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# Dress for Success

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**Brian Horn**  
Editor, Lawn & Landscape

"Even if it wasn't a record year, or even above average, there were lessons learned and positive changes made."

# All things considered

**W**henver you have to preface a statement with "all things considered," there's a good chance that statement is not an expression of overwhelming satisfaction.

Fortunately, for the industry, a lot of companies had banner years from what we've been told. And that's not considering all things – that's based off what they budgeted before things went sideways. Even if it wasn't a record year, or even above average, there were lessons learned and positive changes made.

Recently, we conducted our 2020 State of the Industry webinar where I hosted a panel with Laurie Broccolo, CEO of Broccolo Tree & Lawn Care, Justin Crocker, CEO of EarthTones Design and Maurice Dowell, president of Dowco Enterprises.

We talked about the chaos of 2020, along with some non-chaotic moments of the year, and what to expect in 2021. Here are a few takeaways from the panel. You can view it by entering [bit.ly/2020lawnsoi](https://bit.ly/2020lawnsoi) into your web browser.

**COMMUNICATION IN TOUGH TIMES.** When shutdowns began, Crocker's first step was to assess the financials and communicate to employees where the company stood. While his company was on solid footing, it's a reminder to stay in touch with employees in good times, but especially when there is uneasiness.

**MORE WAYS TO PAY.** With cash flow a concern, Dowell said he created multiple payment options for customers. Customers could prepay and get a 3% discount, sign a contract from January until August and get billed monthly, or keep a credit card on file and have it charged a day after services were provided.

**NO OTHER CHOICE.** For years, Broccolo wanted crews to meet at the jobsite, but foremen couldn't get organized enough the night before. Once COVID-19 set in, the crews had no choice. "We mandated that everybody meet at the job and we saved hundreds of hours," she said.

**NEW LABOR AND LANDSCAPERS.** With so many people out of work, the initial thinking was that it would increase the labor pool as well as the amount of "mow and blow" contractors. Dowell and Broccolo both found an employee from the hospitality industry, while Broccolo noticed more contractors without company names mowing lawns.

Since her company doesn't mow, she wanted to work with some of them. "If it looks like they have the right character and presence about them, we are approaching them to have them work with us for edging and mulching and pruning for next year," she said. – *Brian Horn*

# Lawn & Landscape

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## MARKETING MACHINE COSTS

→ **I WANT TO SHOW YOU** how to combine the machine cost with the cost of an operator, and how you might market this combination to your clients. The total cost per hour (TCPH) for a skid-steer in this example is \$40. *Editor's Note:* You can see the worksheets for these scenarios by visiting [bit.ly/lawnwebextras](http://bit.ly/lawnwebextras).

• **HOW IT WORKS IN THE FIELD.** First, we calculate how much to charge for a day for this package (see my MS Excel worksheet "180.0 skid-steer with operator"). The costs for this scenario are as follows:

- The operator makes \$25 an hour and works a 10-man-hour day and a 50-man-hour week.
- Overtime adds 10% to this figure or \$2.50.
- We apply a 10% risk factor to the hourly rate or another \$2.50.
- Total cost per man-hour is \$30 ( $30 + 2.50 + 2.50$ ).
- Labor burden (FICA, FUTA, SUTA, payroll taxes, insurances for workers' compensation and liability, paid time off, etc.) adds 25% to this cost or \$7.50.
- The F-350 truck to haul the machine costs \$15 per hour or \$120 per day.
- The general and administrative (G&A) overhead cost per man-hour is \$18-. We use a unit cost per man-hour of \$18 because applying G&A overhead as a percent isn't as accurate.
- We desire a 20% net profit margin (NPM) for this package. A 20% margin is equivalent to a 25% markup. You calculate the 20% margin by dividing the break-even point (BEP) by one minus the desired NPM ( $1 - .20 = .8$ ).

Next, we add up all of the costs:

- 8 Mhrs on site + 2 Mhrs mobilization @ \$30 per man-hour totals: **\$300**
- To this we add the 25% labor burden or \$7.50 per man-hour: **\$75**
- 8 hours of machine time @ \$40 per hour totals: **\$320**
- 8 hours of truck time @ \$15 per hour totals: **\$120**

**The total direct costs (TDC) are: \$815**

Next, we add the G&A overhead cost at \$18 per man-hour: **\$180**

This gives us our BEP: **\$995**

We then add a 20% margin to the BEP ( $\$995 \div (1.0 - .2) = (\$995 \div .8) =$  **\$249** (To achieve your 20% NPM you could also multiply the BEP by .25)

Our price to our customer is calculated to be: **\$1,244**

I'd round this up to a day rate of **\$1,250** per day

**MARKETING EQUIPMENT COSTS TO YOUR CUSTOMER.** To achieve your 20% net profit margin, you would want to charge \$1,250 for such a day. For jobs of shorter duration, you could charge \$125 per hour ( $\$1,250 \div 10$ ) to include on-site and mobilization time, a percent of the

day by the daily rate ( $.5 \times \$1,250 = \$625$ ) or a mobilization charge plus an hourly rate for any hours worked on site. I prefer the hourly rate for hours worked on site added to the mobilization rate. It would work out as follows:

- In our scenario, it takes roughly two man-hours to mobilize the machine to and from the jobsite with the F-350 truck. With G&A overhead and a 20% NPM, this charge would be roughly \$176. (See the MS Excel worksheet "180.0 Skid steer with operator (mobilization charge)". I'd round this up to \$180.
- The on-site machine and operator time with G&A overhead and 20% NPM costs out to be roughly \$138.13 per hour (See the MS Excel worksheet "180.0 Skid steer with operator hourly rate.xls") I'd round this up to \$140 per hour.
- Our 10-hour day costs out as follows:

\$140.00 per hour x 8 hours: **\$1,120**

Add to this the mobilization charge: **\$180**

The total for the day is **\$1,300**

You would charge the hourly rate plus the mobilization charge for jobs of shorter duration. **For instance:**

Two hours on site would price out to:  $\$180 + (2 \times \$140) = \$180 + 280 =$  **\$460**

Four hours on site (a half-day) would price out to:  $\$180 + (4 \times \$140) = \$180 + 560 =$  **\$740**

**CONCLUSION.** Charging customers a mobilization fee plus an hourly rate for any hours used is an easy way to market such a package. The key is to understand how to calculate both charges in order to cover your G&A overhead costs and to achieve your net profit margin goal. **L&L**

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**TO COMBINE THE MACHINE COST WITH THE COST OF THE OPERATOR,** you need to first calculate how much to charge per day in the service.





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**WORDS OF WILSON** features a rotating panel of consultants from Bruce Wilson & Company, a landscape consulting firm.

# AGILITY IS KEY TO IMPROVING PERFORMANCE

→ **2020 TAUGHT US THAT NO MATTER HOW FAST WE MOVE**, business, unlike NASCAR, is not just a series of predictable left turns, but instead a track with multiple twists and turns like an Indy car event. Success demands not only speed, but agility – an ability to navigate the changing landscape at record speed without losing control and crashing.

Quickly adjusting the way we deliver services and overcome unforeseen hazards – whether a global pandemic, economic downturn or disaster – while maintaining critical momentum, gives us the inside track over less flexible competitors, allowing us to survive and, in some cases, thrive despite unexpected hardship.

What does an agile company look like and what sets it apart from others that appear, on the surface, just like it in terms of service offerings, people and equipment? These race tips will help you smoothly navigate those unseen hairpin turns that may derail less agile competitors.

**1. PRODUCE AN OPERATING BUDGET AND STAY INFORMED ON THE STATE OF THE WORLD.** Get input from your team on the budget so that they own it with you, and then don't just stick it in a drawer or in a binder on a shelf. Refer to it religiously; make it a part of your monthly financial review, updated regularly to reflect the constantly changing business environment. Agile companies are always looking ahead, adjusting their operating budgets and business plan based on a real-time understanding of the economy and markets. Regularly reviewing trusted business periodicals can help prepare you to spot trends requiring quick action long before they become an issue.

**2. LOSE THE PAPER.** Paper requires time to handle. Before hitting the print button, ask: Is this piece of paper critical? How will it benefit my customer or my employee? Can the information it contains be shared or stored differently? Consider collaborative platforms, such as Google or Teams, or digital formats. Don't push print just because it has always been done that way. Agile companies work in the cloud and make information broadly and easily accessible to those that need it without the need to generate, handle and file mounds of paper.

**3. DEVELOP CONSISTENT, STREAMLINED PROCESSES, PROCEDURES AND JOB DESCRIPTIONS.** Good processes cut down on ambiguity and specializing job duties, where practical, allows for greater accountability, control and proficiency. Agile companies have a deeper understanding of how to do the job well, cutting out unnecessary steps and bottlenecks which cause delays. Need a

starting point? Gather your team together and list the processes they spend the most time on daily, weekly or monthly. Prioritize the list and brainstorm ways to shorten and improve the process for the most critical tasks. Document the procedures and update them as necessary.

## **4. FULLY UTILIZE SYSTEMS TO GET UP-TO-DATE, MEANINGFUL DATA AND REPORTS.**

Less is more – a management dashboard that distills many different operating reports into just the critical, need-to-know information used to make timely business decisions is paramount to avoiding “paralysis by analysis” syndrome. Agile companies react to rapidly changing or unexpected market conditions and make important operating decisions faster than their competition.

## **5. CREATE HIGH-FUNCTIONING TEAMS UNCONSTRAINED BY LOCATION OR FUNCTION.**

Cross-functional collaboration is critical to innovation and improved performance. Working together in harmony – like a finely tuned pit crew – ensures we can deliver and meet unseen demands customers may place on us. Agile companies communicate a clear sense of purpose and hold each other accountable across multiple segments and divisions, creating a culture of continuous improvement and greater levels of commitment.

If implementing change within your organization feels like making a U-turn in a semi, it's an opportunity for your teams to learn to turn on a dime. Gather your team together, pick one of these tips and start tearing down the walls. I bet you will discover an agile race car ready to take the checkered flag. **L&L**

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**CREAM OF THE CROP**  
WITH ALISON HOFFMAN  
M&A REPRESENTATIVE

**CREAM OF THE CROP** features a rotating panel from the Harvest Group, a landscape business consulting company.

## WHAT'S TRUST GOT TO DO WITH IT?

→ **IMAGINE HOW DIFFICULT IT WOULD BE** to proceed through an acquisition with someone you didn't trust. Every step of the way, both parties must have confidence that they are sharing information with a trustworthy person or entity. With current limitations on travel to "in-person" meetings, I continue to hear how much more difficult it is to build a trusting relationship.

I believe a key missing component is that all-important body language. Body language has been found to convey 55% of a person's meaning. It's no wonder that we miss our ability to deal with each other in person.

Fortunately, buyers, sellers and their advisers have Zoom and other technology tools that allow us to meet "in person" virtually. There will always be a need for at least one actual "in person" visit for the buyer to meet the owner and see the seller's facilities and tour select client properties. The good news is that the balance of work that might previously have been done in on-site meetings can be done via video-conferencing. **Here are some critical times in the process when you want to be able to have trust in a deal:**

**EXPLORING YOUR OPTIONS.** You decide to explore your options — you may or may not sell your company, but you don't want to sound the alarm by having word get out in your community, especially your employees and clients. Choose an adviser that you trust.

**SHOWING YOUR COMPANY INFORMATION TO BUYERS.** Before you share any of your company information with potential buyers, your adviser will collect a signed Confidentiality and Nondisclosure Agreement (NDA). In this document, the prospective buyer agrees to not use your information against you. It helps if you and your adviser have a good sense for the buyer who will receive the information. You don't want to release information to potential buyers you don't trust.

**SHARING BASIC INFORMATION WITH POTENTIAL BUYERS.** After the NDA is signed, you will share certain "big picture" elements of information about your company including your company name, gross margin, number and type of clients (no names), organization chart (no names), etc. This allows the buyer to decide if your company is a potential fit with their needs. If they are interested, there will probably be an additional exchange of information and even a conference call and/or meeting.

**SIGNING A LETTER OF INTENT.** The buyer has enough interest to make an offer on a preliminary basis with conditions. At this stage, it's customary for the buyer to include a "no shop" provision where you

agree to discontinue the buyer search while this buyer proceeds with due diligence toward closing. This may last for 90 days or closing.

**ENTERING DUE DILIGENCE.** With a signed Letter of Intent (LOI), every detail about the business including past years and future projections for performance, clients, employees, risk profile, etc., will be scrutinized.

**PURCHASE AGREEMENT AND ANCILLARY DOCUMENT NEGOTIATIONS.** While the due diligence is proceeding, the attorneys will draft the documents to outline all the terms of the deal. There is a level of negotiation required at this stage, mostly related to how risk will be allocated between parties for prior actions and how future issues will be handled. A seller who does not have trust in their buyer relationship can feel vulnerable at this stage. Sellers who trust the buyer can cut through any sticky issues and resolve them in good faith.

**TEAM MEETINGS AND INTEGRATION PLANNING.** During the transition planning phase, more connections are made between the companies to enact the change. Accounting and finance, IT and HR teams will be preparing for the announcement. Executives will be drafting communication pieces and strategy. Hopefully, the relationship has been built between leaders and those individuals will continue to build the trust across the rest of the company.

The bottom line is that trust is an essential part of any relationship between people. When it comes to buying and selling companies, trust can make or break a deal. **L&L**

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**WITH MORE AND MORE MEETINGS OCCURRING ONLINE,** trust during the acquisition process is even more important.



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# Dress for Success



Whether you view them as a necessity or an accessory, **uniforms transform how people view your company and the industry.**

Story by **Jimmy Miller** •  
Photography by **Mal McCrea**

**D**ressing up was never a problem for Tony Nasrallah.

From a full suit for Sunday church to the ties he wore for every school picture between kindergarten and high school, Nasrallah says he saw the value in looking good early on in life. So, when he started his company, Ground Works Land Design, in 2009, he immediately implemented uniforms that have evolved from a basic T-shirt to slick polos and button-down shirts.

When he brings new potential hires into his office in Cleveland, Nasrallah stresses the importance of a first impression. Fair or not, he says people follow the cliché of judging books by their covers — and those impressions stick for time to come.

"Years later, I'd see teachers who said I looked sharp wearing my shirt and ties," he says. "I believe when you look good, you feel good, you act good."

Today, Ground Works doesn't simply hand its employees a T-shirt and call it a day with their uniforms: Their set of apparel is sophisticated, as they have partnerships

with L.L. Bean and Adidas and have uniforms with primary and secondary colors. They even design T-shirts with local artists for employees to wear on weekends or when they're off the clock, or for big company events like their annual cookout.

"We've always kind of approached the industry with a different eye," said Joseph Stark, the company's marketing director. "Tony wasn't grandfathered into the industry or anything like that, so he had no preexisting ideas of a red truck landscaping perception or anything like that, so we were able to do it our own way."

**BUCKING THE TREND.** Nasrallah says Ground Works aims for clients who will pay big money for landscaping, so it's important to dress the part. Showing up in ratty T-shirts and ripped jeans to bid on jobs won't get you any work, he says. He also says landscapers are not only bidding against other companies in the industry, but the industry stigmas themselves. There's this prevailing idea that landscaping is a dirty job done by slobs, he says, and he wants to help buck that trend.



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Tony Nasrallah and Joseph Stark (pictured above) have prioritized uniforms at Ground Works Land Design, which they both say has helped them land desirable clients.

"I want to bring class to this industry. People look down on landscapers," he says. "When you go to high-end restaurants, people are wearing bow ties. Those are the type of clients that we want. We want people who are going to appreciate and respect landscapers who are dressed well."

To pull it off, the Ground Works team budgeted somewhere between \$10,000 and \$12,000 for new uniforms. Stark admits the investment is large, but he says they've valued the uniforms greatly enough to justify the expenditure.

Bill Smith, a branch manager at Grassmaster Plus in Massachusetts, acknowledges landscaping is a dirty job. They provide their employees six T-shirts on rotation, so they have a clean shirt to wear each day they work, while giving them the opportunity to wash the clothes on Sundays. In total, it costs them about \$2,000 annually.

"It's not a business that you stay clean in, but if you start the day clean... the attitude of the technician is better," he says. "They identify with the colors, with the uniform itself. And customers have a higher comfort level because they see the truck pull up and the guy get out in full uniform as opposed to the ripped jeans, the hood up, etc."

Smith estimates Grassmaster does 80% commercial work, so he also reiterates the importance of appearance. In some cases, they actually need to follow state guidelines with their uniforms, as technicians handling chemicals need to wear long sleeves. They wear a moisture-wicking pullover with the logo placed on the breast and on the back,

**“**You open up your closet and you see your work stuff and the stuff you're going to wear on the weekend. **Why can't we intersect the two things and be really proud of (your company)?**

**Joseph Stark,**  
marketing director,  
Ground Works Land Design



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# 81%

of companies replace their employees' uniforms as needed

# 69%

of companies pay for 100% of their employees' uniforms

# 62%

of managers receive a different uniform than lower-level field employees

\*Almost 150 people responded to Lawn & Landscape's uniform survey

plus some dark green hoodies with the logo on the front and back as well.

When his employees show up for work in the morning, Smith says there's "definitely a look" he gives them, glancing over each to ensure the uniform is straightened out and looks sharp.

"I look at every employee as they come in," he says. "They're not allowed to go out without a belt. They have to have the hat on straight forward. There's no cutting sleeves or opening up the necklines. (The uniform) has to be as given to them."

For Smith, it all ties into Nasrallah's principle belief: If you feel good, you'll act good, which means the clients will pay good. This year, the average project earned \$160,000 at

Ground Works, and Nasrallah says part of it had to do with the company's appearance.

"We want people to look at us as professionals, treat us like professionals and pay us like professionals," Nasrallah says.

**A SEAMLESS START.** Rachel Kukhahn has owned her company, Premier Landcare in the state of Washington, for just over two years, but at previous companies, uniforms were important there, too. She doesn't want any clients wondering who's creeping around on their porch or standing in their yards - uniforms bring a sense of identity for the employees.

"I like the clean look of it," she says. "I like that all of my guys are identifiable on site."

Kukhahn says she's a small enough company that she can afford to pay for all of her team's uniforms, which includes five shirts, five pairs of pants, a hat and a coat. Meanwhile, Nasrallah provides all of their team's uniforms as well, and he says it costs more to recruit and retain employees than it would be buying uniforms, so he wants to keep all of his roughly 25 employees happy. Smith says he purchases all but the pants for the employees.

Smith adds that he understands why some companies have their employees purchase their own uniforms - it can bring an emphasis on keeping those uniforms spotless, for example. But he wants to ensure starting at his company is as seamless as possible.

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“

It's not a business that you stay clean in, but if you start the day clean... **the attitude of the technician is better.**

**Bill Smith, branch manager,**  
Grassmaster Plus in Massachusetts

"It's no money out of their pocket. A lot of times when we get a new hire and they're starting on the entry level, they may not have the cash to go out and buy something that we're pretty much dictating what they're going to be able to get," Smith says. "It takes some pressure off of them. They view it as a benefit."

Replacing the uniforms is something else employers need to consider, as the uniforms go through plenty of wear and tear out in the field. Smith says it's

pretty common that he'll walk past an employee, take off his beat-up, worn hat, and hand him a new one. Kukhahn says even sun exposure is something to consider, as she replaces a T-shirt or two each year from each employee because the sun washes out their "Seahawks-ish" colors of dark blue and green.

But she doesn't let ripping uniforms become a reason why employees don't wear them. She says she's had to talk with her employees several times over the


A large iceberg floating in the ocean, with a small blue pickup truck and two workers on top of it, illustrating the scale of the task. The iceberg is a massive, white, jagged mass of ice, and the truck is a small blue pickup truck with an orange snowplow attachment. Two workers in orange safety gear are standing on the ice, one near the truck and one further away. The ocean is a deep blue, and the sky is dark.

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last two years about making sure the uniform looks good before they head out into the field.

"Trying to enforce the uniform is a challenge at times as well," Kukhahn says. "I've heard a lot of excuses as to why they didn't wear their uniforms, like the buttons fell off all of his pants, or the seams ripped out of all of his pants. It just gets creative. You name it, it's been used."

**TAKING IT PERSONALLY.** Stark says uniforms have always been important at Ground Works, but now that they've implemented the marketing department, they can make it a focus. He's been on the staff for less than a year, but he's noticed in previous pictures that the company has made uniforms a "walking advertisement" for several years prior.

"You open up your closet and you see your work stuff and the stuff you're going to wear

on the weekend," he says. "Why can't we intersect the two things and be really proud of (your company)? It comes from this idea of blending work and play."

Nasrallah says uniforms matter so much to him and the Ground Works team because they take it personally – in a good way.

"They're representing Ground Works when they're out there, and their representation is a reflection of who I am and the company culture," Nasrallah says.

For Smith, uniforms are also about having

his team buy in to the company culture. It's somewhat like an athlete wearing his or her team's uniform for the first time: Though it's probably a little less exciting than that, it is fulfilling, especially when the employees are proud to don that company apparel.

"I think when we present that as part of our interview that we supply the uniforms, there's not a big reaction at the interview process," Smith says. "Once they're in and we hand them their uniforms though, it just makes you feel like you're part of the team." **L&L**

“  
I believe when you look good,  
you feel good, you act good.”

**Tony Nasrallah, owner, Ground Works Land Design**



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SEASON AFTER SEASON



# Letting go


By Brian Horn

**B**ecoming a better delegator was at the top of Paul Welborn's list of changes he wanted to make about himself. Looking back, he has seen a lot of progress in this area while leading Mississippi-based Lawn & Pest Solutions.

"It has really made a difference for us in our growth this year, but also helped some people grow in their positions and take more responsibility and take some things off of me that enabled us to move forward like we wanted to," he says.

Welborn says two things helped him become better at delegating – reading Patrick Lencioni's books "The Advantage" and "Five Dysfunctions of a Team," and the discussion at an offsite meeting with his








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leadership team. "My team called me out and said, 'All right, you want us to take on more, but you have to let us take on more,'" he says.

"I have been doing this for 20 years and there's a lot of different aspects of the business I have a hand in. It was just hard to let go, not because I didn't have good people."

Prior to the meeting everyone took personality tests, and the group discussed each person's results.

"We'd said we wanted to be open, but really looking at those specific personality components, it helped everybody open up," he says.

Welborn said that the leader should go first to set the tone on how the conversation should happen.

"You point out some personal faults as the leader of the group and you say that we're not making fun of anybody," he says. "This

is so we can get closer. The icebreaker of it is you tell something from your childhood that you feel like has shaped you. That really got everybody to open up and we found some stuff we had in common."

As Paul Welborn and his team at Lawn and Pest Solutions set their sights on 2021, they are going to have a lot of more room to envision next year. The company recently purchased a new facility, to which Welborn said he didn't hesitate purchasing, even with the economic uncertainty due to COVID-19.

"I knew if we're going to keep growing, we had to have more space," he says, adding he hopes to be moved in by March 1. "We need to get in there before we hit our full stride in the spring."

It's going to be an important year for Welborn. He wants to make a big push into the

Memphis market, something he wanted to do in 2020 but tabled it.

There are some small procedural differences in the two states, but "there's not anything we can't get past," he says. "It's just going to take some extra effort to make sure we're making each state happy in that regard."

He also wants to fully implement the company's career ladder, which he started this year.

"I can make a ton of excuses, but coronavirus hurt us because we had less face-to-face with the guys," he says. "We introduced the career ladder to our technicians, and we're 50% of the way there. We really should have fully implemented that this year."

**THE HARVESTERS' TAKE.** Paul and his team at Lawn & Pest Solutions blew the doors



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“We’d said we wanted to be open, but really looking at those specific personality components, it helped everybody open up.”

**Paul Welborn, Lawn & Pest Solutions**

off the budgets we agreed on one year ago. Their total sales were \$1.74 million at the end of 2019. Based on their past growth we set total sales goals at \$2.25 million for 2022, but they did that number this year. I asked Paul how in the world they achieve such sales and profits and he said, “We just followed the playbook y’all wrote for us.”

Then he added that he realized how important good communication was with his people. Paul even did a one-day retreat with his five managers and this really helped in understanding each other and his goals and vision for the company.

He also mentioned that our suggestion of joining Harvester Fred Haskett’s peer

group really helped him to grow as a leader. Because of Paul’s new “people awareness” he realized he needed another salesperson to help achieve his new growth goal. This helped significantly in the added sales.

He also had one “event” with his team each quarter this year. A ping pong afternoon, swimming/cook out picnic and skeet shooting. He said all of the combined has made a real difference.

In all areas of the company, from human resources, finances, operations, company culture and growing his people, they improved. As an added bonus, Paul purchased a four-acre facility with building during the summer to accommodate his growth well into the future.

They are certainly poised to be a very significant company and we wish them the very best. ☺



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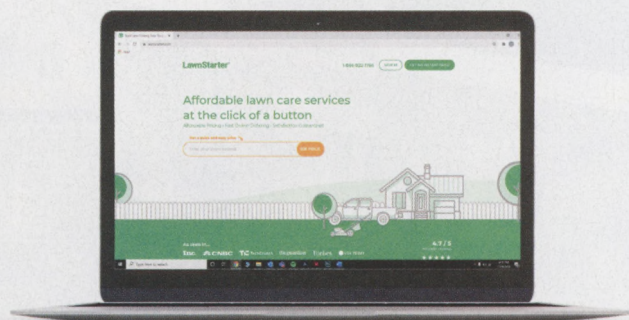


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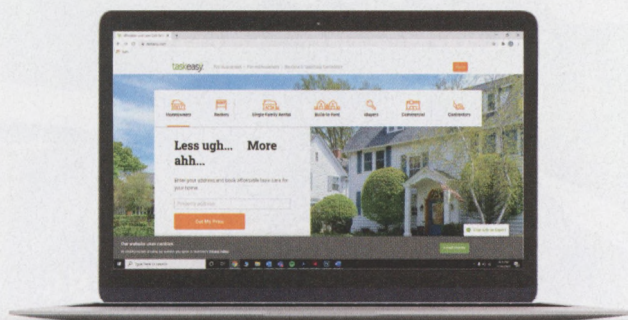


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- TaskEasy offers its partners free lawn care software that eliminates tedious back-office work such as bidding, routing and billing, helping them keep healthy margins on every job performed.

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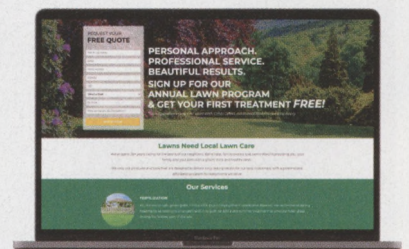


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# THE BEST LAID PLANS

COVID-19 is this winter's monkey wrench. Here are some thoughts on how to prevent it from gumming up your snow and ice management operations. **By Kevin Gilbride**

I've fielded a number of phone calls lately from snow professionals concerned about the state of their operations heading into Winter 2020-21. They're centered around unique logistical issues we're forced to face by these challenging times.

As preventative measures, contractors are implementing safeguards to ensure team members have as little physical contact with each other as possible. Fortunately, much of snow and ice management is already socially distanced. While one-to-a-truck is the norm, the key is to implement an event action plan

that allows for the most effective response from crew members who interact as little as possible with one another.

Likewise, instead of having everyone converge on the shop before dispatching to various client properties, contractors are preparing crew members to bypass the shop and to report directly to jobsites. For this to be successful, everyone must have a clear understanding of where they need to be and what they need to accomplish at their assigned destinations throughout an event.

Most veteran contractors have learned – ei-

ther through trial or error – the benefits to having backup plans to their seasonal game plan in the event everything goes sideways during an event. This year though, an extra layer of precaution is needed as many contractors have told me they're developing backup plans for their backup plans, especially when addressing scenarios where multiple crew members may have to quarantine.

Having multiple crew members sidelined during a major winter storm or a string of snow and ice events could be catastrophic to your business. As the owner or top snow manager, who's qualified to fill your shoes and make critical strategic decisions in the event you're out of action?

Then there are those unique situations where these scenarios converge. Take, for example, properties where certain crew members have special access and only they are allowed onto the jobsite. This creates a unique challenge if one or all of them go down for any period. To manage for this, you could increase the number of crew members who have pre-approved access. This requires communication with and the cooperation of the client to approve these additional "reserve" employees.

This, of course, may mean you have to hire (and pay) additional people to wait in the wings in the event they're needed, but this cost is justifiable if you consider the short- and long-term losses to your business in the event you're unprepared and shorthanded.

Communication with your team and your clients is key any winter, but it is paramount for the 2020-21 season. One of the unique things about living and working with COVID is that everyone must manage through the pandemic – including your clients.

Given clear communication about any predicament you find yourself in this winter your customer will most likely be sympathetic to your plight because they're dealing with the same logistical issues. The leeway this affords you with clients may just be enough to catch your breath, clear your mind and make the clear-headed decisions to see your team through the event. **L&L**

The author is the Executive Director of the Accredited Snow Contractors Association (ASCA). You can reach him at [kgilbride@ascaonline.com](mailto:kgilbride@ascaonline.com).

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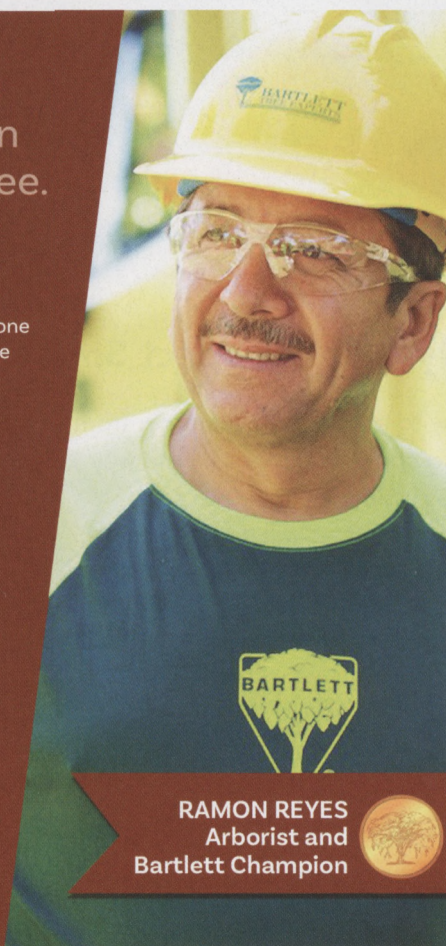


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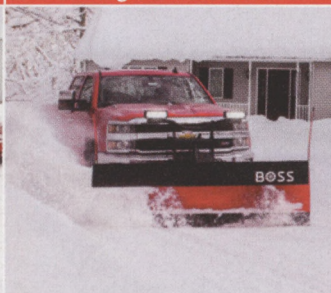
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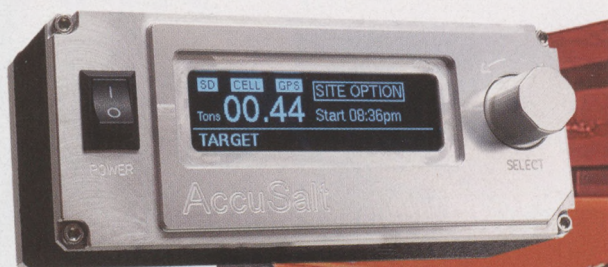


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## KISSNER'S PURCHASE OF MORTON TO FINALIZE SUMMER 2021

By Mike Zawacki

It looks like the \$3.2 billion sale of Morton Salt to Kissner Group will finalize sometime next summer, according to reports.

In early October, I posted to Snow Magazine's social media outlets that the deal appeared close, according to a Chicago Crain's article. However, Bloomberg reported soon after that it received confirmation of the sale from Morton's parent company, K&S AG. K&S had acquired Morton in 2009 for \$1.7 billion. It's now selling the salt business to focus on its potash fertilizer business. This current sale price includes debt, according to Bloomberg.

Bringing two major U.S. salt producers together, Kissner, which is controlled by Stone Canyon Industries Holdings, now becomes a powerhouse salt provider to the professional snow and ice management industry. The merger leaves some questions among salt-buying snow professionals about market competition and potential monopoly issues. The market's other major competitors serving the professional snow and ice management industry include American Rock Salt, Cargill and Compass Minerals.

Could we see prolonged anti-trust review by the Federal Trade Commission in the coming months before the ink dries on the deal in Summer 2021? Time will tell.

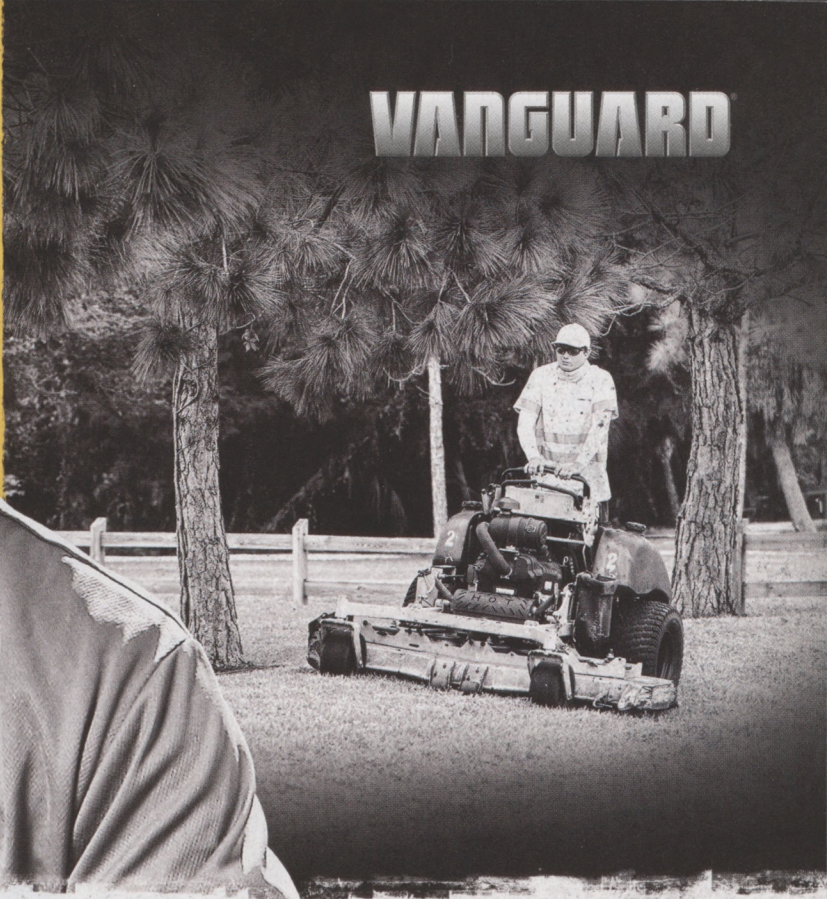
## BUYERS SUPERSIZES ITS SALTDogg SPREADER

Buyers Products has made a larger version of its SaltDogg PRO Series electric spreader. The 9.5-foot PRO3000 model holds three cubic yards of deicing material, which equates to roughly 3.2 tons of bulk #1 rock salt. Buyers engineered its 3-cubic-yard spreader (SHPE3000) with a swing-away chute, which simplifies bulk-unloading extra deicing material and it gives snow professionals the ability to quickly load their walk-behinds on site. Both upgrades are standard features across the entire PRO Series line of spreaders. The PRO3000 joins SaltDogg's existing 1.5-, 2-, and 2.5-cubic-yard Pro Series spreader models. **L&L**

Zawacki is editor of Lawn & Landscape's sister publication, Snow Magazine.



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# Q&A WITH AARON HATHAWAY

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## 1 How does your product save time?

A mixture of Cheetah® Pro + SureGuard SC® can be applied as directed sprays around desirable plants in landscape beds and can be broadcast-applied in areas where bare ground is desired. This combination saves time for applicators looking to control weeds that are already present and control weeds that are waiting in the soil as seed. One application provides control now and can provide months of control later.

## 2 How does your product save labor?

Cheetah Pro + SureGuard SC provides synergistic control, which means the combination works better than the addition of each one applied on their own. Cheetah Pro is a non-selective, post-emergence herbicide controlling grasses, broadleaves, and sedges and SureGuard SC, although its main function is residual weed control, also helps out with control of weeds that are present at application. These herbicides team up with two different modes of action to knock out weeds that have already emerged and SureGuard SC remains as a barrier in the soil to guard against later intruders. This increase in efficacy improves customer satisfaction and prevents callbacks.

## 3 How does your product save materials or fuel?

One application of Cheetah Pro + SureGuard SC can provide knockdown and residual control of weeds for more

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than four months. Return trips to control reemerged and/or newly germinated weeds in bare ground areas and landscape beds not only increase costs for materials but also fuel and labor. It is a great advantage to allow herbicides with residual to do so much of the work for you even after you leave the site.

## 4 How do your products help generate additional revenue for landscape and lawn care companies?

Having a plan of attack for weed control versus reacting to weed encroachment is paramount. A great program for weed control in landscape beds/bare ground areas is a spring-timed and a fall-timed application of Cheetah Pro + SureGuard SC – these timings address summer and winter annual weeds that show up like clockwork with POST and PRE control. Applying this combination at the shoulders of the season can provide season-long control of weeds and free-up time to

cover other sites and/or sell more services. A sound plan for weed control helps applicators keep customers from year to year because weeds will rarely be seen.

## 5 In what other ways do your products make landscape and lawn care companies profitable?

Cheetah Pro + SureGuard SC provides fast control of weeds – injury is prominent within two or three days and the weeds are burned down soon after. As expectations from customers increase, Cheetah Pro + SureGuard SC doesn't take its time controlling weeds, but provides fast, effective control of weeds that are present so that customers aren't staring at them for weeks after application. This, again, can reduce callbacks and simply increase the level of satisfaction among customers who want to see the effects of the service they paid for. We at Nufarm understand that expectations continue to increase and have worked hard to provide solutions that go the extra mile.



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**Q&A  
WITH THE  
EXPERT**


# Q&A WITH RICK FLETCHER

Technical Services Manager, Turf & Ornamental, Nufarm

## SWIFTLY STRIKE DOWN 250+ BROADLEAF WEEDS



UNTREATED



SURE POWER® 32 FL OZ/A

Dave Gardner, The Ohio State University, 2017 | Sure Power® 32 fl oz/A | 1 application on July 25

### 1 How does your product save time?

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### 2 How does your product save labor?

Sure Power offers proven efficacy on more than 250 broadleaf weeds. It is proven to control tough challenges, including excellent control of ground ivy and wild violet. Sure Power’s four-way formulation also offers two different modes of action (group 4 and 14) to support a strong resistance management approach by targeting two different pathways in the selective control of weeds. This reduces callbacks due to weed persistence.

### 3 How does your product save materials or fuel?

One element that Sure Power adds is flexibility due to rapid penetration, leaf uptake and translocation in the plant. Not only is it designed for rapid entry into even the most waxy leaf surfaces, it is rainfast after one hour and mowing can occur within a day of the application.

### 4 How do your products help generate additional revenue for landscape and lawn companies?

We understand that a product that works is key to adding value to lawn and landscape operations. This means a product that is easy to use, highly efficacious, and supports a strong weed resistance program with an improved solution for grass, broadleaf and sedge weed issues. Sure Power checks all the boxes to support your bottom line.

### 5 In what other ways does your product make landscape and lawn companies profitable?

Sure Power is showing its power in ongoing trials, rapidly controlling wild violet, ground ivy and other weeds better than the competition. Nufarm encourages lawn and landscape customers to learn more about Sure Power at **Nufarm.com/USTurf/SurePower**, and to take advantage of significant early order savings on Sure Power and more than 35 additional proven Nufarm products at **NufarmRewards.com**.



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CONTROL GROUND IVY

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SELECTIVE HERBICIDE

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# What's on deck?

We weren't at trade shows much this year, but that didn't stop suppliers from debuting new products.

## Compiled by the Lawn & Landscape staff

Even though most face-to-face events couldn't happen this year, industry manufacturers still released a number of new products. We attended a number of virtual events and visited with companies remotely as they gave us the details on their new products.

Over the next few months, we will feature many of those new releases in both the print magazine and online.

**Visit [lawnandlandscape.com](http://lawnandlandscape.com)** and use our search function to find news about a certain manufacturer. In the meantime, here are a few of the products we saw:



## HUSQVARNA 230IB BLOWER

**The pitch:** It delivers best-in-class blowing power and performance with 650 CFM.

- This blower is partnered with the QC250 charger to provide quicker battery turnaround with more power supply overlap when using one battery while charging another
- It weighs under nine pounds, providing tremendous power while being the lightest model in its class.
- **MSRP:** \$299.00 for kit

**For more info:** [Husqvarna.com/us/](http://Husqvarna.com/us/)





## EXMARK LAZER Z

**The pitch:** For 2021, Exmark has updated its largest Lazer Z model – the 96-inch Lazer Z Diesel.

- A new engine shroud reduces operating temperature with a larger air intake screen.
- The location of the screen has also been revised to significantly reduce blockage from clippings and debris.
- It features Exmark's patented RED Technology.

**For more info:** Exmark.com



## JOHN DEERE DIGITAL PAVILION

**The pitch:** The Virtual Pavilion offers an immersive experience to connect professional landscape professionals with the brand and help them explore its products and services.

- The 360-degree product gallery showcases the full range of John Deere commercial landscaping equipment.
- The John Deere Virtual Auditorium gives users access to on-demand videos and content curated exclusively for landscape professionals.
- Users can also connect with their local dealer and schedule product demos through the platform.

**For more info:** Deere.com

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## STIHL 135 PROFESSIONAL BATTERY SERIES

**The pitch:** Part of the professional AP Battery Series, the tools deliver commercial-grade power found in gasoline-fueled equipment, all with zero exhaust emissions and low noise.

- The KMA 135 R KombiMotor features 14 different attachments to provide landscapers versatile options to tackle a wide range of jobs on a jobsite.
- The FSA 135 and FSA 135 R Trimmers feature a brushless motor and are available in loop or bike handle design.
- The HTA 135 Pole Pruner extends up to 13 feet, while the HLA 135 family of hedge trimmers feature two short shaft designs and one that reaches 60 inches.

**For more info:** [Stihlusa.com](http://Stihlusa.com)



## TORO TITAN MAX ZERO-TURN MOWER

**The pitch:** This massive machine is designed to tackle acres upon acres of lawn or tough, rugged terrain in virtually any mowing conditions.

- The Titan Max is built with field-proven components like the strong, tubular steel frame found in Toro's commercial Z Master Series.
- The machine is powered by a 26 hp KOHLER 7000 Series engine with a canister air cleaner.
- The massive 23-inch drive tires provide enhanced visibility and take the operator up to speeds of nine miles per hour.

**For more info:** [Toro.com](http://Toro.com)



## ASV MAX-SERIES LOADERS

**The pitch:** ASV unveiled the new Max-Series loaders and the machines will replace the original models for the RT-65, RT-75, RT-75 Heavy Duty and VT-70 machines.

- The Max-Series was designed to maximize comfort, productivity, visibility, speed, performance, durability and return on investment.
- The Max-Series loaders have a three-panel rear window, which provides 31% more visibility in that area.
- For increased safety, machines feature a roof-hatch emergency escape.
- The Max-Series machines also feature ASV's Posi-Track Technology. Posi-Track allows for better traction and weight distribution through a wider track and more wheels.

**For more info:** [asvi.com](http://asvi.com)

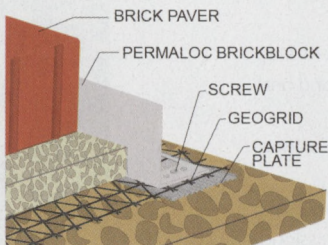
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# Optimistically GREEN

There's plenty contractors can do to lessen their environmental footprint and embrace sustainability.

By Kim Lux



**S**ustainability is a movement, and one that's not slowing down anytime soon, according to Bob Grover, president of Pacific Landscape Management in Portland, Oregon.

He says it's about striking a balance between social, economic and environmental decisions rather than being 100% organic. He defines sustainable landscaping as "low-impact, low-maintenance, low-resource-use practices that are adapted to a particular site and its climate."

Grover recently gave a presentation titled "Grow Your Business with Sustainable Services" during the National Association of Landscape Professionals' LANDSCAPES 2020 virtual event in October.

"Landscapers are the most sustainable part of a development," Grover says. "If you look at the statistics, one tree or 50-foot-by-50-foot area of turf can remove 26 pounds of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere annually."

Grover says the sustainability movement really took off about 15 years ago, adding that

landscapers can sometimes get a bad rap for not being eco-friendly.

"There's been a great focus over the last couple of decades on the importance of saving the Earth," he says. "But some of the things we do put a real big bullseye on our chest."

Those things include misuse of lawn chemicals, wasting water, allowing fertilizer to leech into stream systems and air pollution.

"Let's not have a lot of despair, but let's have hope," he says. "That's where sustainability comes in. It's important to understand as a balance... and we need to find a balance between doing the right things for the environment and having it be affordable and acceptable to our clients."

Grover shared what Pacific Landscape Management has been doing over the years to be more sustainable and the list included: incorporating organics into fertilizers, reducing herbicide use, promoting new irrigation technology and converting to low-emission equipment.

**A GREENER APPROACH.** Grover acknowledges that his company is not 100% organic and still uses some chemicals and fertilizers.

"Organic is wonderful, but organic is very inefficient," he says. "You'll have to put down twice as much or three times as much fertilizer."

But when it comes to weed control, Grover says there is another all-natural solution that's fun and effective – goats.

"Goats are actually a great weed control methodology," he says. "It's very intriguing... the goats are cute and it's amazing what they can do. It's quite effective."

There are a handful of goat vendors in Oregon that will provide the goats, fence them in and monitor them so they can chew down weeds such as blackberry brambles. He adds that the clients enjoy watching the goats, too.

**BESMART ABOUT WATER.** Another popular element of sustainability is water conservation. In fact, Grover says it's the easiest to sell clients on as it has some return on investment.

"There's a lot we can do with water conservation," he says. "Water is money. Water rates are rising, at least in the Northwest, and water is the fastest rising utility."

Grover suggests moving to weather-based irrigation controllers, which adjust the watering schedule based on weather conditions.

Pacific Landscape Management made the switch to installing weather-based systems about 10 years ago and Grover says they're typically saving 20 to 40% in water usage.

**LEFT:** Bob Grover, president of Pacific Landscape Management, says goats make for a great, environmentally friendly solution to weed control.





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## LAWN CARE



Grover says Pacific Landscape Management has been prioritizing sustainability for nearly two decades.

The company also provides detailed water conservation plans that incorporate an irrigation system map, upgrading components, improving coverage, drip irrigation, hydrozoning and lawn conversion.

**EQUIPMENT ALTERNATIVES.** For Grover, lowering engine emissions has been tough at times.

Grover says that keeping your fleet updated with the latest equipment can be a good start, as new equipment is more in line with government regulations.

And for Pacific Landscape Management, that means adding some battery-powered equipment despite their limitations.

"You have to replace the battery, you can't just fill up the gas tank," Grover notes of electric equipment. "They don't have the same force, they don't have the same run-time, they are quieter, but they cost about three-times as much."

Down the road, Grover says he expects to see even more companies making the switch.

"We believe that this is going to take over," he says. "The technology has come a long way in 10 years. And we really believe that 10 years from now we won't really see small, gas engine equipment anymore."

Grover says robotic mowers have also made quite an impact on the green industry. He thinks this trend is also here to stay.

"I believe in a few years, we'll start to see more and more of our wide-open mowing done by robotic mowers," he says. "And all of these mowers are electric powered."

**A LITTLE GOES A LONG WAY.** Even with all these measures, Grover says sustainability can be difficult to accomplish if clients aren't willing to pay for it.

"We quickly figured out people want to provide a sustainable service, or they want to buy a sustainable service...but nobody is really interested to pay a whole lot more for it," he says.

Grover says more companies should get on board with sustainability regardless of geographic location.

"Don't fear the sustainability movement," he says. "It is coming to everywhere...you don't want to have sustainability chasing you, you want to be chasing sustainability." **L&L**



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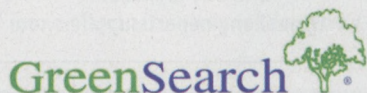
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# AN AVERAGE DAY

**Zech Strauser**, founder and president,  
Strauser Nature's Helpers



**Zech Strauser definitely has his hands full.** As a new dad, he is balancing operating a growing Strauser Nature's Helpers in northeast Pennsylvania and raising a baby, Briar, with his wife, Mary. But he also is starting a clothing line, just bought a farm and is getting more into the real estate market. When he starts to spread himself too thin, he knows it's time to pull back.

Interviewed by **Brian Horn**

"Whenever I get there, I just say, 'Whoa, whoa, back to working with your managers.' I have to bring it back to reality," he says. "I'm not saying those other ventures are not a reality, but they're like 5 and 10 and 15 and 20% of my time, not 30, 30, 30 by any means." **Here's Strauser's average day.**

I'm a new dad, so my morning routine has changed and I'm moving a little slower. I wake up about six o'clock, but it could be three o'clock and I'm just up for three hours or two hours. When I've got high stress loads or different things going on, my sleeping patterns are very irregular. However, if I get that good six or seven hours, which is about 60% of the time, I'd say, it's 6 a.m.

Unfortunately, I do a lot of things you're not supposed to do, which is look at the emails early. 2020 has been a year of that where I feel I'm glued to my phone, more than I ever been. I'm trying to break that by keeping my phone out of my room. I was talking to my wife this morning and I said, 'What time is it?' because I just don't have my phone. It's this constant thing in my hand, so I'm trying to get the phone out of my hand because I've also noticed my daughter is just staring at my right hand. She's eight months old and she's gravitating towards that. It's quite freaky.

My office is 11 minutes or 16 minutes away – depends on the direction you drive. But if I want to hit more lights, do more people watching along the way, I go 16 minutes. If I have to get there fast, I go 11 minutes. Even pre-COVID, I was not the traditional go to the office at six, seven, eight in the morning and bang out an eight-, nine-, 10-hour day at the office.

When the company was a million bucks, I started going into the office a little bit. Then the company's 2 million bucks, I start getting into office even more. As the company grew and as we went regional, I started being more mobile and being truck

bound. I can have a two-hour meeting in a parking lot in my truck. I haven't spent probably much more than a combination of five hours at my office building desk since February.

I do not read emails or texts or multi-task things while I'm meeting. I'm going to pay 100% attention. I'm going to look out the window at a hydrangea tree or something. I'm going to focus on the discussion or what we're working on or the document we're sharing on the screen.

Right up until lunch, it's more meetings, more emails, more texts and I have no hard and fast lunchtime. I will admit I feel better when I get in that space at times of having a set lunchtime.

One of my weaknesses is firm stops, which is something I'm working on. You have to be more than ever now firm stopped because someone's waiting on another line for you. I had a meeting with two of my managers at four o'clock, but then I got on the phone with a big potential new customer, I said, 'It's quarter to four. I can squeeze that call.' Sure enough, it wasn't a 15-minute call. How foolish. Do you really think you're going to call a customer about a new project for 15 minutes?

Toward the end of the day, dinner is 50/50, because we're just figuring out how to be parents. It's about feeding her and then she's gone asleep. We more so are eating a little later, like seven to eight, because that's when she goes to bed. But then 50% of time where we're trying to eat right next to her. Just trying to get her to go to bed and then we'll take care of us.

At night – nine, 10, 11 o'clock – I can be hammering out scheduled emails. Some are going to get them at 6 a.m. or seven. Scheduled emails are the best thing since sliced bread. Because you don't look like the weirdo emailing people at 11 at night. **L&L**





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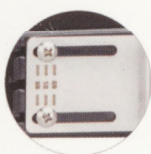
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