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ICYMI: Business book giveaway

LM is hosting a business book giveaway in-hand with our February issue. We’re doling out 10 business books, including those on this month’s cover. To nab a tome, keep an eye on LM’s Facebook and Twitter accounts and respond to the posts mentioning the book you’d like to win (favorites, retweets, mentions, likes and comments all qualify) by noon March 17. All participants also will be entered into a drawing for the grand prize, a $50 Amazon gift card, which will be awarded at the conclusion of the contest. For more details, visit LandscapeManagement.net/BusinessBooks.

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» Reference 1-Minute Mentor Terry Delany’s “How We SERV” document for tips on how to manage relations with subcontractors and strategic partners (from page 52).
» Get more on Michael Gerber’s logic of “working on the business, not in the business” (from page 25).
» Read an excerpt from The E-Myth Landscape Contractor, coauthored by Michael Gerber and landscape industry veteran Tony Bass (from page 25).
» Another to add to the shelf: Jerry McKay details how reading Les McKeown’s Predictable Success improved his business (from page 18).
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Recommended reading

The Pew Research Center reported last month that nearly a quarter (23 percent) of American adults had not read a single book in the past year (that includes e-books and audiobooks). This number has nearly tripled since 1978, when Gallup reported only 8 percent of the population was non-book-readers. That figure hovered between 13 percent and 18 percent between 1990 and 2008. Suffice it to say, with the advent of mobile devices, social media and our “busy” culture, fewer people are turning to books.

For me, books are like movies in that a personal recommendation is required to get me to delve in. I can see what the masses are reading and watching by checking best-seller lists or box-office ticket sales, but I’m not forking over my money—or, more importantly, committing my time—without the good word of a trusted friend or adviser.

I know from our research and from talking with Landscape Management readers that you feel the same way about your time as I do about mine. In my interview on page 24 with the author of The E-Myth, Michael Gerber, he confirms lack of time is one of the biggest problems plaguing small business owners. He adds that even if they did have more time to study how to improve their businesses, many wouldn’t know exactly where to start.

So, that’s what we’re giving you here: A place to start. Starting on page 16 is our recommended reading list, courtesy of other landscape and lawn care professionals who’ve learned a thing or two about improving their companies from the pages of a good book.

“Reading is to the mind what exercise is to the body,” some say. If you can find time to exercise to improve your body’s health and fitness (or at least if you know you should be doing so), why not make the same commitment to reading to better your mind, and, in turn, your business?

The benefits of reading are countless. Studies show you may improve your vocabulary, boost your memory, become more emotionally intelligent and reduce stress levels by the simple act of reading regularly.

Think about it: Aren’t the smartest people you know voracious readers? The best and brightest among us are those who constantly seek more information to either confirm or challenge their current belief systems.

While we’d love it if you could get every idea you need to run your company—whether it’s a small tip or an entirely new business philosophy—from the pages in LM and our website, we’d be silly if we thought one source was sufficient. That’s why we’re referring you elsewhere.

I encourage you to add at least one of the books featured in this issue or in its associated online content to your reading list this year. Don’t be a member of the 23 percent who go 365 days without picking up a book. Spend just a few minutes a day reading (or listening to) one of these recommended titles. You just might learn something.
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ServiceMaster completes TruGreen spin-off

ServiceMaster completed the separation of its TruGreen business Jan. 14, according to a filing with the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission.

Memphis, Tenn.-based ServiceMaster spun off assets and certain liabilities of TruGreen through a tax-free, pro rata dividend to private equity firm Clayton, Dubilier & Rice.

The deal first was announced in November during the company’s third-quarter earnings call. The move was expected to close by the end of 2013 but was delayed slightly due to logistical reasons.

“We believe the most effective way to realize TruGreen’s long-term value is to have it operate as a standalone company,” said TruGreen President David Alexander. “We have the right team and the right plan, and we’re excited about the opportunity ahead of us. What we need to do now is stay focused, execute well and deliver more consistent, reliable performance over the long haul.”

Alexander said the company is down about 300,000 customers compared to two years ago, the (Memphis) Daily News reported.

Green Industry observers aren’t surprised ServiceMaster took action, considering TruGreen’s poor results, but they’re unsure what the outcome will be.

“It’s kind of hard to believe (Clayton, Dubilier & Rice is) in it for a long-term fix, but who knows?” said Ron Edmonds, principal of mergers and acquisitions consulting firm The Principium Group.

“I will be very surprised if they do any significant acquisitions in the next year. What I hear them say is they will be focusing on execution, including solving their systems issues and implementing new marketing programs, especially door-to-door neighborhood marketing.”

MAILBOX

Systems = success
I love Marisa Palmieri’s “Editor’s Note” in the January issue of Landscape Management (“Frequency illusion”). You have corroborated the ‘Shotzbargierian’ approach to business: Process and systems equal successful growth.

I applaud your continuing efforts to improve our industry by challenging us to work smarter and get better. Using Weed Man USA as an example was the perfect choice. I’m a fan of Jennifer Lemke, one of the humble leaders in our industry.

Tom Shotzbarger
General manager, Shriner Tree Care
King of Prussia, Pa.

Eyes on Weed Man
(“All systems go” is) a great article and very cool journey this father and daughter have taken together along with their associates and franchisees. (It will) be great to see if they can hit the 2023 Goals.

Mike Rorie
CEO, Go iLawn
Loveland, Ohio
Via online comments

We’ve been a Weed Man franchisee for 11 years. I can’t tell you how proud we are to be a part of the Weed Man family. Roger (Mongeon) is a true professional that’s led by example. We also have been able to apply Weed Man principles to the rest of our business, which has made us a better company. I feel confident that 2023 goals will not only be met but exceeded!

Stephen Hillemeyer
Owner, Stephen Hillemeyer Landscape Services/Weed Man
Lexington, Ky.
Via online comments

Planting right
We appreciate Gregg Robertson’s constructive article (“The invasion of the plant regulators” on the LM blog, Jan. 6). It was educational and actionable. Well done!

I’ve shared it with a number of my PlantRight colleagues, our network of plant scientists and allies. PlantRight is partnering with California’s nursery industry to tackle the ornamental invasive plant problem in ways that make economic sense, including a plant risk evaluation tool. Thanks to the grant funding support of HRI, we’re extending our research with this tool nationwide.

Jan Merryweather
Senior project manager, PlantRight
San Francisco

Kudos? Complaints? Share your thoughts with the Landscape Management team by emailing mpralieri@northcoastmedia.net.
Specticle® from Bayer provides effective, long-lasting pre-emergent weed control. Specticle gives you superior control of crabgrass, goosegrass and *Poa annua* as well as 75 other troublesome grasses and broadleaf weeds. Get ready to achieve more with Specticle. For more information, visit www.BackedbyBayer.com/Specticle.
Early December headline in the Wall Street Journal: “Employers Gain Confidence to Hire.” The national unemployment rate has dropped below 7 percent. For many, this is really good news and an indication the economy is finally coming back.

This news is on top of reports that the economy grew at 4.1 percent and 3.2 percent rates in the third and fourth quarters of 2013 (in terms of real GDP).

The Green Industry, like all industries, benefits from positive economic news. However, unlike many others, our business depends on adequate labor. These headlines, then, indicate trouble ahead for Green Industry companies to have sufficient labor for future opportunities.

And it’s not just production labor we need. It’s middle managers, administrators and salespeople. You don’t have to be a victim of employment trends. There are some best practices that have proven to help proactive companies. And the most important of those is building bench strength.

Five steps to a bench-driven hiring culture include:

- **Let your employees drive recruiting.** I’ve always believed in using employees to help recruit. If recruiting and hiring is done by the human resources person or department, employees become passive in helping to find good people. It becomes, “Not my problem. It’s HR’s problem.” Sound familiar? The best recruiters are engaged, energized and happy employees at all levels. If you have good people with good values and good work ethics, they probably have friends with the same attributes working elsewhere. Encourage them to bring their friends into the company.

- **Stay in hiring mode.** When good people become available, hire them. Find a place for them in your organization so you have them when needed. You can always eliminate a weak player to keep your costs in line. If you wait until you need someone before you hire, you risk settling for what’s available versus what’s optimal. If you settle over and over again, the result is a mediocre, turnover-prone culture.

- **Build with a culture of promoting from within.** Establishing a career path encourages employees to stay. If they see opportunities and know they’ll be considered, they’ll be motivated to perform and achieve. Promote this concept heavily throughout your organization. You cannot talk about it enough.

- **Create a profile of the ideal high-potential, success-driven entry-level employee.** What attributes will make him or her successful in your company culture? Create a document identifying these items and use it as a guideline for hiring. This process will help you be a little more selective and efficient. Invest quality time to get quality people.

- **Develop a “train your replacement” culture.** Every crew leader, for example, should be identifying whom among their crewmembers could replace them if they get promoted. Each manager should identify which people on his team are promotable and help them do what they need to do to be ready. If you don’t have promotable people, you need to address that in your hiring processes. Profile and establish success and performance metrics at all levels.

Integrating these five steps will build a dynamic company culture populated with talented people who are committed to your business and want to get ahead, people who drive opportunity because they themselves want opportunity.

Watching your people grow is not only a beautiful thing, but the positive energy in your bottom line is contagious.