENTS

6 News & Views
Green Industry Great Escape recap; 10 tips from Homi Patel

8 Mailbox

12 Giving Back
Acres Group invests in its community.
BY CASEY PAYTON

20 Weed Watch
Southern Brass Buttons; lesser swinecress

39 Market Watch
IRRIGATION
Reclaimed water use in landscaping is on the rise

DESIGN/BUILD
One owner finds the perfect work/life balance

MAINTENANCE
Lawn clippings do have their benefits

LAWN/TREE CARE
Meet Ohio’s Applicator of the Year

48 Add-on Biz
Sonoran Gardens finds a unique niche in the maintenance market.
BY CASEY PAYTON

50 LM Reports
Irrigation equipment; mowers; tree care products

56 1-Minute Mentor
Meet IA President Bob Dobson.
BY MARISA PALMIERI

COLUMNS

4 Editor’s Note
BY MARISA PALMIERI

16 Best Practices
BY BRUCE WILSON

18 The Benchmark
BY KEVIN KEHOE

46 Profiting From Design
BY JODY SHILAN

IN EVERY ISSUE

55 Classifieds, Resources

FEATURES

22 The 7 habits
Practical family business advice from experts and execs.
BY MARISA PALMIERI

32 The ins & outs of Houzz
The online platform gives residential landscape designers a boost.
BY DIANNA BORSI O’BRIEN

OUR MISSION: Landscape Management — the leading information resource for lawn care, landscape maintenance, design/build and irrigation professionals — empowers Green Industry professionals to learn and grow from their peers and our exclusive business intelligence. Serving as the industry conscience, we not only report on but also help shape news, views, trends and solutions.
The four myths behind incentives

Avoid the pitfalls of incentive programs by being aware of these common myths, Green Industry consultant and LM blogger Jeffrey Scott says.

1. Incentives should be focused only on what a person can control.
2. An incentive should be holistic.
3. Incentives will create a change in behavior.
4. Incentives must pay out monetary rewards.

For the full blog post, visit goo.gl/g0rWJ.
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I’m on the cusp of the generation Richard Louv, author of Last Child in the Woods and The Nature Principle, defines as having “nature deficit disorder” or a deficiency in vitamin N (N is for nature). A child of the 1980s, I had minimal access to technology other than the television in my early years, unlike today’s kids. But by middle school, my family had a PC. By high school we had an Internet connection. And by college I had a cell phone.

Still, I played outside as a kid. I got dirty. I ran around in bare feet. When we were 8 or 10 my sister, our neighborhood friends and I had a fort in the woods behind our house. I went to week-long Girl Scout summer camp. We played “spud” and “sardines,” had campfires and caught lightning bugs late into the summer nights.

Will my daughters, Sadie and Paige, ages 3 and not quite 2, have the same type of childhoods? I’d be lying if I said I wasn’t worried about it. On top of my concern that they’ll miss out on a lot of fun, grass stains and skinned knees, there are potentially more serious repercussions for their attention deficit disorder and anxiety, just to name a few.

As a member of the Green Industry, you probably have—or had at one time—a healthy dose of vitamin N. And you likely have the same concerns for the well being of the children in your life. That’s not to mention the direct impact future generations’ nature deficits may have on the market for landscaping services. Thankfully, you and I are far from the only ones concerned. There’s Louv, his ground-breaking books and the work of the Children & Nature Network (C&NN) he co-founded. One of C&NN’s initiatives is Let’s G.O.!, which encourages people of all ages to “get outside” to play, serve and celebrate during the month of April. There are First Lady Michelle Obama’s Let’s Move and Let’s Move Outside campaigns. In the landscape industry, there’s Project EverGreen, which aims to preserve and enhance green spaces of all kinds. And there’s Come Alive Outside, a movement founded by Green Industry consultant Jim Paluch and supported by the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) and a handful of suppliers. (See page 6 for more on his presentation at PLANET’s Green Industry Great Escape in Las Vegas last month.)

As Paluch puts it, the landscape industry has been out-marketed by Hollywood and the electronic communications industries. How many of your prospects don’t have a 56-in. flat-screen TV with a complete indoor entertainment system? Very few of them, right? It’s time to show them that by improving their outdoor living areas, they’ll bring their families more memories, joy and wellness than a black box ever could. Sell them on outside.

When that happens, and when our nation’s vitamin N levels rise, we’ll have one fewer worry for our children and our children’s children.
A SIGN OF THE TIMES

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What happened in Vegas?

PLANET’s Green Industry Great Escape encourages new ways of thinking.  


Coming alive
Green Industry consultant Jim Paluch welcomed Great Escape attendees with the “Come Alive Outside” message he founded, which is supported by PLANET and a handful of industry suppliers. The flagship website, ComeAliveOutside.com, features free tips and resources for companies to promote the message, webinars and information about in-person education events.

There is no membership fee; it’s a grassroots effort, Paluch explained. The goal? “Capture the business opportunities of today while creating a better world for tomorrow.”

“We need to move our focus to helping people ‘come alive outside,’” he said, referring to some of today’s biggest problems, like childhood obesity. “We’re dying a slow death inside. Do we want to be the industry that cuts grass and installs landscapes or the profession that transforms the health of the nation?”

Finding a cause
Roger Phelps, promotional communications manager for Stihl, led a roundtable discussion on cause marketing with Bill Brunelle of Independent We Stand, an online community of locally owned businesses that educate their communities about the benefits of buying local. Independent We Stand is sponsored by Stihl, which sells its products only through independent dealers.

Independent We Stand, with more than 100,000 members, has taken off. Finding such a “cause” could translate to success for landscape contractors, too. Consider another cause marketing campaign: Small Business Saturday. Brunelle pointed out it was founded by American Express. More than 100 million consumers shopped local on this day in 2012 (the Saturday after Thanksgiving).

Phelps emphasized cause marketing campaigns must be authentic. “If the cause isn’t part of your DNA, customers will sniff that out,” he said.

The roundtable conversation turned to PLANET’s annual Day of Service event and the “Come Alive Outside” movement, which attendees had learned about the day before, and how companies could leverage these things in promoting their own businesses.

Show time!
It wouldn’t be Vegas without seeing a show, and speaker and magician Jon Petz emphasized the importance of creating “show time” moments for customers because, as he said, “No one remembers boring.”

Body language expert Janine Driver presented “The New Executive Presence,” which was anything but boring. A law enforcement trainer, she taught the audience what signs they may be sending with their body language, and how to read others’ actions.

She also spoke about “inattentional blindness,” which occurs when executives are hyperfocused on one thing, so they miss problems or crimes unfolding before them (think: embezzlement). “Information can be right under our eyes and we miss it,” she said. “You have to look at things with a different perspective. It could literally change your business.”
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8

MAILBOX

Nice mix
Congratulations on a fantastic (February) issue! I love reading valuable articles and learning about improvement opportunities for our business and for me personally. An added value is seeing the faces of and reading about colleagues whom I have known for a long time, like Dan Eichenlaub, Drake Snodgrass and Maurice Dowell. They are outstanding people who genuinely deserve recognition for the positive influence they have on our industry and the people with whom they associate.

This issue has a nice mix of high-quality content. Accept my sincere thanks for excellent journalism.

Tom Shotzbarger
General Manager, Shreiner Tree Care
King of Prussia, Pa.

Hit the spot
"About us" (Editor's Note, February) hit the spot. We've perused the Radiant Plumbing page, and we're all quite impressed. Everything in life and business is all about marketing and relationships. Thanks again for everything that you do for our industry.

Gary LaScalea
Owner, GroGreen
Plano, Texas

Bigger’s not better
I’ve complained about this (LM150, forthcoming in June) before but to no avail. Volume does not a good company make. This is the continuation of the American ego myth about bigger is better. You and most of the media have never figured out that bigger doesn’t mean better. How about companies that have the most satisfied employees and customers as a benchmark? I’ll continue to complain about your folly and misguided criterion and you will continue to say this is what your readers want to see. This is very sad. There are thousands of good companies in our industry who don’t want to be huge that do a wonderful job for their customers and are fair to their employees.

Charles Bowers
President, Garden Gate Landscaping
Silver Spring, Md.

Kudos? Complaints? Share your thoughts with the Landscape Management team by emailing npalmieri@northcoastmedia.net.

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Profiting from Patel

Northwestern University professor Homi Patel shares 10 tips on how to ensure success.

BY BETH GERACI

Homi Patel, professor of marketing at Northwestern University’s Kellogg School of Management, was a featured speaker at the peer group gathering Next Level University last November. (For more on that event, see “Raising the Bar” in our January issue at goo.gl/2bhH68.)

Speaking to leaders and staff from six notable landscaping companies Patel, retired chairman and CEO of Hartmarx Corp., shared his views on managing employees and pleasing customers. In the process, he gave those in attendance much to think about.

Patel emphasized there are 10 things a company in the service industry must get right. Here they are, in his own words. Companies that follow this advice, Patel says, will benefit.

1 Define your service offering. Every business needs to understand what they’re going to do well—and what they’re not going to do well.

This is not a casual choice. Instead, it is a choice that you perform badly at some things so that you can afford to excel at others. For example, if you are going to provide the very best service, you have to get comfortable with the fact that you cannot provide the best price.

2 Delight your customer by doing unexpected and surprising things.

Everybody has good service, everybody has great service. But that’s just not enough. What you’ve got to do is delight your customer. Take Disney, for example. You stand 40 minutes for a two-minute ride and yet those kids come out thrilled.

Try getting a kid that age to stand 40 minutes for anything. Disney figured out how to delight its customer.

3 Be aware of your customers’ pain points. Don’t ignore the uncontrolled pain points, because that’s when you’re going to lose one of your customers. Know about divorces, deaths or whatever it is. Your clients need you at that particular time. Keep in regular contact. Empathize. Deliver new information without being a pest.

A lot of customers are lost, particularly in the service business, because businesspeople a). are not aware of the pain point that’s going to hit them, which is uncontrolled, and b). haven’t devised a plan to get close to the customer in that particular area.

4 Hire for attitude; train for aptitude.

When it comes to recruiting and selecting talent, 100 percent of employers want the smartest, the best people. But the simple reality is, the people who have it all are expensive to employ. A competitive cost structure requires compromising on employees. Hire for attitude; train for aptitude. You need 100 percent of your employees to have a great attitude. You don’t need 100 percent of your employees to be A+ students.

5 Know that employee sacrifice is not sustainable. You must recognize the difference between a stretched employee—which is good—and a stressed employee, which is not so good. Don’t expect that you’re going to do well in the long run by just constantly putting more and more pressure on your employees.

6 Understand that training requires transforming the complex into the simple. It’s as simple as that. Make sure the training curve puts your to-do list on your employee’s to-do list. A good training program enables employees to exceed their own expectations. Cut out the boilerplate stuff so training creates energy rather than saps it.

7 Reward employees. Remember, your employees are closest to the customer. Reward them for insights and information and use them in multiple ways. They know what kind of people really fit into the organization. Let them help you recruit talent, and reward them for it.

8 Control personnel. Your largest cost is personnel. I don’t need to do a survey on that. We’ve already discussed hiring for attitude, training for aptitude, but there’s another big issue in employee cost, and that’s managers not making the tough call on personnel. An employee functioning below expectations is costing you money.

9 Get rid of customer sludge. Everyone has them: those customers you don’t make money on. The customer who demands too much. Anybody who demands unprofitable levels of service, you have to have the guts to get rid of them, from a profitability point of view.

Next, make your customers do things for themselves to eliminate unnecessary costs. But give them a plus, as well. Take airport kiosks, for example. By creating these, airlines saved themselves money, but travelers benefit as well. You can check yourself in, you don’t have to deal with a surly attendant and you can walk right in through security. They created a win-win.

10 Finally, lead by example.

You built this business. You are the leaders of this business. If you don’t have passion, energy, integrity and humility, you have no reason to expect your employees to have any.