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FROM THE ARCHIVES

As we introduce you to our fourth round of Turnaround Tour winners, we took a look back our first year. Head to our archives to view the companies we featured back in February 2017 at bit.ly/LLArchives

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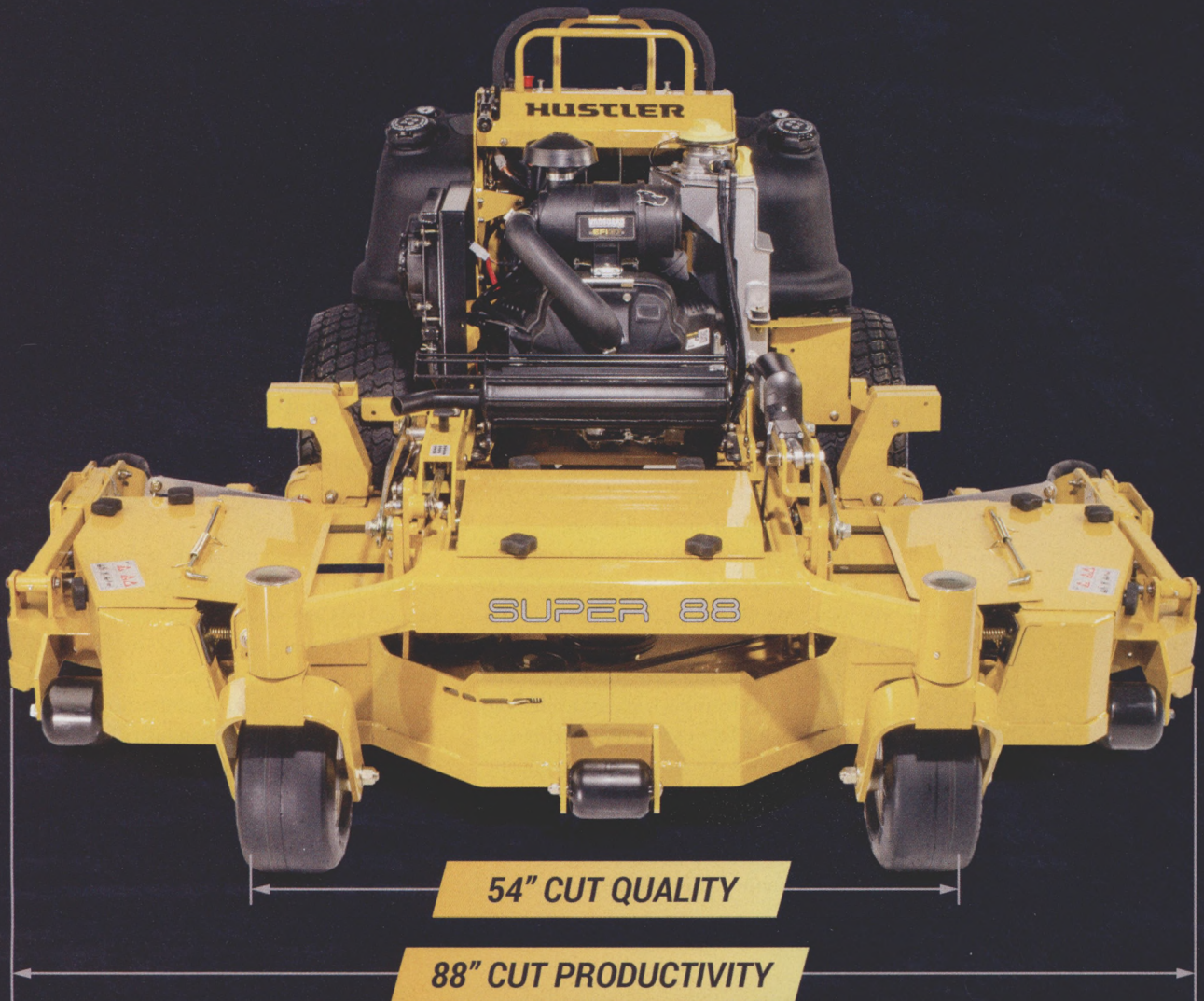
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Nominations are open for the 2020 Employee of the Year award. Send an email to Editor Brian Horn (bhorn@gie.net) nominating someone who goes above and beyond for your company and they may be selected as one of our 2020 Employees of the Year. The deadline to submit is March 2, 2020. Find more details here: bit.ly/EOY2020

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Brian Horn
Editor, Lawn & Landscape

Imagine making
an investment
to improve your
company, and it
has the complete
opposite effect.

The right fit

For as helpful as technology can be in different aspects of our lives, it can also cause many problems.

I was reminded of this while speaking with a landscape contractor who had some major issues with software alignment last year. He had been operating on three different software platforms, and it was causing chaos within his company. So much chaos he went through six different people in his two office administration positions in one year.

His description of how the software challenges basically crippled his company was eye-opening.

He said, "it robbed my staff of confidence and enthusiasm for their daily tasks."

Imagine making an investment to improve your company, and that investment has the complete opposite effect. No one would blame the contractor if he threw in the towel and went back to the old school paper-and-pen method.

But he didn't turn his back on technology. He kept looking for other options and eventually found a new software that fit his company's needs. He pointed out something to me that it seems a lot of contractors miss: finding the right software takes time and patience.

"It costs money to invest in software, but I

cannot put a price on what we gained in efficiency," he says. "I cannot imagine running a sizable business on paper, but I know many lawn care and pest control companies do. Having reports, invoicing, scheduling and customer account notes all in one place is priceless. As we found through our struggles, the wrong piece of software robs you of your efficiency and can hurt your customers."

Finding "the right fit" is a common phrase I often hear around hiring. Employers are willing to take the time and money to find the right fits for their organizations. Why shouldn't that be the case for the software you use or the equipment you buy?

While we are talking about technology, I'll get one more plug in for the Lawn & Landscape Technology Conference. In case you missed one of the many, many emails (yes, we know we peppered your inbox these past few months), we are hosting an educational conference focused on technology in the green industry from Feb. 19-21 in Orlando. If you are seeing this in the digital edition, there is probably still time to register. Visit bit.ly/lltech20 to learn more.

If you aren't able to make it this year, we hope to see you in 2021. — *Brian Horn*

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NCLC is heading to the
nation's oldest horticulture
school for 2020.

BIGGER & BETTER

Back at Michigan State once again, this year's NCLC might be the most expansive competition yet.

By Jimmy Miller

LANSING, Mich. – It's hosted at the school with the nation's oldest horticulture program, but there's plenty of new things happening at this year's National Collegiate Landscape Competition.

Whether it's the trial run of a robotics competition event or the revival of a bus tour to nearby horticulture businesses, National Association of Landscape Professionals' Jennifer Myers said the continually rising number of attendees will have more than enough things to do at NCLC.

"It's not just getting more students and having more companies at the career fair," said Myers, NALP's director of workforce development. "It's having new, exciting, relevant offerings for those that are attending. We want students to come potentially every year that they're in school. There's a reason for them to go above and beyond the competition."

Myers said she anticipates one of the largest turnouts for NCLC ever, if not the largest attendance in history. The number of expected student participants for 2020 is hovering around 850, and she also said there will be more career fair booths and workshop sessions than ever before.

"I'm getting a lot of these emails saying, 'We're bringing our largest team ever, we have more students interested than ever,'" Myers said. "I think we've had a couple really positive (competitions) in the last few years. If you go to an event and have an amazing time with great weather and get five job offers, you're going to go back to your classmates and share that news. The faculty can talk about it all day long, but it comes down to their peers encouraging them to go."

Myers said that despite a busier schedule than ever, NCLC was able to add a tour of three Michigan horticulture companies so students and faculty can see some professionals in the industry at work. Myers said tours were previously part of the NCLC schedule, but the surge in the number of workshops meant less time to go on a tour. Now, participants can go on the tour scheduled for Tuesday, March 17 (they'll see Walter Gardens, Spring Meadow Nursery and Kawasaki Motors) and attend workshops Wednesday, March 18.

The Robotics and Technology in Landscape Design and Maintenance event is new to the mix this year. Up to two students per school who compete in the event must answer questions about sample residential or commercial projects and how robotic mowers can solve those issues. They'll also likely be tasked with drawing and design calculations in the event.

Myers said this is listed as a test event on NALP's website for a reason: They want to iron out all the possible issues with the event before it affects overall team scores. Students who compete in the event will still be ranked for their performances.

Michigan State professor Marcus Duck has seen plenty of new competitive events come and go, and he's been around the competition long enough to have witnessed its growth firsthand. He competed for



NCLC WAS ABLE TO ADD A TOUR OF THREE MICHIGAN HORTICULTURE COMPANIES FOR STUDENTS AND FACULTY.

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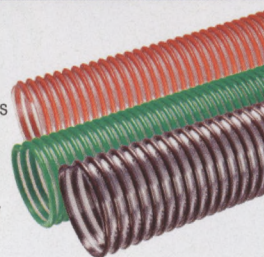
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Auburn University in 1996 and 1997, and once he joined the MSU staff a few years later, he joined Bradley Rowe as co-coaches for the Spartans' program.

Duck said he's been mostly impressed with what NCLC has done to make it about more than just the competition. With the addition of a career fair and workshops, he believes there's more benefits than ever before at NCLC. The workshops allow students to try things that maybe aren't offered in their respective horticulture programs, and the career fair is one of the industry's easiest ways to meet potential employers.

"It's like a couple day interview process. The industry gets to observe the students, and the students get to observe the industry," Duck said. "The focus has always been on the competition because that's how you get the students excited, but when they've got all this excitement and energy and preparation for the competition, and you have the career fair before that... it makes for a completely different atmosphere for the career fair."

Duck and Rowe will host the competition for the second time, their first since 2007. Though many of the same facilities used in 2007 will be used again this year, Duck said there's plenty of work to still do. He's helped with setup on a majority of the competitions over the last 13 years, which has kept him up to speed with what planning an ever-growing event like this can be like.

"Now that we're preparing, there are fewer surprises," Duck said. "The most difficult (part) is finding the space. If we had the event during our spring break, it'd probably be snowing. When we're having the competition in March, we still have classes."

Myers attended the previous competition at MSU and said the reunion at a historic program will be powerful.

"Since we rotate around every year, there's always something unique about the location. I'm excited to go back to Michigan State," Myers said. "It's kind of got this homecoming effect for me and I think the planning team and a lot of others."

SUPERVISION AND SALES

Leadership and acquiring customers were two topics on the agenda at Real Green's annual conference.

NASHVILLE – In January, lawn care operators from across the country descended on Nashville, Tennessee for Real Green's annual users conference – Solutions 2020. The event is designed to not only educate Real Green customers about the software, but also to help attendees with general business lessons. The 20th anniversary of the event it took place at the Gaylord Opryland Resort & Convention Center. Below are some takeaways from educational sessions.

FIND THAT 'SUPER'VISOR. One problem that plagues a lot of companies is the method in which they promote employees. You take a field worker or salesperson who excelled at that role and then promote them to a supervisor position, but you may later find they don't have great leadership skills.

"That's especially easy to do when you are in the middle of peak season and you lose someone," said Chuck Williams, contact center manager at Senske Services based in Washington. But Williams said leadership skills can be taught. Here are three points to help you create the ideal supervisor.

1. Interpersonal skills – This is the ability to connect to people and then connect them to something productive. One way to do this is by genuinely expressing appreciation for someone's work with details. Williams uses the Situation, Behavior and Impact Tool – for example, expressing gratitude to an employee who, during a busy time (situation), completed extra tasks efficiently (behavior) and it helped everyone get caught up on the work (impact).

2. Conflict management – Conflict is normal and necessary for growth because that means there are people in the room who want to succeed. Conflict is unhealthy when it's not managed properly, Williams said. Properly managed conflict is one of the most beneficial things for an organization, and if you don't want someone to disagree with you, you aren't a leader, Williams said. When dealing with conflict, do your best to take emotions out of it.

3. Communication – Employees want to know what's going on, and if you don't fill in the blanks, they will fill the blanks in with the worst-case scenarios possible, Williams said. Keeping people in the dark will lead to fear, which isn't productive.

KEEP KNOCKING. With restrictions on telemarketing, like the national "do not call" list, old fashioned door-to-door sales are still a viable way to get new customers, said Ken White, owner of Hometown Pest & Lawn in Michigan.

"It can be fun and it can be frustrating," White said of going door-to-door.

But before you or your employee start knocking, make sure you know the door-to-door solicitations rules of the area you are canvassing. Not only will it keep you from a meeting with the police, it could save you time.

"Door-to-door isn't for every city. If it's difficult to get a permit, that could mean the people in the city don't want door-to-door sales," White said.

Before you start canvassing a neighborhood, mail a brochure the week before you knock and place signs in the area a few days before walking. White said you can have salespeople with the company serve as the canvassers, or you can hire hourly employees specifically for the job.

If you go the latter route, put a supervisor who spends five hours a day focusing on this aspect of your business – recruiting, role playing, organiz-

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ing pickups and drop-offs, facilitating daily and weekly meetings.

White recommends going door-to-door over a 12-week period with work starting 3-4 weeks before production begins or when the sidewalks are clear of snow. Shoot for 6-7 days a week, with the option of avoiding Sunday. If you are going to door-to-door on a Saturday, have a truck in the neighborhood to service lawns that day if a sale is made. Don't ask people to go door-to-door for more than a few hours since it can get exhausting.

"It can be grueling work," Smith said.

You should have three teams of two with one person on each side of the street. Instruct them never to go into the house. The door-knockers could be the ones doing the selling, or they can just serve as the initial point of contact to inquire if the homeowner wants to meet with a salesperson. If so, Thomas said sometimes he can have a salesperson ready to visit the potential client later that day.

Smith buys company shirts for the canvassers to wear as part of a uniform and they are not allowed to wear sunglasses.

"It's going to be our first impression," he said.

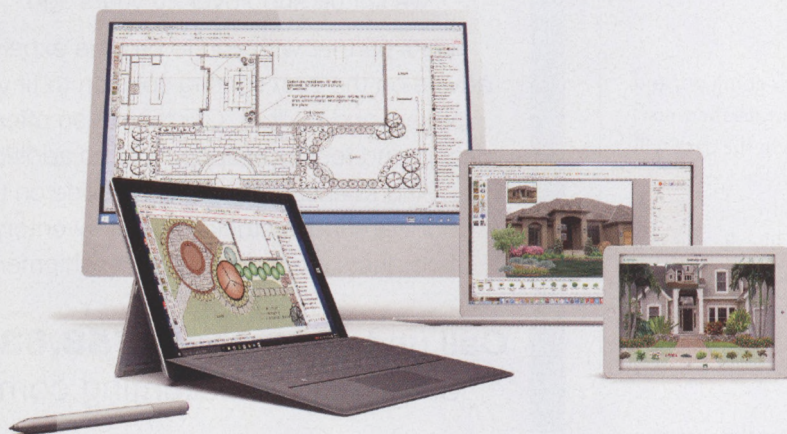
NALP TO SEPARATE FROM GIE+EXPO IN 2022

Beginning in 2022, NALP will no longer host LANDSCAPES in conjunction with GIE+EXPO and plans to host its own conference.

FAIRFAX, Va. – The National Association of Landscape Professionals will separate its annual meeting, LANDSCAPES, from GIE+EXPO beginning in 2022 and will host its own stand-alone conference.

For more than a decade, NALP has held its annual meeting in Louisville in conjunction with GIE+EXPO. Before that, the association hosted an annual meeting and exposition (the Green Industry Expo) which traveled to different cities.

"We've enjoyed a strong partnership with the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute, and we continue to work together on govern-



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ment relations and other important industry issues," said Britt Wood, NALP CEO. "But the time has come to provide members with a new annual meeting experience, so beginning in 2022, our conference will move to different cities."

NALP has assembled a planning task force, including industry suppliers and manufacturers, lawn care, maintenance and design-build professionals, to provide guidance and input into the design of the new conference. Member input is also being gathered to ensure that the conference provides the best education and networking opportunities while incorporating local facility tours and the latest innovations.

"We look forward to opening up new opportunities for attendees as we create the future NALP Annual Meeting experience, beginning in 2022," Wood said. "In the meantime, we are focused on providing innovative and exceptional LANDSCAPES conferences for the next two years in Louisville."

In 2022, OPEI will move into 100% ownership of the GIE+EXPO, which in 2020 is set for October 21-23. Attendees can expect hands-on drone training, expanded tree care demonstrations, a UTV test track and a continued co-location with Hardscape North America.

"OPEI has signed an extension agreement for the show from 2022-2024 with the Kentucky Exposition Center and area hotels in Louisville for the future. GIE+EXPO has always been the industry's family reunion, and the place to be if you're in this business," OPEI President and CEO Kris Kiser said. "We're looking forward to continuing to work with our partners to provide the best training, education, and hands-on learning for the entire industry."

BRIGHTVIEW ACQUIRES TOP 100 COMPANY

The company acquired Signature Coast Holdings based in Napa, California.

BLUE BELL, Pa. – BrightView Holdings acquired Signature Coast Holdings, a commercial landscaping company headquartered in Napa, California. Transaction terms were not disclosed. Signature Coast ranked No. 55 on our 2019 Top 100 list with \$33 million in 2018 revenue.

Signature Coast's operations span nine locations in both California (Concord, Davis, Marin, Napa, Rocklin, Sacramento and Santa Rosa) and Nevada (Carson City and Reno). The company provides landscape maintenance, irrigation, enhancement, installation, arbor care, pest control and snow removal services under its three major brands: Coast

Landscape Management, Signature Landscapes and C&R Landscape. The company's 600 employees serve clients across the corporate, HOA, multi-family and municipal segments.

Andrew Masterman, president and CEO of BrightView, said this move was the second largest acquisition the company has made since the 2017 inception of "our successful 'strong-on-strong' acquisition strategy. I look forward to working with the team for many years to come."

Kelly Solomon, CEO of Signature Coast, and her senior leadership team will remain with BrightView to guide the integration process and beyond. "Our shared values toward our customers and employees convinced me that joining BrightView was the logical next step for Signature Coast. In addition to sharing best practices and leveraging industry-leading resources, I am excited by the opportunities that we will create for our award-winning team members to continue growing while keeping the customer at the center of everything we do," she said.

In addition to acquiring Signature Coast, BrightView also recently announced its acquisition of Summit Landscape Group in Rock Hill, South Carolina. Established in 2011, Summit serves the Charlotte, Charleston and Hilton Head markets in the Carolinas, as well as its clients in Nashville, Tennessee. Summit Landscape Group founders Mike Knabenshue and Steve Adolph will remain with BrightView to provide leadership continuity.

LOVING ACQUIRES H&H SOD FARM IN ORLANDO

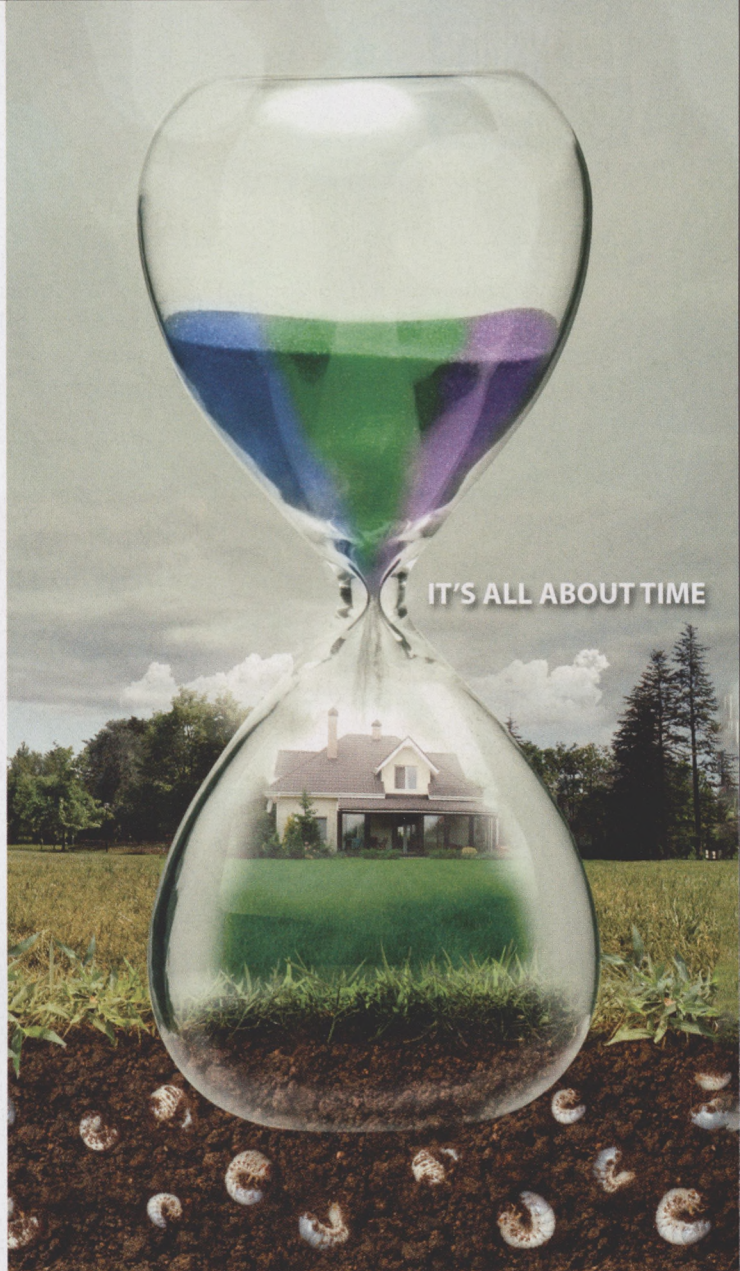
In addition to the acquisition, Loving has created a strategic partnership with Scotts and Bethel Turf.

GASTONIA, N.C. – The Loving Group recently acquired H&H Sod Farm, which is located in Orlando. The Loving Group ranked No. 70 on Lawn & Landscape's Top 100 list in 2018 with \$27 million in revenue.

"Although our company has been built solely through organic growth rather than acquisitions, we found that the shared values and belief in fostering strong communities made this opportunity a natural fit," said Mike Haynes, founder and CEO of Loving. "We are excited for the continued opportunity to expand as it allows us greater opportunity to capitalize on our mission of creating a positive impact through our outreach efforts in the communities that we serve."

Founded in 1969 by Danny and Lois Hall, H&H Sod Farm has grown to become one of the largest sod farming operations in the state of Florida.

In addition to the H&H Sod Farm acquisition, Loving has created a strategic partnership with both Scotts and Bethel Turf to join in the



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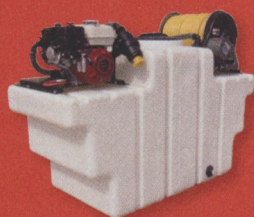
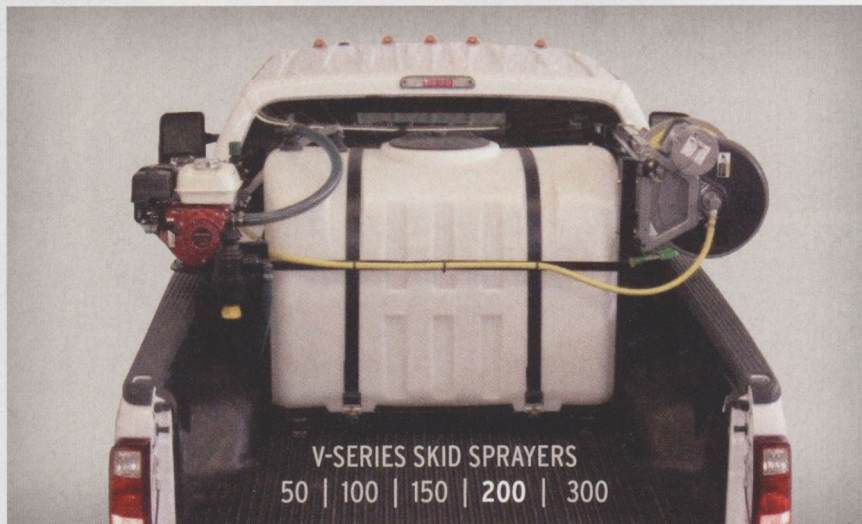
production and distribution of ProVista Turf throughout the state of Florida. "Bethel and Scotts are happy to welcome Loving into the ProVista network, we are excited about the

numerous distribution opportunities that Loving provides through the strong relationships that they have created," said Will Nugent, owner of Bethel Turf.

"We believe that this step is a major milestone in our effort to increase public awareness and education of ProVista Turf. We are thrilled of the numerous homebuilders throughout the state that have already committed to transition their new lawns over to ProVista Turf, providing their homebuyers a superior looking turfgrass, that requires a fraction of the maintenance." Nugent added.

Loving is headquartered in Gastonia, North Carolina and offers landscaping, outdoor living and sod farming services to both local and national homebuilding clients throughout the Southeastern United States.

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SITEONE ACQUIRES TWO SUPPLIERS TO START 2020

ROSWELL, Ga. – SiteOne Landscape Supply recently acquired Wittkopf Landscape Supplies in Spokane, Washington, and Empire Supplies in Newark, New Jersey.

Wittkopf has two locations focused on the distribution of hardscapes and landscape supplies to landscape professionals.

It was SiteOne's first acquisition of 2020.

"Wittkopf is a great fit with SiteOne as they expand our offerings in a growing market that we entered in 2018 with our acquisition of AutoRain, an irrigation products distributor. This addition aligns with our mission to be the best full-line distributor to landscape professionals in all major U.S. and Canadian markets," said Doug Black, chairman and CEO of SiteOne Landscape Supply.

Meanwhile, Empire Supplies serves the greater Newark-Union, N.J. metro with three locations focused on the distribution of hardscapes and landscape supplies to landscape professionals.

Black complimented Empire's company culture and said the move helps them improve their presence "in an attractive market." **L&L**



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KNOW YOUR NUMBERS

- **THE MID-DECEMBER DRIVE** from Logan, Utah, through Lincoln, Nebraska and St. Louis on my way to Indianapolis was going to be a rough one. Early winter snowstorms ripped through the Midwest as I drove across Wyoming and Nebraska on I-80. Fortunately, I carried a shovel and a Bubba Rope (an elastic tow rope that's great for getting you unstuck) in my trunk.

HOW IT WORKS IN THE REAL

WORLD. Bill's revenue was just under \$1 million a year and he enjoyed an unparalleled reputation for installing hardscapes in his market. Going into 2020, he had some big jobs ahead of him and he wanted to ensure that his "numbers" accurately reflected his cost structure.

To price his work, Bill had a day-rate for his three-man crew. He would then add a 20-30% markup to his material costs. If a project required subcontractors, he'd mark up those costs 10-20%. The markups on material and subcontractor costs were fine. However, the day-rate that he was using was too low because it did not include his truck and equipment costs. This happened for the following reasons.

First, Bill thought that his field truck and equipment costs were covered by and included in his crew day-rate and the markups on the materials and subcontractor costs. The assumption was that field truck and equipment costs were below



JIM HUSTON runs J.R. Huston Consulting, a green industry consulting firm.

the gross profit margin (GPM) line and included in his general and administrative (G&A) overhead costs. Second, almost all of his field trucks and equipment were paid for and 100% depreciated. As a result, cash flow was fine and the depreciation for these items did not show up on his financial statements in his G&A overhead costs.

Add all of this up and Bill's pricing was about 10% too low. Interestingly, my benchmark for all of a green industry contractor's truck and equipment costs total about 12% +/-2%. Two percent of this total accounts for G&A overhead vehicles. The cost breakdown for such items for a typical green industry company is in the chart below.

To begin with, Bill's costs for field trucks and equipment were

understated since they were 100% depreciated in his financials. In addition, because they were in his G&A overhead costs, they weren't addressed as a line item in his bidding process. Jobs that required a lot of equipment were bid too low. Ones that required just pickup trucks and wheel barrows were bid too high.

ANALYSIS. Putting a cost in your G&A overhead and adding it to your pricing by means of your direct cost (materials, field labor, labor burden, trucks & equipment, and subcontractors) markups essentially averages these costs in your pricing. Bill averaged his field truck and equipment costs in his pricing. Some jobs he priced too high. Others he either priced correctly or too low.

Many green industry contractors have been taught to include their field truck and equipment costs below the line and in their G&A overhead costs. They then supposedly include them in their pricing by means of their markups on the direct costs in a bid.

Over the years, this caused Bill to underprice his work by about 10%. Due to his excellent reputation, I believe he could have raised his prices 5-10% without losing any work.

Multiply his average annual revenue over 30 years by 10% and you get the following:

$$\begin{aligned} &\bullet \$700,000 \text{ avg. annual revenue} \\ &\quad \times 30 \text{ years in business} \times 10\% = \\ &\bullet \$21,000,000 \times .1 = \\ &\quad \$2,100,000 \text{ in lost revenue} \end{aligned}$$

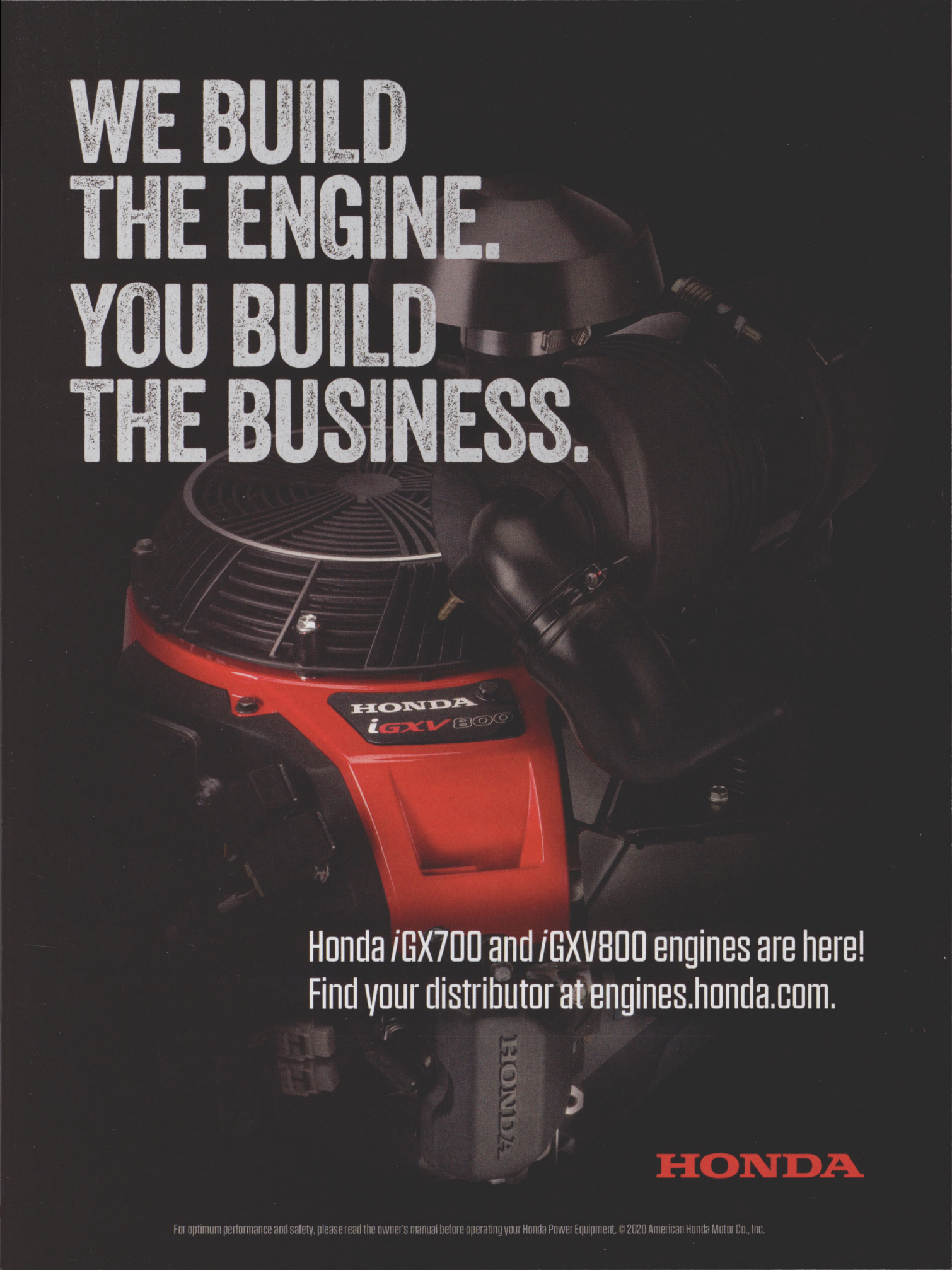
If his underpricing was only 5%, he still would have under-priced his work by over \$1 million.

CONCLUSION. Putting your field truck and equipment costs in your G&A overhead on your P&L statement is bad enough. What's worse is assuming that when you price your work using direct cost markups, such costs are covered by these markups. The solution is to have specific line items in your bidding process for your field trucks and equipment.

Fortunately, I didn't have to use my shovel and Bubba Rope to dig myself out of a snowy hole along I-80. Unfortunately, too many green industry contractors dig themselves into a financial hole because they don't understand how to bid their equipment in their projects. Too often they end up digging a great big hole that shows up on their bottom line. **L&L**

Contact Jim Huston
at jhuston@giemedia.com

Fuel	3% +/-1%	
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Total	12% +/-2%	



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SUSTAINABLE STORYTELLING

- **WITH THE PROMISE OF A NEW DECADE**, plus as content marketing and social media drives strategic value, a great brand story in 2020 will be one of the best ways to drive a deeper connection with your audience.

Seth Godin, the author of "Purple Cow: Transform Your Business by Being Remarkable," has this advice for CEOs thinking about repositioning their brand: "Marketing is no longer about the stuff you make, but about the stories you tell."

The best story about your company will ultimately connect at an emotional level, or how your brand fits into your customers' experience. In other words, it's not about the awesomeness of what you do, but about how what you do has an awesome impact on others.

To find your talking points for a customer-centered storyline, look to what's going on in their market, their priorities and goals, and how and where they buy.

To illustrate how this works, let's look at the influence of environmental performance in the property and facility management industries. Generally, this segment's sustainability drivers center around improved air quality, energy efficiency, water management, ecological impacts and safety and risk management.

If this is your market, and your services support green goals, here are 10 ways to reframe your sustainability story and create content



CHERYL STEELBERG is the marketing and public relations consultant for Bruce Wilson & Co.

written from your commercial customers' point of view:

1. Focus on the upside of your organization's processes, policies and best practices as related to the natural environment and how your path to sustainability improves your customers' path to stewardship.
2. Discuss how an integrated landscape strategy benefits green building or LEED, supports urban green zone initiatives, improves a healthy public space, decreases annual operating costs and reaffirms the value of landscape as a return on investment.
3. Demonstrate your leadership in managing impacts by showcasing innovation, energy efficiency, smart water technologies, renewable and alternative solutions and all-season conservation and eco-friendly practices that protect groundwater, mitigate erosion, en-

courage bio-diversity and benefit habitats and watersheds.

4. Build a narrative around four-season value creation; your expertise in managing snow/ice, fire, drought or extreme weather events, and why your unique knowledge in ecologically productive landscapes, rain gardens, habitat restoration, pollinator and bee-friendly programs, for example, translate to mitigating risk and improving the quality of life.

5. Connect your company's environmentally friendly landscape design, construction and maintenance and winter management practices with improved property resiliency and higher performance.

6. Make sustainability central to the way you do business – why it drives how you train your teams, advances your professional growth, leans up your operations, serves your customers and makes your company a great place to work.

7. Always involve your customers in your story and how your company has positively improved the life of their business.

8. Be true to your company's authentic self. Make sure your content matches your brand values and voice.

9. Know your customer. Social media can get your message out to millions. Sometimes it's better to reach a perfect audience of 100.

10. Where you tell your story is as important as how you tell it. Use the right medium. Find out where your customer buys, what platforms they're on and where they seek information and news. Don't forget video or the value of panels, presentations, and lunch and learns.

Landscape companies are moving toward making sustainability messaging less ambiguous. What's good for the planet is generally good for people. Take a closer look at what your company is doing to create value for your employees and customers. Elevate your brand story by demonstrating the long-lasting impact landscapes have to unite people where they live, work and play. **L&L**

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YOUR WINTER CHECKLIST

- **BEFORE SPRING SERVICES SET IN**, we all look forward to catching our breath after a long and busy season and taking some time off to recharge your batteries. That is definitely needed and well-deserved. For those of you in the northern parts of the country, this is truly the slow time of the year – except for the occasional snow event. You can deal with the slow time of the year in one of two ways:

WAY #1: Put your business on autopilot and coast from now until it is time to start gearing up for your spring rush.

WAY #2: Develop and then attack your "Winter Checklist." We suggest you follow Way #2! Here's the start of a good winter checklist:

ADMINISTRATION:

- Hold a strategic planning session to forecast out three or five years to determine where your company is headed.
- Establish an operational plan to map out how you will be doing business in 2020.
- Create a rolling budget for 2020 and then spread it over 12 months.
- Assign team members to oversee each line item on the budget to make sure you are meeting budgetary goals and not overspending.
- Establish an on-boarding program so you are ready to greet and bring on new employees in the spring.

OPERATIONS:

- Check tool complements for each crew.
- Order missing tools.



JUD GRIGGS
is a design/build consultant with the Harvest Group.

- Set up a tool tracking program for each of your crews to create accountability.
- Assess your large equipment (review hours, condition, etc.) against your budget for the upcoming year.
- Create a "wish list" of all equipment that you would like to buy. Assess your capital expenditure budget to see what you can afford to purchase.
- Explore equipment leasing programs to see if they will work for your company.
- Perform preventive maintenance on all equipment.
- Build relationships with several equipment dealers to set up a long-term equipment purchasing plan.
- Review production labor needs against your budget for direct labor hours.
- Establish a recruiting and hiring plan to attract the labor you will need.

- Investigate the H-2B program or update your paperwork for labor needs if already part of the H-2B program.
- Establish a safety program if you have not already created one.
- Assign a champion to head the program and perform safety training.

SALES AND MARKETING:

- Review sales goals for the upcoming year against your budget.
- Review or establish a sales pipeline report.
- Assign winter sales goals for each salesperson and consider some rewards for meeting or exceeding those goals.
- Assess your sales team and perform year-end performance reviews.
- Review/set up/budget for your marketing plan for 2020.
- Contact your existing and past clients. Offer to walk the property with the clients.
- Perform an analysis of all of the key properties that you maintain. Suggest enhancements for these properties in a bound presentation package separated into primary, secondary and tertiary areas. This will serve as a great budgeting tool

for the property manager that you are working with.

- Follow up on Phase II and Phase III of design/build projects. Have budget numbers ready to show clients.
- Consider reduced price incentives for work that can be performed in early spring (i.e. construction work, large trees, etc.)

This is a short list of what I consider the most important things to accomplish during slower times of the year. I know that there are many more points that we could add to the checklist. I challenge all of you to create your own list that addresses your company's most critical needs. I invite you to send me additional points to add to the list and make it a working document.

Please be sure to send me what you consider the most critical items at judson@harvestlandscapeconsulting.com.

I will accumulate all of your responses and send out an updated checklist by the end of the year to all of you that responded to me. **L&L**

Contact Jud Griggs at judson@harvestlandscapeconsulting.com

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Here we go again

Yes, it's that time of year again – when two guys who know a thing or two about landscaping, Bill Arman and Ed Laflamme of the Harvest Group, team up with us in telling the story of three companies who need a little help with their businesses.

It could be lack of profit, bad culture, labor (well, it's always labor, isn't it?) or something else that's holding a company back – or maybe all of the above. That's where Bill and Ed come in. They spent three days with each of our winners: Custom Landscaping and Lawn Care in New Jersey; Lawn and Pest Solutions in Mississippi; and Hawkins Landscaping in Maryland to get to the bottom of what's ailing each company.

From there, Bill and Ed will work with the owners and other key employees to implement methods to help the companies grow. In some areas, they are doing well and can do better, but other areas they are really struggling and could use a “turnaround.”

We'll follow the progress of each company in our print magazine, digital newsletters and via podcasts on our Lawn & Landscape Radio Network.

This year we took a different approach than in the past where we mainly focused on companies less than a \$1 million. This year, all three companies have already broken the \$1 million mark, while one of those companies is the largest company to participate in the Turnaround Tour.

We hope mixing it up a bit will give you a different perspective and more options to relate to since problems you have at \$6 million can be different than if you are around \$1 million in revenue.

Finally, thanks to our sponsor, Corona Tools, for supporting the Turnaround Tour. We hope you enjoy following along this year as much as we will like telling the stories.

For video of Bill and Ed's visit to Green Lawn and coverage of past Turnaround Tours, visit bit.ly/lawntour or hold your camera phone over the QR code above.



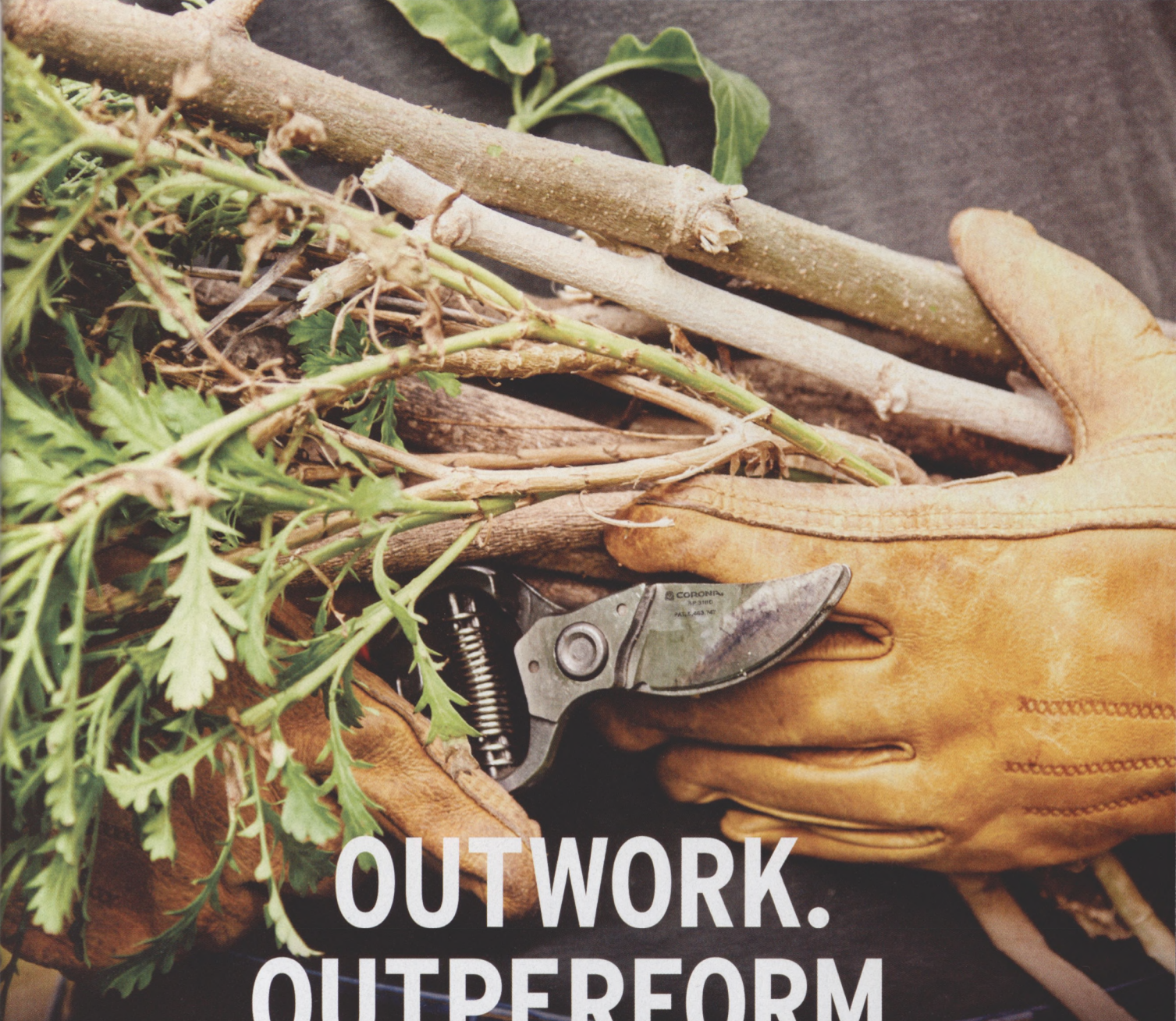
Bill Arman and Ed Laflamme

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SEASON AFTER SEASON

Brian Horn, editor, Lawn & Landscape






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OVER THE HUMP

PAUL WELBORN HOPES

DELEGATING HELPS

HIS MISSISSIPPI-BASED

COMPANY, LAWN

& PEST SOLUTIONS,

BREAK THE \$2-MILLION

MARK IN 2020.

BY BRIAN HORN

Paul Welborn admits he is a “re-covering control freak.” Well, he says he still likes control, but he’s getting better at his company Lawn & Pest Solutions located just outside Tupelo, Mississippi.

“I started this and knew I wanted to grow this business,” he says of the company that he launched in 2002. “The first two-and-a-half, three years, it was just me. I didn’t have any employees. I had a plan and I had a vision for what I wanted it to be, but then of course, several years in I hadn’t let go of a lot of stuff to keep it growing.”

A few years ago, he realized being involved with every detail of the company was wearing him down, so he decided to lessen his grip on the reins. But he realizes the micromanaging had hindered some current managers’ ability to grow.

“I’ve done a good job of letting go, but I held on to things for so long, wanting to let go of them, I’d almost handicap some of the people that I have turned it over to,” he says.

Helping that management team grow is one of the main reasons he applied for the Turnaround Tour. This lack of empowering managers (Welborn says he’s a firm believer of promoting from within) has resulted in them shying away from taking the lead in areas they should, which led to a higher than usual rate of customer cancellations when compared to previous years. Welborn said normally the company is around 95% retention of customers, but last year it slipped to around 88%, which was a red flag for Welborn.

“We’re adding more faces in here and so it gets harder to keep that relationship with customers. The other part was, sometimes our approach on people wanting to cancel wasn’t what it should have been, as far as managers following up as well as we should have,” he says. “Because I view a cancel as they’re giving us an opportunity to keep servicing them, ‘Yes, they’re canceling, but let’s find out why.’”

It’s details like that where the micromanaging may have hindered the managers’ growth.

“They see the big picture, don’t get me wrong,

THE HARVESTERS' TAKE:

Overall, this is a very solid company performing turf care and pest management, including mosquitos and even termites! They have sales of \$1.8 million and have very good gross margins of over 50%. Normally this would be good to go and very profitable.

The challenge here lies with the overhead costs associated with this business. Paul, the owner, has invested in hiring key team members to help manage the business and therefore has invested a considerable amount in overhead salaries. The answer is to grow this business and enter into several new areas while moving more into the commercial market.

This year's Turnaround Tour will have the Harvesters help in five key areas:

- **New sales: Increase by \$600,000**
- **Retain and recruit key positions: Retain 100% of key employees plus hire and on-board 2-3 techs**
- **Account receivables: None over 60 days**
- **Customer retention: 90%+**
- **Safety: Build program/ no lost time accidents**

During our first day of our two-day visit, a key employee gave their notice. They had decided to go back to the organization where they had previously worked. The Harvesters were challenged right from day one! The Harvesters met with the owner and built a game plan to retain this key employee. After we completed our initial assessment and returned home, the owner executed the retention game plan perfectly and this key player will remain on board!

Stay tuned as we work with this talented team to grow this business to success!

PS: We will also share what Paul did to keep his key team player in our next Turnaround Tour installment.



but it's getting them to see all the little things we need to do to make sure the customer is serviced well, make sure our guys are doing their job correctly, making sure everybody's bought into what they're doing and satisfied with what's going on and has a good understanding of what's going on," he says.

CLOSER TO THE HOME.

Right now, structural pest control is 20% of the company's revenue while 80% is in lawn care. Welborn sees a lot of growth opportunity and wants to grow that portion of the business by 50%. The company has performed structural pest work for 10 years, but the consistent growth of the lawn care side of the business has left little time to focus on the structural side.

"It didn't get the attention it deserved, and the way we treat customers and what's required out of a good termite service, it just falls in line with the way we do business," he says. "It's just a huge growth area for us that just hadn't gotten the proper respect that we should have given it in years past."

What's enticing is to Welborn is the opportunity to create bundles (the company also performs mosquito spraying) to offer customers. However, for the pest division to grow, he's going to have to find new technicians because treating lawns is different than treating structures.

"The only difficulty, and there are some that treat

it the same, but in my mind, a great lawn technician and a great pest technician are oftentimes different in their skill sets," he says. "And in our area, if you're out spraying in the yard and it's the hot summertime, you don't want to go in somebody's house. You've been out spraying in the yard. You're not really clean enough to go in a house."

2020 GOALS.

For 2019, Welborn had hoped to hit \$1.87 million in revenue but fell short, only reaching \$1.78 million. Welborn hopes to hit slightly more than \$2 million in 2020. In the early years, the company could grow at a 25% rate. But as business grew, the growth slowed down.

"The past two to three years, we've had this hump that we can't get over," he says. "If we ever get over that hump, if we ever crest that hill, we're going to bump up to this next level."

Part of getting to that next level was expanding into the Tennessee market. The company has a small presence there but would like to grow into Memphis, which is about an hour north of Lawn & Pest Solutions' current service area. "We've got a small customer base up there that we're going to maintain, and then if we come across the big customer potentially take that on," he says. "But, any kind of big, formal push, we'll lay low and wait until 2021." ☺



A CLEAR PATH

CUSTOM LANDSCAPING AND LAWN CARE HAS HAD NO TROUBLE GROWING THEIR CLIENTELE, BUT THEY'VE STRUGGLED WITH MAKING INTERNAL ADJUSTMENTS TO KEEP UP WITH THE GROWTH.

BY LAUREN RATHMELL

For Frank Leloia, landscaping is a family business. He's worked alongside his father, above right, at Custom Landscaping and Lawn Care since he was 12 years old. Now, he is the sole owner and the business has been in operation for nearly 38 years.

But things have definitely changed since 1982, and Leloia has seen the company hit a few road blocks trying to navigate through new growth, especially in the last 14 years.

The company has seen revenue increase from \$450,000 to over \$6 million with the expansion into other service areas like irrigation and chemical lawn care. Now that Custom is on the growth path, Leloia says they've been experiencing issues that are impacting their bottom line. "There are things that occur with a staff of 100 that didn't occur with a staff of 20," Leloia says.

While Leloia says he feels like the company has a good grasp on a lot of policies and procedures, he admits they've been struggling with HR-related operations.

THE HARVESTERS' TAKE:

Custom Landscaping is currently primarily a residential landscape company which provides landscape services to approximately 2,500 homes. These services include lawn mowing, chemical application, irrigation repairs and landscape enhancements. Custom also provides snow services primarily to commercial accounts.

The majority of the homes Custom provides services for is for lawn mowing. This business model is very difficult to manage, and the retention of accounts is way below standard. There needs to be a change and now!

After much discussion and review, it was decided by the Custom Leadership Team that they will focus more on building the commercial maintenance side of the business.

Over the next three years, Custom Landscaping will be marketing and selling towards the commercial market while retaining as many full-service residential accounts as possible. This will result in a more balanced portfolio mix of residential and commercial maintenance.

During this next year, the Harvesters will help Custom to focus on these five key areas:

- Gross margin improvement in non-snow revenue
- Marketing and sales toward the commercial market
- People program: Retention and recruiting
- Training/safety program implementation
- HR programs, systems and compliance

We'll have a lot of work to do here, especially with the conversion to a better blend of market types. The goal will be to transform the business to a 50-50 blend of residential and commercial work within three years. Stay tuned on their progress this year as the Harvesters take on this challenge.



"The consistent issues would definitely be integrating and managing HR," he says, "As we've continued to grow, maybe just delegating across the organization chart (could be

better." Up until this point, the team has been focused on working on these issues internally, but Leloia says they've already started work with the Harvesters to remedy

some HR dilemmas. He's hoping that since they've worked to break down a more detailed organization chart, he will be able to delegate better to other leaders in the company.

"We've recognized that implementation of new processes and procedures are just very challenging, so hopefully we can assign those specific tasks to specific managers within the company," he says.

IN THE NUMBERS.

During their introductory visit, Bill and Ed realized there were some inaccuracies in Custom's P&L's. In fact, there wasn't a way to determine the company's current gross margin per revenue stream due to the setup of the P&L statements.

Overall, the company's current gross margin sits right around 50%, with some skewed information coming from the snow segments revenue stream. In order to get a better picture of Custom's gross margin, Leloia and his team will have to break down each maintenance job and dig into the true costs.

A WELCOME SHIFT.

One of the bigger tasks at hand is the plan to shift from residential maintenance to more commercial accounts. "(Residential) is what we know," Leloia says. He says the team is on board and ready to give it a shot, but they are still weighing some options.

"We're still trying to determine if going that route is really what we ultimately want to do. But with that said, we definitely want to add commercial work," he says. "We've had a plan the last two or three years for residential to continue to increase density within our routes, ultimately increasing our gross margin, but we're looking forward to expanding our commercial routes, too."

The Harvesters set a goal of a 50/50 residential and commercial split by 2020. To tackle this, Custom will have to shift their marketing efforts a bit to go after new customers. Hopefully, this will include hiring on a business developer down the line.

"We ultimately want our hiring and recruiting to improve," he says. "But we also want to try to make right hire at the right time." ☺

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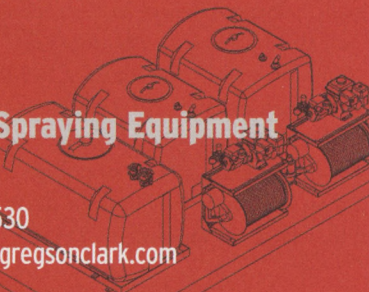


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THE HARVESTERS' TAKE:

Hawkins is a solid landscaping company doing quality work. It truly is a family business, with father and son and their mates all working together. They are located in what they believe to be a very competitive area.

At our visit and subsequent follow-up (Harvester Huddles) phone calls, it's the Harvesters' goal to help each company increase their sales and profits. Hawkins Landscaping have a few classic problems that are affecting each area; therefore, we suggested a number of solutions.

The first is to separate each of their profit centers in their profit and loss statement. Currently they are all together and we can't tell which departments are making money and which are not. The second area is to improve their estimating process to enable the jobs to be estimated more accurately and faster.

By doing this, the jobs will be more profitable and they should close more because they will get them into the hands of their potential customers faster. Third, grow their landscape maintenance department much larger and consider moving into the commercial sector.

They agreed that these areas would help, but we did get some pushback on moving into the commercial area because they feel there is so much competition. (The Harvesters hear this all the time). They may instead work to eliminate the low performing residential customers and bring on better more profitable ones.

Lastly, the area we felt holding them back the most was the lack of clarity among them as to who is doing what. We suggested they have formal meetings at least once a week to improve communication between them and that they make it clear who is responsible for what.

Although they have not received the typical amount of snow fall this winter, they are working hard to build up a solid backlog of work for the spring. We are confident that the changes they are making will make a substantial difference this season.



DOWN THE LINE

DAVID HAWKINS JR. HOPES TO SET UP HAWKINS LANDSCAPING FOR SUCCESS NOW AND LATER, WHEN HIS SON TAKES OVER THE COMPANY.

BY JIMMY MILLER

Walking away from the company he started right out of high school in 1974 will be difficult, especially since David Hawkins Jr., left, loves working in this industry so much. He's not only invested over four decades at his own company—he's put in the same time helping his area's landscaping industry, too. He helped found the Frederick Area Landscapers and Nurserymen Association and is a member of the Maryland Green Industry Council. But Hawkins Jr. knows he needs to set up Hawkins Landscaping so that down

the line, his son, David Hawkins III, can transition to the top role seamlessly. There's no set timeline on when Hawkins Jr. will retire or step out of the ownership role, but establishing a strong succession plan is one of the top reasons Hawkins Jr. applied for the Turnaround Tour.

"It's kind of a sore subject. We haven't really sat down and come up with a timeline," Hawkins Jr. says. "That's a big deal, and I definitely need to work on it."

Finding ways to hand over the reigns to Hawkins III – or "D-Three," as he jokingly calls himself – isn't the only thing Hawkins Landscaping is looking forward to in the Turnaround Tour. The company makes roughly \$2.2 million annually and employs roughly 30 full-time employees.

But one of the largest issues Hawkins Jr.

says his company faces is being stagnant. Because they've been in operation for 45 years, it's difficult to break out of the system of operations they've found successful over time.

"We're obviously looking for guidance. Nobody has the magic bullet, but hopefully we can gain bits of information here and there," Hawkins Jr. says. "It's just trying to get us to the next level."

Hawkins Jr. says he wants to keep up with the rising tide of competitors in the Washington D.C. area, so staying current with the latest industry practices could help them stand out among competition.

Take finding quality labor for instance. Since the government implemented an H-2B cap, Hawkins Jr. says the company has really struggled to hire the right people. "If guys would come, they'd come really late, so we

just stopped using H-2B 10, 12 years ago," Hawkins Jr. says. They've counteracted that loss in labor with a referral rewards system for their employees, where each person who brings in a laborer who stays for six months earns a \$500 bonus.

"Pretty much nine out of the last 10 employees were brought in by one of our existing guys," Hawkins III says. "If they know they've got to work with them, hopefully they won't bring in somebody horrible."

So, it's not that the Hawkins father-son duo is not trying some new things – it's simply that they want more guidance and more options for solutions. Technology also exemplifies this: Hawkins Jr. isn't sure his company has adopted the best technology updates on the market, simply because Hawkins Landscaping has found a way of doing things and it's

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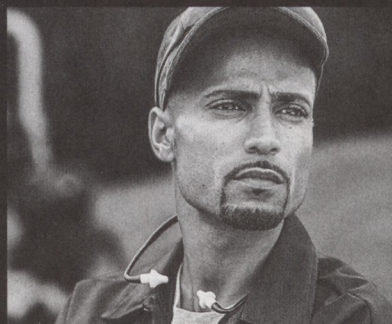


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SAFETY FIRST



Award-winning safety firms
share secrets of their success.

By Robin Roenker

Keeping crews safe and job sites accident-free are top priorities for every landscape company, but achieving a safety culture that's front-of-mind with every employee doesn't just happen on its own.

Building a safety culture takes intention and requires routine safety meetings, standard safety protocols and management and leadership teams that take safety seriously.

To glean tips for establishing a safety-first mentality, Lawn & Landscape spoke with three firms who have won national awards for their safety records – Clarence Davids & Company, with multiple locations serving the Chicago area; Mahoney Associates, in Southampton, New York; and Snow & Sons Tree & Landscaping in Greenfield, Massachusetts.

1. STANDARDIZE CREWS' SAFETY EQUIPMENT. To ensure crews have the safety equipment they need, Mahoney Associates provides every team member with a standard safety starter kit, which includes a reflective vest,

ABOVE: Safety training should be implemented daily, not just in office meetings.

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ear and eye protection, as well as high-visibility jackets for the winter, says Michael Maskiell, Mahoney's lawn care division manager. Crew members are also asked to sign a document acknowledging receipt of the safety wear – both for insurance purposes but also to signify that they agree to commit to wearing them.

Mahoney has also installed standardized safety equipment on every crew truck, including a first-aid kit, a fire extinguisher and even a card with pertinent safety information. "Taped to the back window of every truck is a safety card with 911 as well as the phone number and address of the local hospital, walk-in clinic, and Chemtrec – if there is a chemical exposure," says founder Don Mahoney.

2. PRIORITIZE ON-THE-JOB SAFETY

TRAINING. At Snow & Sons, much of the safety training surrounding equipment use is done on-the-job, with foremen and other leadership personnel modeling best practices to new hires and those less familiar with the tools. It starts with basic training at the office – how to use the equipment safely and to get the desired result and what to watch out for when working on a job site.

Employees then practice using the equipment at the office before working with crews on a job site. "With equipment, we're going to show employees how to run it, what you need to watch out for and how to do a good job," says manager Kyle Snow. "When dealing with



Familiarity with equipment, including chainsaws, starts with basic office training and outlining typical scenarios where injuries occur.

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“With equipment, we’re going to show employees how to run it, what you need to watch out for and how to do a good job.”

KYLE SNOW, manager, Snow & Sons Tree & Landscaping

chainsaws and hedge trimmers in particular, we try to outline possible problem scenarios that could cause injuries.”

Mahoney Associates frequently supplements its internal staff safety trainings with workshops provided through other, outside sources – including industry associations and the company’s own insurance company.

“Our insurance company sent someone in for five-hours of training to get our team certified on forklifts, doing defensive driving, proper lifting, and cold-weather exposure training,” Mahoney says. “Once we reached out, we learned they had this massive catalog of safety programs – some we can implement ourselves, and others where they can send someone in.”

3. HOLD REGULAR SAFETY MEETINGS.

At Clarence Davids & Company, all staff members attend a full-day safety training just

before the spring busy season and again before the winter snow removal season.

“Everybody comes in, and we have numerous bullet points that we go over, whether it’s driving (safety) or information on new pieces of equipment, or any new regulations that have gone into effect,” says president Bill Davids. “We’ll do the same for snow, with driving and plowing safety during the winter.”

At Mahoney Associates, safety meetings are held weekly or bi-weekly, depending on the work level of the season. But safety lessons aren’t tabled only until meeting time; management and foremen use every workday as an opportunity for training.

“At these meetings, we’ll discuss issues and concerns focusing on safety, review safety procedures, and discuss equipment (protocols),” Maskiell says. “Also, while we’re out in the field, we’re doing safety

inspections with the workers and mentoring them on why safety is important – why it’s important for them to wear their safety equipment and how it benefits them.”

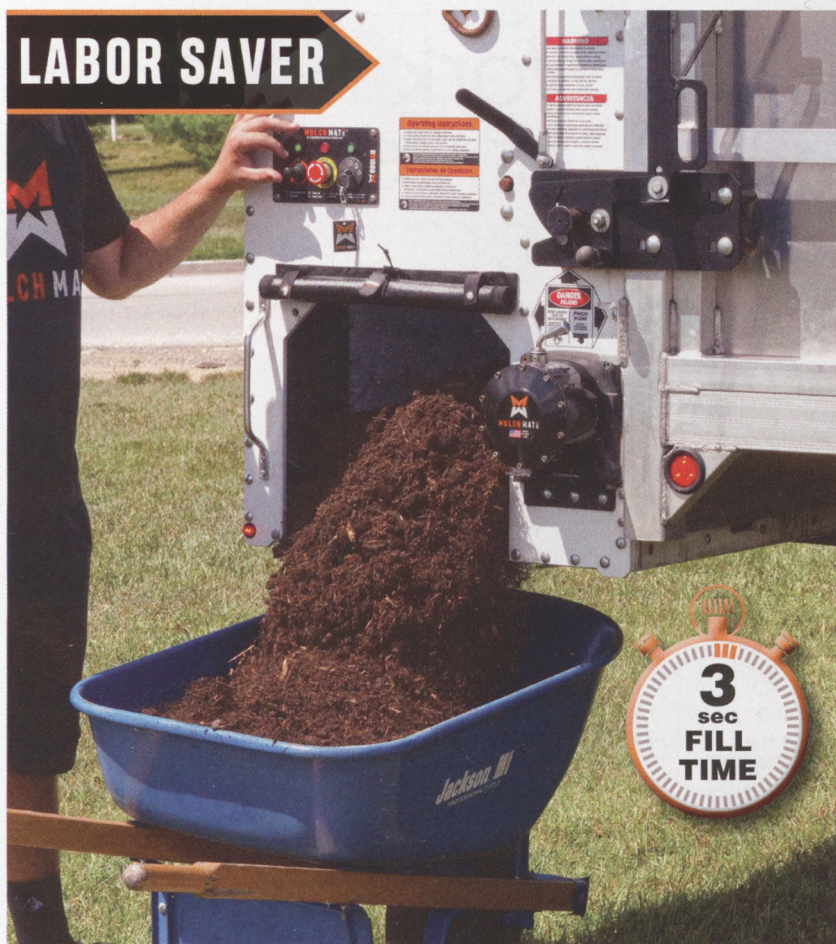
4. DOCUMENT MISTAKES AND REWARD SUCCESS.

Along with its spring and winter safety trainings, Clarence Davids also has an annual, company-wide fall safety meeting, during which employees with positive safety records are publicly recognized and awarded with sweatshirts or other company gear. Employees are also eligible for twice-a-year paycheck bonuses based on maintaining a clean safety record.

When incidents do occur, the issue is carefully documented and a crew foreman goes over the mistake with the team member.

“Each accident is written up, and it’s gone over by the supervisor and the employee,” Da-

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vids says. "Then when we pay out bonuses, they get a sheet that shows their record, either clean, or the date of the incident and what it was."

5. KEEP CREWS VISIBLE. In addition to providing visibility vests or jackets to team members, it's also essential to make trucks visible—and to find ways to clearly mark work zones—in order to avoid potential traffic, crew or pedestrian accidents.

"I would say safety cones, work zone signage, and caution tape (are essential), anything to prohibit people from coming into a work area if we're doing tree trimming or other work," Davids says.

6. BE MINDFUL OF COMMON SAFETY HAZARDS. When planning your teams' safety training, don't focus solely on large-scale safety hazards—such as chainsaw accidents or equip-

ment rollovers—while excluding smaller, more common ones.

"Truthfully, our biggest issues are bee stings and poison ivy," Snow says. "Those are our most frequent incident reports."

As a result, Snow & Sons safety training includes steps to avoid bees and how to identify and avoid poison ivy.

In a similar vein, Davids notes that some of the most common safety incidents his crews face involve rocks or other yard debris being thrown by a trimmer or mower.

To lessen the possibility that crews might slip or fall on the job, Mahoney Associates recently painted their mowing-trailer ramps with non-skid paint.

"If it's raining or if there's wet grass or leaves, your chance of having a slip and fall injury that could turn into a worker's comp case is lowered a lot," Mahoney says.

EASY ACCESS: Mahoney suggests having emergency numbers and addresses of nearby hospitals readily available to all employees.

The company also installed collapsible ladders on its dump trucks to ease in-and-out access.

"The (truck) bodies are so high in the air, so now (with the ladders) the teams have a step to get in and out," Mahoney says. "We welded handles [on the trucks] where the ladders were installed, so they have something to grab, minimizing someone jumping off and twisting an ankle or hurting their back trying to climb into the truck."

While building a safety culture takes commitment, crews with successful safety programs say the effort is worth it.

"It's a great morale-builder for the team as a whole," Maskiell says. "It shows the team that we care for them. It's important for the team, and it's important for the firm." **L&L**

The author is a freelance writer in Kentucky.



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For more info: Hunterindustries.com



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For more info: Rainbird.com



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WORKFORCE SUMMIT



46

Widen the pool

The 2020 Workforce Summit aims to help the industry find new avenues to fill the labor void.

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Tapped out

How do you find staff when it seems like you've tapped into every potential resource?

52

Diversifying your workforce

Bringing diversity to your workforce can be a remedy for the labor crisis, but it's imperative to understand why it's a problem and how to begin fixing it.



Industry professionals will connect to discuss solutions for the current labor crisis.

WIDEN THE POOL

The 2020 Workforce Summit aims to help the industry find new avenues to fill the labor void.

With a workforce crisis in the green industry continuing to stunt companies' growth, the National Association of Landscape Professionals Workforce Summit aims to provide a space for industry professionals to discuss possible solutions.

"The workforce shortage is the most pressing issue for landscape contractors," says NALP CEO, Britt Wood. "The Workforce Summit is quickly becoming nexus for new ideas in tackling the problem."

The two day-event features topics ranging from what other industries are doing to find labor solutions, to appealing to a diverse workforce and many others. There will also be breakfast and roundtable discussions about working with local schools, effective messaging about the industry, interviewing and hiring practices, and many other topics.

The keynote session, which you can read more about starting on page 48, will be given by speaker, author and former landscaper Eric Chester.

Chester will share findings from his research on where today's most innovative companies are finding seasonal and entry-level employees for non-glamorous jobs and what they are doing to retain unskilled workers.

"Today's emerging workforce is a symphony of people from different ages and ethnic groups and genders and backgrounds and attitudes and beliefs," Chester says.

Secretary of Labor, Eugene Scalia, and Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, have been invited to offer insight into what employers need to be doing to navigate today's challenging labor market.

Here are a few more sessions taking place at the event.

• **Brigitte Orrick, Davey Tree, and Mark Hopkins, LandCare: Success Stories: How Contractors are Spurring Educators to Promote the Profession.**

Companies across the industry are beginning to open doors in their local communities with educators – driving interest in the profession and creating effective partnerships between schools, students, and industry. Learn what's been impactful by those who are doing it right to learn how to create meaningful change for the profession in your town.

• **Tyler Bloom, Sparrows Point Country Club: Tactical Teachings for Hiring Today's Young People.**

Like it or not, you may need to accept helicopter-parenting and win-over a teen's parents and grandparents in the hiring process. You may need to ask what pronouns a teen would prefer to use. Your responsiveness to resume submissions may need to be more like attracting a customer than an employee, with digital and timely responsiveness, 24/7.

Hiring needs to be done differently today than it was done a generation or two ago – or even a year or two ago. This session will offer insight into what young people demand from today's recruitment process and explore how current practices may need to change to attract the best and the brightest.

• **Sarah Anderson, American Forests: Creating a Culture of Diversity and Inclusion.** This session, which you can read more about on page 52, is based on NALP's new Diversity and Inclusion program and will provide the framework and lenses for looking at your company differently to attract and retain communities of people currently under-represented.

The session will navigate difficult discussions including what systemic changes need to be made to attract women to entry level field positions and executive roles, and how to attract a workforce that more closely resembles society. Through facts, stats, testimonials and best practice examples Anderson will explore the benefits of breaking down existing barriers that may restrict the ability to attract the best and brightest to the field.

Visit bit.ly/nalpworkforce to register for the event. **L&L**



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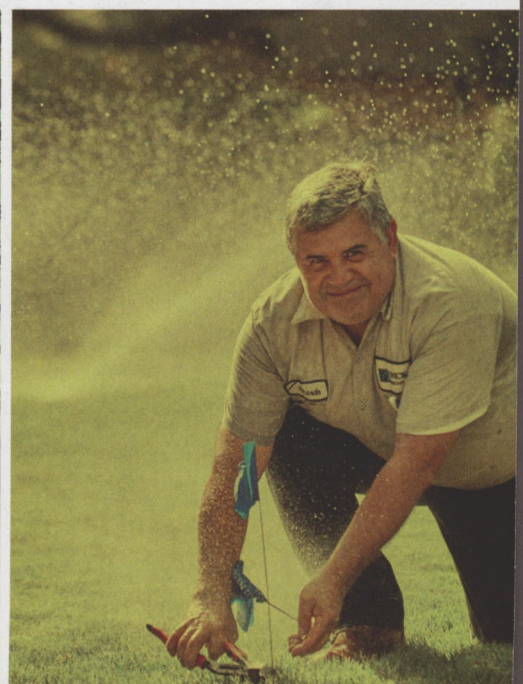
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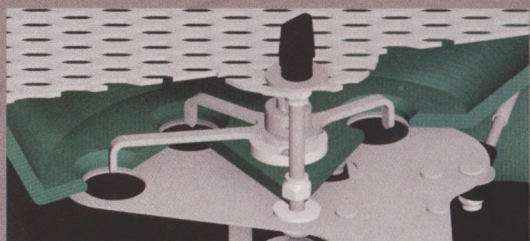
**TAPPED
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By Lauren Rathmell

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IT'S NOT JUST POSTING on job sites. How is everyone in your company working as a recruiter?

Eric Chester knows the landscaping business. He worked his way through high school and college caring for people's lawns. "Nobody woke up and said 'some day I hope I can install sprinklers'" he says. "Those aren't sexy jobs. But it doesn't mean that they can't be fun, pay well and be meaningful career employment. It's just that we don't have a generation that is focused on that."

The labor pool seems small, and Chester, also a former high school teacher, has spent time in the trenches with the exact generation of workers that so many companies are trying to employ.

"There's a prevailing attitude of the current workforce: You need me, I don't know if I need you because I could quit here. I have three job offers before lunch. I can swing a bat and hit five help wanted signs," he says.

In his soon-to-be-released book "Fully Staffed: The Definitive Guide for Finding and Keeping Great Employees in the Worst Labor Market Ever," Chester digs in on recruiting and retention tactics that professionals may not have considered until this point. He's presenting some takeaways from his book at NALP's Workforce Summit next month. "Every second will be spent on your workforce, and we're not just talking about young people. We're talking about a broad spectrum of people," he says.

A GREAT PLACE TO WORK. "There's nothing I'm going to tell an audience about recruiting that is going to be effective if you're not a great place to work because they're just going to leave and you're going to be on the hire-and-fire-hire-fire treadmill forever," he says. And, to be a great place to work, Chester has found several things that, no matter the age, a person will always look for in an employment opportunity.

1. Compensation. "They want a paycheck," he says.

2. Alignment. "They want to align themselves with a company that is doing good things."

3. Culture. "You must be continually working on your culture."

THINK OF YOU FIRST. Chester says doing some self-reflection is key. You need to identify what makes your company better than every single one of your competitors. "That is your reason for why your company is a good place to work," he says. And, that goes beyond having a Christmas party every year or barbecues when the weather gets nice, he says. "Until you can give me another answer, you don't know why your company is a good place to work."

BE A RELENTLESS RECRUITER. It's not just posting jobs on job sites, Chester says. "Everybody does that. What are you doing to recruit and not just you, the business owner. How is everybody in your organization involved in that pursuit?" Instilling the importance of recruitment at all levels will arm you with multiple recruiters who can reach audiences that you may not even be aware of.

"Do you have other sprinkler installers looking for sprinkler installers? They're probably going to find sprinkler installers before you do. That's who they hang out with," he says. Business owners should educate their staff on what to look for in a good employee and how they can

be recruiting people. And, you should be thinking about what you can do to reward those who do recruit well.

THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX. While it seems obvious, Chester says there are many groups of people that companies still miss when trying to recruit, even in this industry. He offers insights into sources of labor that companies may not have considered and also addresses how to go about recruiting them.

"It's not just about hiring veterans: it's where to find them and who exactly you're looking for," he says. Another often overlooked route is hiring employees with special needs. "There are people out there who can do far more than you give them credit for," he says. Chester even suggests recruiting retirees who often take jobs to keep them busy. "Are

you aware that there are many retirees that are 60 years old or even older that can work the 20-year-old under the table," he says.

PUTTING IT TO SCALE. "I'm all about giving solid, actionable ideas," he says. And it's not just about looking to large companies and corporations for advice.

"You don't have to be Google. But if you're a small landscaping company in Bismarck, North Dakota, you just have to make sure you're the best small landscaping in Bismarck, North Dakota," Chester says. "Everybody that's smacking their pillow at night going 'dammit, so-and-so called in sick again and I don't have enough to complete that crew'... they're going to understand what it takes to connect with the people that they need so desperately in their business." **L&L**



You don't have to be Google. But if you're a small landscaping company in Bismarck, North Dakota, you just have to make sure you're the best small landscaping in Bismarck, North Dakota."

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DIVERSIFYING

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Bringing diversity to your workforce can be a remedy for the labor crisis, **but it's imperative to understand why it's a problem and how to begin fixing it.**

By **Lauren Rathmell**



How do we account for the barriers to entry faced by minorities in our community?" That's the question Sarah Anderson, senior manager of tree equity for American Forest, aims to answer for the landscaping companies she consults with.

Diversity can seem like a buzzword, and every owner wants to think they run a diverse company, but Anderson says it's not always a simple task. And, with labor harder than ever to find, tapping into a more diversified workforce can benefit not only the company but the communities they serve.

Frankly, though, the industry is not very diverse, especially at the executive levels, Anderson says. In order to foster a more diverse environment, Anderson says companies can take several courses of action. During her presentation at the upcoming NALP Workforce Summit, she hopes to provide a pathway for companies to branch out into a more diverse company.

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We need to bring an equitable canopy to cover these areas. We can try to generate wealth for these areas with forestry."

WHY IT'S AN ISSUE. Anderson says historically marginalized areas generally aren't exposed to the same ecological environment as areas with a better socioeconomic status. "Trees grow in money," she says. "Places that were zoned for non-minority areas." This creates a huge lapse in awareness for potential green industry jobs. American Forests works towards establishing "tree equity" which means getting trees and green spaces into areas and communities that they're lacking. "We need to bring an equitable canopy to cover these areas," Anderson says. "We can try to generate wealth for these areas with forestry."

PUT YOUR COMMITMENT IN WRITING. "Company workforces don't currently reflect the population in the community they serve," she says. And the first step to remedying that may be acknowledging it. "Put it in writing to make an official commitment to being able to hire the communities that you are trying to

reach," she says. This isn't just communicated, but also demonstrated in the actions your company takes. "Host shadow days where members of marginalized communities can come observe someone in the field or teach them to pass a certification test," she says.

DO AN ASSESSMENT. Anderson recommends taking a good look at where your company might be struggling and if this is the right time to start focusing on diversity. Sometimes you may not have the capacity to commit to this movement right away, but knowing that will help your company make better decisions down the line.

"I always hear 'we don't know where to find women,'" Anderson says. "But they haven't even assessed what they're doing organizationally to prevent that."

It's okay to realize you don't have means to move forward with hiring efforts now, but make some sort of resolution that you are going to do this in the future.

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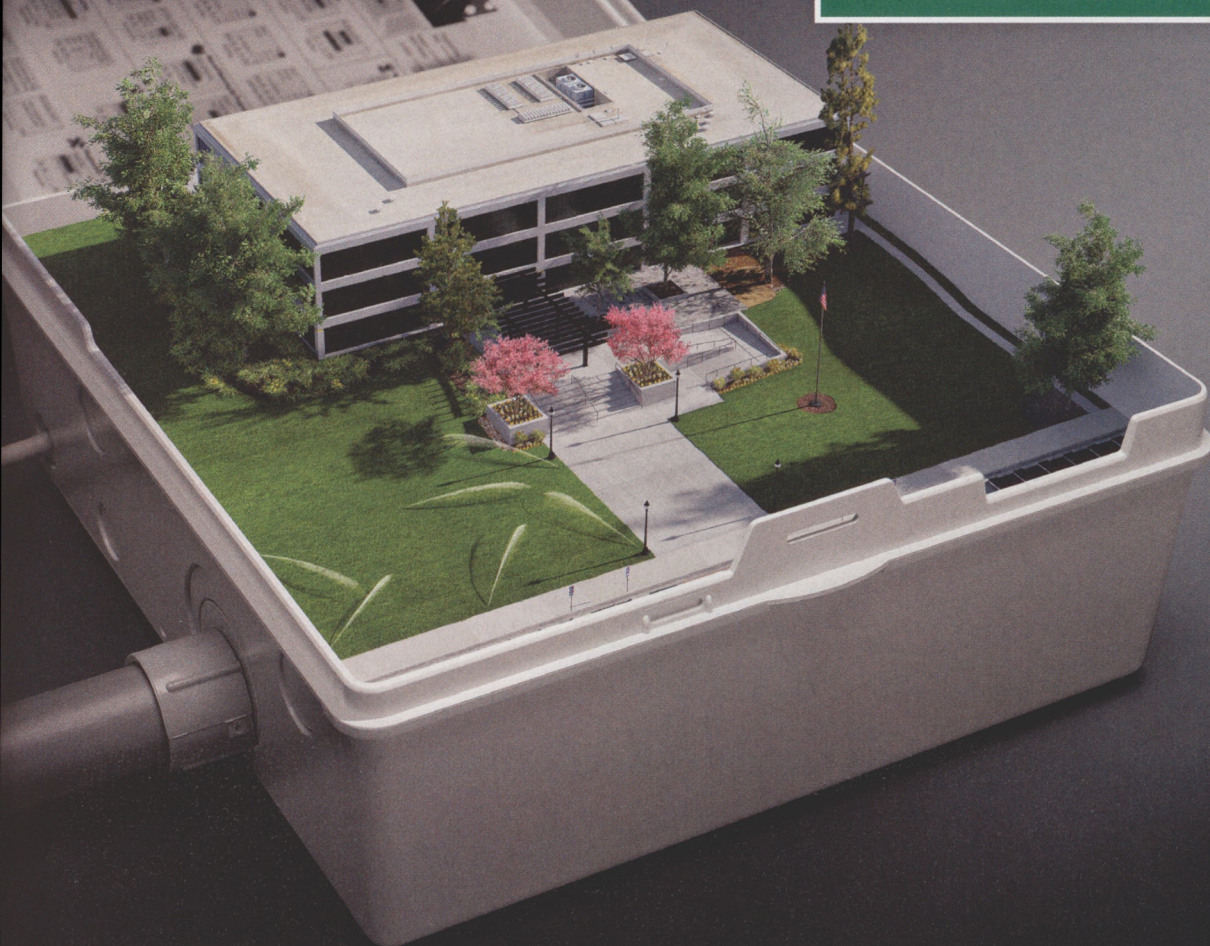


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"If a you're not at the stages where you can start a full revolution, make a point to commit to a certain number of hours mentoring a population that is underserved. There are

ways to take action at every level," she says. "Meaningful commitments need to be tied to your business plans." And, your goals need to reflect the communities you're trying to

reach and match what their priorities are.

TAKE ACTION. There are small steps your company can make towards a more diversified workforce.

One suggestion might be to employ someone who is neutral in terms of hierarchy. This person can act as a safe and trusted confidant for voicing issues or complaints. There aren't any repercussions for voicing issues to this person, which builds trusts amongst employees. "This person isn't seen as a superior," she says. "This is a great way to build trust in your company. Anybody that feels like an outsider who doesn't feel like they're fitting in on a crew can then talk to that person. And then that way the crew leader isn't the person on the hook to talk to HR."

And while it seems like a no-brainer, try asking your currently marginalized workers what would make them more comfortable. "Sometimes for women for example, they say 'it'd be great if we could have some equipment that was designed for our size,'" Anderson says.

She also suggests recognizing the need for more flexible work hours or maybe an in-house translator. "Maybe you need to decide if you can shift your business model to accommodate those with childcare needs or transportation challenges," she says.

REACH YOUR COMMUNITIES. "The best way to work with marginalized groups of people is to build relationships with community-based groups that have existing ties to the part of the population that we want to hire from," she says.

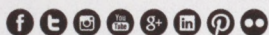
Often, the population won't know who is working on the city park across the street. "They don't know what the contractors are doing who work in that park across the street from their house. 'Who are you, what are you are doing, you're making all this noise,'" she says.

When companies don't try to bridge the gap between their work and underserved communities, they lose potential employees and even lose market share. **L&L**

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A large, stylized graphic of an eye in shades of blue and orange. The eye is composed of concentric, curved shapes that form the iris and eyelids. The top right corner of the image is a solid orange shape, while the rest of the background is a deep blue. The text is overlaid on the blue portion of the eye.

2020 EYE ON **INNOVATION**

CUTTING-EDGE SOLUTIONS
TO HELP LANDSCAPE CONTRACTORS
STREAMLINE THEIR BUSINESSES

EYE ON INNOVATION

LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE

5 REASONS WHY SOFTWARE MATTERS

By Kevin Kehoe

In the landscape sector, business management software has transformed the way many companies operate. However, to those who have not yet implemented an industry-specific solution, the benefits may not be as clear. If you've been left asking, "Do I need software for my business, and why?" here are five reasons why software does matter to consider.

Landscape management software can help you:

1. Gain control of your business
2. Increase profitability
3. Boost productivity
4. Scale your business
5. Ensure customer retention

Gaining Control

Business management software provides valuable, end-to-end functionality to your entire company. Information from every department is input into one system, providing accessibility and visibility across the business to aid decision making. With this increased awareness, owners and general managers can make proactive, informed decisions to keep the business on course. Adjusting course is much easier—and more successful—when done incrementally, in real time, versus triaging an unknown situation weeks or months later.

Increasing Profitability

Accessing your business's information in one centralized system is far more than a convenience. In fact, it can even influence whether your company makes money or not. With full visibility into the factors that impact profits, owners and managers can

better determine where improvements are needed—and why. For example, if a job is losing money, an operations manager can review all aspects of the project, from labor to materials, to assess if the discrepancy is related to crew productivity or pricing. Likewise, business owners can review services for profitability and adjust their service mix accordingly. Or, if a customer is costing the company money, business owners can decide whether to terminate the relationship or not. Maintaining a healthy bottom line is greatly simplified with real-time insight into your company's profits.

Boosting Productivity

Regardless of your role, chasing down information to do your job is both frustrating and a waste of time. With business management software, information is immediately accessible across the organization. For accounting, this is particularly beneficial: not only does an end-to-end system improve accuracy by eliminating duplicate data entry and manual processes, it also helps ensure financial statements and reports are completed on time. On the operations front, quick access to estimating and purchasing tools, as well as daily crew timecards, helps streamline processes to free up time for high-value activities. As productivity increases organization-wide, it's possible to accomplish more with the resources at hand.

Scaling for Profitable Growth


Growth is often a primary objective for businesses; yet the real challenge faced by most is scaling. Typically, growing com-

panies add resources at the same rate as revenue, and profits remain flat. Scalable growth occurs when revenues increase but overhead remains level, resulting in higher profit margins. By increasing efficiency and boosting productivity, business management software helps companies accomplish more without adding resources to achieve profitable growth.

Retaining Customers

Although customer acquisition supports revenue goals, the reality is: current customers have a greater impact on your bottom line. Crews work more efficiently when servicing familiar properties, which in turn improves labor margins—plus there's no cost of sale associated with current customers. Retention can also drive acquisition through word-of-mouth referrals and case studies. A multitude of factors may contribute to customer retention, but ultimately the key to keeping clients is delivering the best possible experience. Business management software helps field and back-office operations run seamlessly so jobs are completed correctly and on time, invoices are sent in a timely manner, and customers remain satisfied.

In all, there are many approaches to optimizing your business. However, no single strategy will impact your success as greatly as implementing business management software. From the back office to the field, landscape management software has the power to help you gain control of your business and increase margins by simplifying processes, streamlining operations, boosting productivity, and improving customer retention.



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EYE ON INNOVATION

SUSTAINABLE FERTILIZATION



MATT MARTIN

Co-Founder, Carbon Earth

1 What makes your fertilizer technology unique?

At Carbon Earth, we developed a novel nutrient release method we call Carbon Release Root Promoting (CRRP) Technology. Our technology begins in the renewable energy sector with the production of green energy. We take the by-product of the renewable energy production, biochar, and put it through a creatively engineered manufacturing process that allows us to capture the positive benefits of biochar while mitigating the risks. Through a specialized agglomeration setup, we can then combine specific plant nutrients and root hair promoting peptides with the biochar to alter the release curve, ultimately extending availability and efficiency of those nutrients. This allows us to offer a host of products with equal or greater performance metrics compared to what is currently available on the market without the reliance on micro-plastics, polymers, vinyl, or materials that may resist biodegradation in the soil, and all for a comparable price.

2 Why are people considering your fertilizer for their business?

With the environmental pressures raining down on LCOs across the country, we have seen a growing focus among

companies on how to be more sustainable. As a company that focuses on research, development, and manufacturing within the circular economy, it's truly a perfect fit. We can supply products that offer predictable results commonly seen with purely conventional products, however; we have the added benefit of also delivering bio-stimulants, organic matter, and even soil amending ingredients all in a single fertilizer prill.

3 What are the long-term impacts of using your fertilizer?

When an LCO chooses to use our product, they are no longer "throwing down" fertilizer. They have a decided to participate in the circular economy. Renewable energy production moves to poultry production moves to fertilizer production and biomass waste goes back to renewable energy production. Within this model, we provide LCOs with a solution to integrate best management practices with a product that can have an overwhelming positive impact on converting urban green spaces into a carbon-sink. For the LCO, the client, and the environment, it is a win on all fronts. Biochar has been studied as one of the great successes of the Terra Preta and its ability to function as a carbon sink. Long-term

impacts of integrating our CRRP Technology into best management practices ultimately allows a conversion of home lawns into these same carbon sinks.

4 How does your technology work?

CRRP Technology works in two parts: 1. Provide a loaded delivery vehicle to protect and serve valuable inputs and 2. Provide a unique bio-stimulant to signal explosive root production. Given that granular fertilizers achieve nutrient uptake through the root system, our technology focuses on a multi-faceted approach – increase root biomass to increase uptake potential and protect those nutrients with an adsorptive natural carbon source. CRRP Technology's two parts in our fertilizer products allows us to positively impact soil structure and tilth, deliver bio-stimulants that signal unrivaled root performance, and supply nutrients to maintain peak plant performance.

5 How does CRRP Technology impact an LCOs bottom line?

Because CRRP Technology can improve soil, root, and shoot performance in a single application, the first way we help LCOs save money is through labor. By replacing what is usually accomplished

in two to three applications, we can achieve in one application. And because of our unique manufacturing ability within the circular economy, we can often deliver the results of three applications in a single application, for the cost of a single application.

Secondly, we deliver results, and for any LCO, results is one of the most important parts of reputation and brand management. One of the companies we worked with last year, Picture Perfect Lawn Maintenance in Dinwiddie, VA, experienced over 100% growth after integrating our program. Their two top drivers of growth were "Signs in Neighbor's Lawn" and "Referrals." Speaking with the president, Jimmy Cox, he was impressed that such a high percentage of new leads were driven by potential clients stating, "They want a lawn that looks like their neighbor's."

For us to have that kind of impact on a business is exactly what we strive to do because not only are we helping that company grow, we are helping that company impact the environment in a carbon negative way. The more companies we can affect in this way, the stronger our opportunity grows to highlight to the rest of the world exactly how important our industry and our LCOs are to the preservation of our planet.

CRRP TECHNOLOGY



CARBON RELEASE ROOT PROMOTING

CRRP Technology is our answer to total plant nutrition - soil, roots, and shoots. This complete health approach is designed to impact not only plant performance, but environmental sustainability. When choosing to use Carbon Earth products, you're not just choosing a fertilizer. You're making a conscious decision to positively impact the environment, water systems, and the Green Industry.

- Patent-pending granulated biochar fortified with **N-P-K, minors, and biostimulants.**
- The only granular fertilizer featuring biochar infused with **Root Hair Promoting Peptides**
- Consistent feed for up to **twelve weeks**



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EYE ON INNOVATION MINI EXCAVATORS

CATERPILLAR INTRODUCES NEW 306 CR MINI EXCAVATOR

Includes industry-first features inspired by customers

When developing the next generation of mini excavators, we focused on the single most important component—you. Because it's you who digs the ditches, dredges ponds and shapes the land, so your input means a lot to us. In fact, it was that feedback that helped influence the newest addition to our Next Generation lineup—the 306 CR.

The Cat® 306 CR Mini Excavator

Customer insights helped us debut several industry-first features into our Next Generation lineup that provide an unmatched operator experience, performance and serviceability. And now, you can enjoy the same in a 6 ton model.

With the Cat® 306 CR Mini Excavator, you can expect maximum power and performance in a mini size to help you tackle landscaping projects in increasingly tighter work spaces.

This all starts with a greater lift capacity that allows you to lift more with ease, offering industry-leading performance right where you need it, and allowing you to do more with your mini excavator than you thought possible.

But we didn't stop there—the stick steer control enables the operator to easily switch from traditional travel control with levers and pedals to joystick controls at the push of a button. No more hunching over when you need to track

long distances, it's all in the wrist with stick steer. But stick steer isn't just about enhancing comfort. It also makes operating a mini excavator much more intuitive and productive, especially for operators who are already familiar with operating skid steers.

In the 306 CR Mini Excavator, you can travel longer distances seamlessly with cruise control. This allows you to continuously travel without holding down the levers or the joystick, all while preserving the ability to safely stop the machine in several ways. This is great for tracking and grading long distances, you just need to steer.

Additionally, operators can enjoy intuitively designed full color LCD monitors with a jog dial for easy ergonomic interaction, which come standard on all next generation machines. These displays also come equipped with hands-free Bluetooth® compatibility, allowing operators to safely answer calls and stream audio.

As if that weren't enough, all standard maintenance points are easily accessed from ground level, because we know that maintenance that's easy to do is maintenance that gets done. Because we know that dents and dings can be expensive, these machines feature a modular panel design with consistent sizing across multiple models, ensuring you only replace the piece that was damaged. This, along with common parts across models, makes servicing your equipment easier than ever.

Next Generation Mini Excavators

In addition to the 306 CR, the next generation mini excavators come in 1-2 ton and 7-10 ton size classes. They may be mini, but they are powerful.

Customers interested in a smaller size class can experience all of the industry-first features and best-in-class serviceability found in the 306 CR in our 1-2 ton machines, which offer a sealed and pressurized cab with air conditioning, a first for this size class.

For those needing in a larger mini excavator, our 7-10 ton size class delivers leading performance in various applications. The 309 CR is equipped with a dedicated auxiliary pump to provide high flow hydraulics and unmatched attachment performance, while the 310 boasts a lift capacity up to 10,000 lbs. for those heavy lifting applications.

Whatever your mini excavator needs may be, our next generation mini excavators provide the solution. They promise a big experience in the smallest package so you can complete more landscaping projects, no matter the task. To learn more about the new 306 CR and the rest of our suite of next generation mini excavators, please visit cat.com/NextGenMiniExcavators or to learn more about all of our landscape offerings, check out cat.com/en_US/by-industry/landscaping.html



BIG PERFORMANCE IN A 6 TON PACKAGE

INTRODUCING THE NEW CAT® 306 CR,
DESIGNED WITH OUR CUSTOMERS IN MIND.



**YOU NEED A MACHINE
THAT CAN DO IT ALL,
WITH INDUSTRY-FIRST
FEATURES TO BACK IT UP:**

- GREATER LIFT CAPACITY
- STICK STEER
- CRUISE CONTROL
- FULL COLOR LCD MONITOR
WITH BLUETOOTH



LEARN MORE ABOUT ALL OF OUR NEXT GENERATION CAT® MINI EXCAVATORS AT [HTTPS://WWW.CAT.COM/NEXTGENMINIEXCAVATORS](https://www.cat.com/nextgenminiexcavators)



EYE ON INNOVATION ZERO-TURN MOWERS



JAMIE BRIGGS

Director of Marketing, Exmark

1 How can landscape contractors increase the productivity of maintenance crews?

A: Landscape maintenance professionals are always looking to get more work done, more quickly, with fewer workers. For some contractors, that means adding larger, faster, more powerful mowers, while for others, it's about finding the best mower size(s) for the properties they maintain. No two situations are exactly alike, which is why Exmark offers a wide range of mower types and sizes.

Ergonomics and operator comfort are two big considerations when choosing the right equipment, because they affect an operator's ability to work efficiently. sustainably produce at a

high level. A productive mower is only productive if sustainably operable, and comfort is a key component of that sustainability.

2 What are examples of Exmark innovations that help each crew member be more productive?

A: Exmark's 96-inch Lazer Z Diesel and Lazer Z X-Series zero-turn riding mowers raise the bar for the productivity one operator can achieve. Thanks to their hydraulically foldable wing decks, these 96-inch machines take up no more room on a trailer than a 72-inch machine.

On the other hand, for many Exmark customers, a more productive mower that fits through common 36-inch gates is extremely valuable. Innovative new machines like our 32-inch Staris E-Series stand-on mower and Commercial 30 X-Series walk-behind mower give these contractors more productive options to finish small yards faster than ever.

3 Reducing downtime is a big deal for landscape professionals. How is Exmark using innovation to address this customer need?

A: Innovations that reduce downtime and necessary maintenance are a big focus at Exmark. Our new Tractus airless tire and wheel combo is a great example of this. Available this spring as an accessory for select 2020 Lazer Z zero-turn riding mowers, the Tractus tire and wheel combination works with Exmark's airless caster wheels to completely eliminate flat tire-related downtime. Tractus raises the bar in every area compared to traditional pneumatic tires. Benefits include increased traction, more consistent ground pressure and a larger contact patch for reduced turf compaction and increased cut quality.

4 What technology is Exmark incorporating into their machines to improve efficiency and productivity?

A: Exmark's patented RED Technology works with state of the art EGov-equipped gasoline and diesel engines to increase fuel efficiency without compromising

productivity. RED Technology monitors vital mower functions, machine health and operating metrics in real time, making it easier for contractors to stay on top of maintenance needs.

Exmark has also incorporated Smart Controllers into a number of its zero-turn, stand-on and walk-behind mower models. Designed to offer a more robust operator interface than a traditional hour meter and reduce downtime, the Smart Controller tracks total hours, fuel level, maintenance reminders and machine health status.

5 As we move into the 2020 season, what trends do you see developing?

A: Labor shortages will continue to be a challenge for landscape contractors, so it will be more important than ever to maximize the productivity of each crew member every day. As a result, more productive mowers like our 96-inch Lazer Z Diesel and Lazer Z X-Series models will continue to be in high demand. They significantly raise the bar for the amount of work one employee can get done in a day, and they're comfortable enough to do it again the next day.



INNOVATION THAT
RAISES THE BAR
FOR PRODUCTIVITY.



INTRODUCING
96-INCH GAS-POWERED LAZER Z®

For 2020, Exmark raises the bar again with the introduction of the gas-powered 96-inch Lazer Z X-Series zero-turn mower. Powered by a Kohler® Command PRO® EFI air-cooled engine and equipped with Exmark's patented RED Technology, the new machine features a durable UltraCut™ Flex Wing cutting deck. With a 48-inch center deck and two 24-inch wing decks, the 96-inch Lazer Z X-Series is the right tool to make quick work of the largest, toughest jobs, while delivering Exmark's signature cut quality. By cutting more grass, on more properties, with fewer operators, the 96-inch Lazer Z X-Series enables customers to reduce labor costs and increase revenue potential. It provides the performance, productivity and unique value today's landscape maintenance operation needs.

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EYE ON INNOVATION STAND-ON MOWERS

HUSQVARNA'S MOWER LINEUP IS EXPANDED WITH A STAND-ON V500 MOWER SERIES

Rounding out the company's commercial mower portfolio, Husqvarna's V500 stand-on mowers series for commercial-grade lawn care combines extreme efficiency, durability along with a compact design and excellent maneuverability. The two V500 models – the V548 and V554 – come with full zero-turn capability and the ergonomic body cushion in both mower models will provide maximum comfort for the operator. Providing rapid mount-dismount, unbeatable maneuverability and ergonomic operation, operators will get the best of a zero-turn mower and a commercial walk-behind mower combined with Husqvarna's V500 zero-turn mower series.

Built to endure, the V500 mower series is constructed with the toughest materials available. The reinforced 2-by-2 industrial-strength tubular steel frame, cast-iron spindles and heavy-duty cutting deck are built to withstand season after season of commercial use. The heavy-duty construction combined with industrial strength drive systems deliver long-lasting operation in any commercial application and is backed by Husqvarna's industry-leading 5-year limited commercial warranty.

For fast, convenient access and service, the V500 models are equipped with tool-less tracking adjustment and removable deck covers, easy-to-reach transmission by-pass and front-mounted hydro tanks and pumps. Other additions



include a digital color fuel gauge that will let the operator get a quick overview of fuel levels.

In order to achieve maximum productivity, the V500 mower series also streamlines maintenance. All service points of the mower can be accessed with minimum tools required, saving the operator time with its easy-access tanks and pumps, outboard bypass levers, a flip-down mowing pad and tool-less tracking adjustment. The mower's flip-up anti-slip operator standing platform, for example, allows the operator the option to either stand or walk behind the mower if necessary. The V500's compact design also allows you to bring more equipment to the job site for increased productivity. Available with a 48" or 54" Commercial ClearCut deck, the V500 models provide

excellent grass cutting and management, ensuring efficient operation throughout.

Other features include the fastest method of disengaging the hydraulic transmissions through the use of one lever pull to make both transmissions go to bypass mode, tool-less removal of the operator's cushion, an easy-access operator console, palm deck release, Kawasaki V-Twin engines and a high-leverage deck lift. The operator can also stand between the axles of the mower, positioning them between the wheels instead of behind, in order to more appropriately distribute weight for enhanced traction and a reduction in effort from the operator to stay perfectly balanced during zero-turn maneuvers.

The Husqvarna V500 stand-on mower series represents extreme efficiency in commercial mowing.

V500 SERIES SETTING THE STANDARD IN STAND-ON MOWERS



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OUTSTANDING FEATURES IN A SMART AND COMPACT PACKAGE.

Providing zero-turn capability, rapid mount-dismount, and ergonomic operation, the V500 Series puts extreme efficiency in your commercial mowing fleet. Heavy duty construction, ClearCut™ decks, industrial strength drive systems and easy service access provide uncompromised cutting results every time. Plus, the compact design fits perfectly on your truck or trailer. [HUSQVARNA.COM](https://www.husqvarna.com)

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34 MINS

Client Notes

Info Job
Instructions
Regular cutting; do edging and dispose of
clippings; provide mower and other equipment.
Per sq. ft. QTY
1.5

Line Items

Labor

Hourly charge

Checklist

Take and upload before and after pic

Tell customer about spring

Complete

Timezone

Q&A WITH MATT IKARD & JEFF SMITH

Medium Duty Truck Sales, Neely Coble Company

First and foremost, why is the Isuzu truck the ultimate truck for landscaping?

MI: "I'd have to say the first thing that comes to mind is its design. It's a low cab forward truck, which makes it incredibly easy to maneuver. [Additionally] we're able to upfit it with any number of applications, which completely eliminates the need for a trailer. With landscaping, where there are a variety of needs, whether you're just mowing or doing hardscapes, being able to have a dedicated truck with the right body makes all the difference."

JS: "We also see that Isuzu trucks have a greater resale value than competitors. It's a versatile vehicle that can be kept busy year round."

How long has Neely Coble Company carried the Isuzu product and what makes them a superior dealership?

MI: "Neely Coble Company was the fourth dealership in the United States to incorporate the Isuzu product into our lineup of commercial trucks - we've carried the product since 1985. I feel what makes our dealership superior is our reputation for having work ready trucks on the ground, ready for delivery. We've really mastered the development of the "ideal" landscaper truck,

and while we're able to build a truck to meet any of your business needs, our available inventory really is impressive and our close relationship with local body companies allows us to keep up with demand.

Tell me a little about the "ideal" landscaper truck.

MI: "Well, we typically carry a significant number of the Isuzu NPR and NPR-HD Gas trucks in both single and crew cab. We partner with Wil-Ro, Inc. in upfitting it with a remove-able dovetail truck bed. We've really been able to hone in on a product that maximizes efficiency and have spent many years analyzing market needs and ensuring we are able to keep up with demand. The biggest benefit to this type of truck is its functionality. It essentially gives our customer three adjustable bodies in one truck - a landscape body, a flat bed (within five minutes of removing the dovetail) and then a dump body with the addition of a hoist package."

JS: "We found that having ample inventory of these trucks has been especially beneficial for our landscape customers. The lead time on a body application can be anywhere between 8-10 weeks, so having these trucks on the ground ready to go, makes a huge difference."

So why Gas versus Diesel?

JS: It really depends on how much you plan on running the truck. Most landscape businesses are localized and are only covering about 10,000 to 15,000 miles a year. Where diesel really starts to pay off is at around the 28,000 mark. That's not to say that diesel doesn't have its place if someone were looking for something with a greater torque options. We're happy to build whatever truck most meets a businesses needs, but we find that often Gas is the most cost efficient option for the landscape industry."

Perhaps most importantly, what is the total cost of ownership for these trucks?

JS: We've already discussed the resale value of Isuzu trucks compared to other vehicles, and the ability to opt for a gas versus diesel engine, both of which significantly reduce your total cost of ownership. Additionally, Isuzu offers great financing options, and with our own dedicated F&I manager we're able to provide all the resources needed for purchasing an Isuzu landscape truck. Additionally, Isuzu offers an industry leading base warranty of 5 years or 75,000 miles on their gas drive train and 3 years or unlimited mileage on diesel, easing the burden of maintenance as well!

Neely Coble Company

YOUR LANDSCAPE TRUCK HEADQUARTERS



ISUZU
TRUCK

ISUZU NPR GAS TRUCK

12,000 GVWR | 297 HP | 372 lb-ft Torque | Tilt & Telescopic Steering Column | 30 Gallon in-frame fuel tank | Single and Crew Cab Options Available!

ISUZU NPR-HD GAS TRUCK

14,500 GVWR | 297 HP | 372 lb-ft Torque | Tilt & Telescopic Steering Column | 30 Gallon in-frame fuel tank | Single and Crew Cab Options Available!

Neely Coble Company was built on the premise that *"The Customer Comes First!"* After adding almost 70 years of truck experience, and the progressive ideas of today's technology, there are few dealerships that can offer your business more support!



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Integrated solutions working together to maximize efficiencies and grow your business



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Providing tools to help your staff maximize efficiencies will help you manage your team.

"Real Green allowed us to run lean - the software so convenient and keeps everything in one spot, rather than across multiple systems or software."

- Andrew Wesselman, Owner & Partner, A & A Lawncare and Landscape - Florence, KY

Maximizing and retaining your current team is crucial to maintain a high level of customer satisfaction and to grow your business. While labor-management tools undoubtedly assist you in making the most of the qualified people you do have, time management and efficiency tools will help your staff work smarter and manage themselves.

Andrew Wesselman, owner, and founding partner of A & A Lawncare and Landscape, located in Florence, Kentucky, shared their growth story and how the right software solutions helped them increase overall efficiencies and better manage their time. He and the A & A team can now concentrate on growing the business.

Besides Service Assistant®, what tools did you start with to help maximize your time?

"When we started, we were much smaller. I was the only one in the office. I like the routing software. It's so easy to transfer schedules into **Routing Assistant** to see what's available for a given day and schedule the most effective routes for my technicians."

Tight, efficient routes minimize drive times while maximizing the number of customers each team can service in a day, week, month, helps contain costs and increase revenue. Something as simple as scheduling stops on the same side of a street saves countless hours and allows each technician or team to service more customers, in turn enabling a company to operate and grow with a reduced headcount.

How do you manage your technicians in the field?

"From a production standpoint, with **Mobile Live®**, the techs have their work on tablets in their trucks and can post each job as completed. Start and stop times are noted, and it allows one person to enter all the production for our lawn care and mowing teams every day. It's good from a customer standpoint, too, because they get their invoices right away."

Mobile Live is a leader in field team management and empowerment tools. Instantly know the location of your technicians using Mobile Live's real-time vehicle tracking. The app monitors and notes weather conditions and wind speed at the time of application, allows you to document inventory, customize job notes, and schedule services

throughout the day to available work crews. Technicians can note problem areas on a property and document each account with images. Teams have the ability to safely accept and process payments in the field through the app, allowing them to sell and upsell products and services in the field.

Efficient use of time isn't only a challenge for your staff in the field. Your office staff also needs tools to help them use their time more effectively in the growth and maintenance of your business. Real Green helps companies of all sizes communicate more efficiently.

What tools do you use to help maximize your office staff's time?

"The Green industry has a bad rap with customers for not receiving timely callbacks or taking too long to send information. We strive not to make people wait for an estimate, or have them waiting to make a payment or anything like that. Real Green has allowed us to be able to do that.

"We have **Automated Marketing® Assistant** and use the After Service emails that send invoices to customers. That's helping with cash flow because people have service and payment information as soon as we post-production. Everything happens so quickly because of system integration. It makes it easier for people to do business with us. This tool helps us keep pace with the large competitors in the area."

The Automated Marketing tool utilizes customer behaviors and service account data to send personalized, detailed messages to customers automatically. Over 50 communications cover every aspect of the customer journey from new sale confirmations to credit card expiration notifications to canceled customer win-back drip campaigns.

This tool helps smaller, or startup businesses appear more fully staffed while assisting enterprise companies in making customer communications highly personal and relevant without manual intervention on thousands of accounts. Users can track engagement and ROI, and make edits to marketing campaigns and interactions on the fly based on real-time response data from a centralized dashboard.

"We also use the **Service Assistant** Call Log every day, and it has made us who we are. In my position, I usually don't get involved with customers unless they threaten to cancel or something happened. It's usually a problem. It's important to have a consistent follow-up.

If I don't get hold of them that same day, a reminder pops up the next day and keeps popping up until I reach them. When I resolve their problem, I can set a reminder to follow back up with them in a week or even a year to see how they're doing. I'm not writing it down and losing a post-it note; it's noted right on that customer's account. I'm sure there are other things out there; however, this ties everything back to the customer, and everyone in the company can see what's going on with each customer."

The **Call Log** is a repository for all emails, phone calls, texts, letters, any communication with a customer is noted here, so everyone in an organization knows the exact customer status at any given time. Wherever your team happens to be, they can all offer a superior customer experience by having access to all pertinent customer communications at all times.

"**Measurement Assistant®** allows us to give estimates over the phone or include accurate pricing on marketing mailers. It's a game-changer when you can give a quote while you're still on the phone with someone or send them exact pricing in an email or on a marketing piece and know it's fair to them and you because you didn't have to guess. It's also a huge time and resource savings because we don't have to travel to a customer to measure their property."

Having a measurement tool integrated with your CRM saves time, improves quote accuracy, and enhances the value of your customer marketing data. Supplement a quote with an aerial property photo to further personalize estimates and promotional pieces. Measurements can be done anytime, from anywhere without physically visiting a property, expediting the entire estimating process.

Finding qualified technicians will continue to be a challenge, and labor management can seem like a daunting task. However, with time-saving automation tools that support the way you and your teams work, your staff will become more self-sufficient, efficient, and virtually manage themselves. Real Green Systems offers an entire suite of tools to maximize your team's time and productivity in all areas of your business – from marketing to the actual service applications, inventory management, and more.

Still standing

The latest stand-on mowers offer enhanced operator comfort options and a precise cut.



CUB CADET PRO X

The pitch: In late 2019, Cub Cadet unveiled the latest addition to its PRO Series, announcing the PRO X Series of stand-on mowers.

- A fully fabricated 10-gauge deck shell with 7-gauge top and bottom reinforcements gives the PRO X Series a strong backbone.
- The adjustable hip pad with ample side supports offers comfort and stability when mowing slopes. A large, fully adjustable suspension platform allows the operator to adjust tension quickly and easily.
- With a maintenance-free design, the spindles, bearings, hubs, casters, rims, linkages, levers and other pivot points do not need greasing.

For more info: Cubcadet.com



GRAVELY PRO-STANCE

The pitch: Take on hills with confidence with the Gravely Pro-Stance, designed to deliver power and performance in environments that demand quick on and off versatility.

- Available in a wide range of deck sizes, from 32-inch to 60-inch.
- Redistributed center of gravity for increased stability and maneuverability.
- Adjustable cruise bar limits and expands speed in tight working environments, and a thumb release and vertical pin system adds ease to cutting height adjustments.

For more info: Gravely.com



EXMARK STARIS STAND-ON ZERO-TURN RIDING MOWER

The pitch: Exmark's new Staris stand-on riding mowers deliver commercial performance, durability, ergonomics and ease of service.

- Staris is available in E-Series models, with a choice of 32-, 36- or 44-inch UltraCut Series 3 cutting decks, and large-frame S-Series models, with 48-, 52-, or 60-inch UltraCut Series 4 cutting decks.
- Intuitive, ergonomic controls make Staris models easy to operate.
- Staris frame design and caster wheel positioning are optimized for each cutting deck width for superior cut quality.

For more info: Exmark.com



TORO GRANDSTAND MULTI FORCE STAND-ON MOWER

The pitch: Toro's GrandStand MULTI FORCE features the ability to switch attachments for year-round productivity.

- The new Toro MULTI FORCE aerator attachment can handle 66,000 square feet per hour at 5 mph.
- Operators can turn the Toro MULTI FORCE into a spring cleanup tool with a front-mount tine rake dethatcher.
- The aerator has six floating rotor heads that lift independently, and three caster assemblies with two floating cast iron tine rotor heads.

For more info: Toro.com

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the 'WHY' and the 'HOW'

Understanding Millennials and Generation Z takes tracing their influences back to their roots.

By Jimmy Miller

Phil Gwoke's daughter just wanted to know why he was mad at her.

She wanted to know why Gwoke, a speaker from generational consulting firm Bridge-Works, would act cool with her in person but seemed frustrated via text. Gwoke had no idea what she meant – he certainly wasn't mad at her, and he couldn't figure out why she believed he was upset. Even after scrolling through the messages, he didn't see anything that indicated frustration.

Here's what he was missing: He ended a goodnight message with a period. His simple, direct punctuation on "OK. Love you." made

sense to him, but he realized that his college-aged daughter had grown up using technology that allowed younger generations to convey emotion. She viewed the period as a firm way of ending the conversation. Punctuation was nearly as important as the words themselves.

Gwoke pointed out plenty of these generational differences in his CEO Forum presentation at LANDSCAPES 2019. Titled, "Breaking into the Millennial Mind," Gwoke showed listeners how events during each generation's formative years shaped their personalities now as working adults. Additionally, he made a few suggestions on how to appeal to millennials and Generation Z, who could be your employees or clients. But above all, he challenged attendees to remove their previous paradigms and biases as best they could.

"To break into anyone else's mind, you need to be able to break out of your own mindset," Gwoke said.

MOLDING A MILLENNIAL. Gwoke pointed out other paradigms that differ between

generations. For example, a millennial knows how to roll down a car window by pressing a button, not cranking a handle. The save button on most computer applications looks like a floppy disc because that's what people used before, but now it's a forgotten technology.

"If you handed an actual floppy disk to a 13-year-old person today, they would look in bewilderment wondering why you made a 3-D printing of the save button," Gwoke said.

Despite this, Gwoke cautioned listeners on blaming technology as a scapegoat for frustrations with communicating with younger generations. He says it's not really about technology – it's about how fast that technology is changing.

"Every generation since the dawn of time has been influenced by new technology," Gwoke said. "We can't get too caught up in that. We need to ask ourselves, 'How is this new technology shaping them?'"

Gwoke also said it's still important to self-examine and understand previous generations because they're the ones who raised millenni-



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71%

OF MILLENNIALS will leave a job because they feel their leadership skills aren't being properly developed, according to a Deloitte study.

als and Generation Z, and he used communication devices to epitomize how generations change. Traditionalists and baby boomers might have used rotary dial telephones while current generations use cell phones. Gwoke said while his generation learned how to be formal on the phone, millennials and Generation Z employees are more authentically themselves and use casual language because they've always been reached by cell phone directly.

There are also some key differences between millennials and Generation Z. Gwoke admitted it's speculative because Generation Z is just getting into the workforce—the oldest of them are 23 years old. Still, he believes Generation Z is more visual because they all have had smart phones, not just cell phones. This meant they always had a variety of apps on their phones like YouTube, Instagram, etc.

A millennial might ask “why,” but Generation Z will ask “how?”

“YouTube teaches them exactly how to do life,” Gwoke said. “Information is everywhere, but application is very rare. They want people to show them how to do life.”

WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE? Gwoke presented a Deloitte study which showed millennials will look for a new job within two years or less if they feel like they can't obtain a promotion. 71 percent of millennials also jump ship from a job because they feel their leadership skills aren't being properly developed.

That falls in line with that generation's experience-based mindset, which Gwoke said social media has shaped. They want to be included in many elements of the job and see the inner workings.

“(They're saying) I just want to make sure

I'm being challenged regularly in my career,” Gwoke said.


The best way to recruit younger generations is to get their friends on board. Because of social media, they've formed implicit trust with peers online and take their suggestions seriously. They'd rather hear about a company's work culture from a person at that business, not from the public relations messaging the company puts out. Gwoke said you need to shape your company culture and a unique and compelling “why,” because some millennials would take a pay cut to work at a place that works for a good cause.

Meanwhile with Generation Z, bosses need to “involve the learner by requesting a response to the message,” Gwoke said. They've never had to memorize answers to questions because information is so quickly and widely available. **L&L**



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PAVES THE WAY



RIGHT ON TIME

Software helps landscape firms manage labor and maximize production. **By Kristen Hampshire**

Labor is the greatest barrier to growth. You can't sell work if there aren't people to complete jobs. And, when the people you do have are scheduled to the max, there's no room for new business. "We have walked away from revenue opportunities because we don't have the capacity," says Pierre Bridger, director of operations at Vibrant Outdoors in Whitestown, Indiana.

Labor management software can change the picture. "We can get better by monitoring progress and tightening up jobs to increase our efficiency and our capacity," Bridger says.

Investing in a software program is daunting for businesses of all sizes. There's an inherent learning curve and the whole team has to buy in. The information you gain from a system is only as good as the data you record – the old "input-output" thing.

The biggest hurdle for some professionals is retiring excel spreadsheets and handwritten schedules for digital tools.

Faulkner Bell admits having a tough time retiring the whiteboard schedule. "We had one whiteboard for each crew – It was hard to get away from that," says the owner of Bell Outdoor in St. Simons, Georgia. "We had magnetic tags – it was the same concept as a digital calendar, we just needed to shift."

Here, Lawn & Landscape talked to three landscape firms about how software has helped them manage labor and production.

TRAINED TO MAXIMIZE TIME. There are some jobs you know aren't reaching their profit potential. "But after a year of using software, it opened our eyes to the jobs that weren't doing that great that we didn't know

about," says Bill Caramanico, co-owner of Caramanico & Sons in Upland, Pennsylvania.

The fourth-generation family business had been using Excel spreadsheets and software before 2017, when they invested in another software. They learned about the system from a consultant who had been advising their business for a dozen years. "He hooked us up with another client that uses the system, so we visited to take a look at how it works firsthand," Caramanico says.

After watching how another landscape company manages labor and production efficiency with the software, Caramanico says "we pulled the trigger." In spring 2017, Caramanico & Sons started a five-month process of integrating the program into their operations, which included customizing features like production hours, materials costs, overhead percentages and, of course, the budget.



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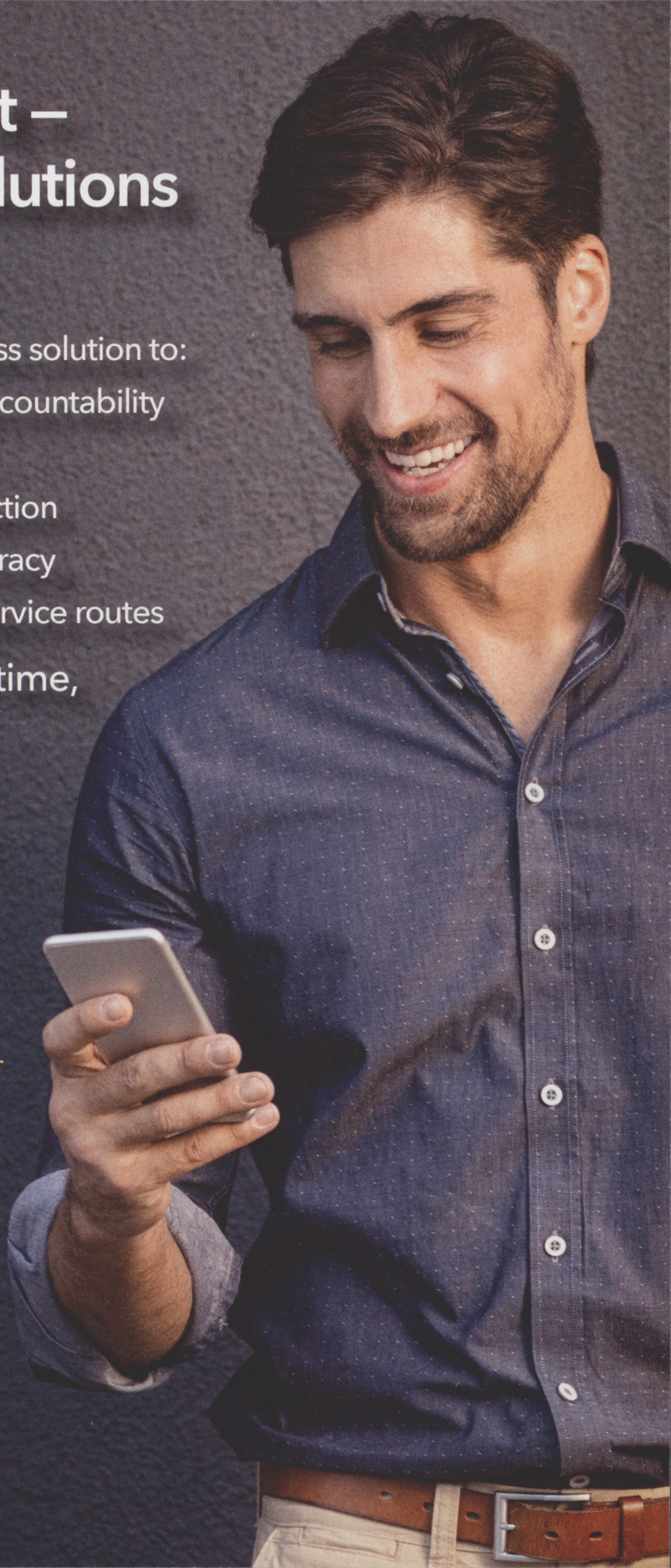
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Three to four days a week, the software company hosted two-hour conference calls involving five team members at Caramanico & Sons. "With this, we built the system the way we wanted to run it," Caramanico says.

A training timeline with a target launch date of Sept. 1 kept the team on track.

"It was definitely a process," Caramanico says, adding that they entered all existing customers' information into the system. Also, the company decided to dedicate one employee to dealing with software issues, clock-in and clock-out information and any problems that crop up in the field or office. "We can submit a question to the company, and they provide an answer or resolve the issue," he adds.

Caramanico estimates spending one year getting accustomed to the program. "Everyone is on board," he says. "Everyone likes seeing how they are doing. Some guys are more competitive than others, and they can see if they are hitting their job hours and materials goals."

Real-time insight into job profitability has helped Caramanico & Sons make labor and materials adjustments. "As soon as a job ticket

is completed, we can see how we did rather than inputting information from paper time sheets into our system and waiting a week to see how we were doing on overtime, after payroll went out," he says.

For jobs that were not profitable, Caramanico discussed the "gaps" with customers and shared information from the software program. Similar conversations happened with crewmembers who consistently went over on hours.

Now, after two years using the system, Caramanico says it's second nature for employees to clock in and clock out using the app on their phones. "It's a big, big learning curve," he says. "But it has been well worth it."

REWARDING FOR PERFORMANCE. A technician's inconsistent material use popped up on the radar when Pierre Bridger reviewed a time and materials report from a day's work. "He has been struggling because his usage is not consistent," says Bridger, Vibrant Outdoors' director of operations. "This allowed us to see those blips and try to correct them."

Information gathered from labor management software also gives Vibrant Outdoors the ability to reward its team at the end of the year with bonuses. "If they continue to hit budget, they can get year-end bonuses," Bridger says, relat-

ing that bonuses have ranged from \$2,200 to \$4,000 per employee. "We want our people to have an opportunity to make more money."

That opportunity is possible because Vibrant Outdoors maintains detailed records through business management software. Vibrant Outdoors relies heavily on subcontractors for mowing services.

For example, about 12% of its snow removal revenue is produced in-house, and all mowing is subbed out. However, services like pruning, mulching, lawn care applications and bed maintenance are performed in-house.

"The good news is we don't have a lot of labor, but the bad news is if we lose a key individual, it's a big deal," Bridger says. Also, team members must maximize productivity because the \$2.7-million firm runs lean with about 15 people during the peak season.

"It is critical that we are efficient, and we have been able to accomplish that by utilizing software and providing our people with budgets," Bridger says. "We learned that we can get better by monitoring their progress, and they know we are monitoring it. That's not a bad thing."

The software includes budgeting and estimating, but what Bridger is most excited about is the time tracking. "Our labor pool has really bought into it," he says, pointing to the bonuses they earn when they meet or beat budgeted hours on jobs.

But Bridger points out, software is not "a magic bullet." "Our next challenge is to get more feedback from crewmembers so we can continue to improve efficiency," he says. "The guys working in the field know how to do a job quicker whereas (managers) might not."

Bridger hopes to hold formal meetings to discuss ways to improve efficiency on jobs. "We can get real feedback by the supervisors going out and working with the crews," he adds. "We may find out that a crewmember uses more production hours than they were supposed to, but we need to look at why and talk about how to get closer to the budgeted amount."

The key with implementing any software program is to be consistent. Bridger admits this is tough, given there is no office staff at Vibrant Outdoors. The owner and Bridger manage the software. "If we had more time to put into it, we would probably learn more," he says.

What the company has learned is the value of tracking time and acting on the information by reaching out to employees for insight. "The time tracking is huge," he says.

FINDING A SOFTWARE FIT. After working at a large commercial landscape company that implemented industry software and a smaller residential design/build focused firm that relied on spread sheets and basic accounting software,

**\$2,200-
\$4,000**

THE RANGE OF YEAR-END BONUSES VIBRANT OUTDOORS HAS REWARDED ITS TEAM WITH WHEN THEY HIT BUDGET

“It is critical that we are efficient, and we have been able to accomplish that by utilizing software.”

PIERRE BRIDGER, director of operations, Vibrant Outdoors

Faulkner Bell launched Bell Outdoor with a good idea of what he was looking for in a business management platform.

But, when you're a startup, you have to start small with software, too. So, he got on board with a more basic program, which Bell says was “good for a one-man show handyman-style outfit.” But it lacked tools like job costing. “You could estimate, invoice and provide proposals,” he says.

So, he realized what he was missing.

As his business grew, so did the need to track overhead and indirect costs. “We needed to monitor and cut back on those expenses, and we needed ease of scheduling,” Bell says.

He moved to bigger software company's basic package and eventually upgraded. “We were still growing and running into issues with work order details,” he says, adding

that he would convert proposals into work orders as a solution.

For Bell, what's making a difference today in his operations and labor management is a “tags” feature that allows him to assign tags like “skid-steer” or “concrete saw” or “mini-excavator” to proposals, which eventually convert into active jobs.

Those tags sync into the schedule and let him know if two jobs requiring the company's one skid-steer are scheduled for the same day and time.

“We've had that problem forever, so being able to see if there is a conflict with two jobs needing that skid-steer at the same time is really helpful,” Bell says.

Tags can also be applied to crews. So, Bell tags proposals with a crew name: A1, B2, C3, D4. For example, the B2 crew is maintenance.

“Depending on the scope of work, if it's

maintenance for the B2 crew, we can set up recurring visits for 52 times per year,” he says.

Because of the software, Bell says scheduling is more precise. “Now, we can schedule months out and be accurate based on man-hours, rain delays or equipment on jobs,” he says.

Bell can also attach photos to work orders, and split jobs into separate visits. “We can split jobs into separate visits if a job requires several visits based on a waiting period for a subcontractor to finish a scope of work, or we need to pour concrete and wait a day before we return,” he says.

All of these tools have convinced Bell that moving from his scheduling whiteboards to a digital platform is worthwhile.

Not to mention, he can view and alter that on his phone rather than reaching for a marker. “It's like night and day,” he says. **L&L**

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the move to **manager**

If a laborer isn't having success after a promotion to a managerial role, try these tips to make the change a little bit smoother. **By Cyndi Laurin**

Do you know someone very talented at their work and promoted to management without receiving any guidance or training? Maybe you've promoted a worker who really shined above the rest yet seemed to struggle with the transition. It's not so different from playing baseball and coaching baseball. The best player on the team doesn't always make the best coach. However, with some really simple tools, you can help your workers transition to manager in a much less stressful and more rewarding manner for everyone.

Often times, in predominantly labor-based industries, such as landscaping, people get promoted to manager because of their efforts, work ethic, or because they're the best at what they do. While these promotions generally come with a boost in pay and other perks, many new managers find the transition challenging and downright overwhelming. The stress of manag-

NOTHING SHUTS AN EMPLOYEE DOWN faster than being yelled at or demeaned in front of their peers. Rather than parent them, you need to first make sure the employee is very clear on what the expected behavior is.

ing people, customers and inventory doesn't end at the end of the shift...it often causes sleep and anxiety issues through the night.

Brandon Varney, owner of Pristine Green located in Phoenix says, "I could have never imagined how much stress it would be to transition from doing the majority of the work to managing a landscape team. Once after returning from a weekend vacation, I was bombarded with messages from customers saying their yards were not serviced. Apparently, our team lead was out sick and didn't let clients know he wouldn't be able to get the team out. No weekend away was worth the stress of having to recover accounts and get caught up."

Why is this? At the most fundamental level, the skills someone has leading to a promotion are not the same skills that will serve them as manager. Think back to before you became a manager. As a laborer, work was very process oriented. You followed the process, and the work got done. As a manager, it's not as clear cut. At any given time, you're dealing with people not showing up, poor workmanship, or turnover. If your team is ship shape, a good chunk of your time may be spent managing customer complaints or resolving scheduling or inventory issues.

What's generally missing is a process to manage people. Without one, many default to how they were parented. If your parent was a yeller, under pressure you're going to yell at your employees. If your parent was a pushover, under pressure you'll give in to your employees. Neither is effective because parenting is not managing.

SO WHAT DOES WORK?

1. Effective management is the practice of regular observation and providing clear, specific feedback in real time. When you see or hear your employee do something right (even if it is part of what is expected of him or her), let them know. Behavioral science says people receive critical feedback from their manager much better when balanced with specific, positive feedback. Rather than saying, "Nice job," let your worker know exactly what they did that you want to see more of.

What about undesired or ineffective behavior? Nothing shuts an employee down faster than being yelled at or demeaned in front of their peers. Rather than parent them, you need to first make sure the employee is very clear on what the expected behavior is.

2. Next, state the specific, observed behavior needing adjustment followed by letting the employee know the ripple effect of the behavior. Finish the conversation by making the behavioral expectation very clear. It's much less costly to give a worker the opportunity to get it right before cutting them loose and starting over again.

3. Another best practice is to conduct a daily huddle. This is a great way to get your crew on the same page by sharing the plan for the day and eliciting feedback on resources they need or any other obstacle that could prevent accomplishing the day's goal. As manager, this becomes your to-do list to ensure your crew has every possibility of staying on track and meeting goals or deadlines. Pristine Green uses a daily group message because they are not all in the same location. Varney says, "It's really benefitted our landscape team by alerting them of items needing care due to change in seasons or a new strategy we're incorporating. The team has a better understanding of what is expected, and our customers benefit from better looking yards."

Your job as manager is to remove obstacles and provide tools and resources so your crew can effectively do their job. In essence, you must be committed to their success. This is especially true in industries where the labor shortage is a huge concern. We all know turnover is expected, but when good employees are walking out the door, so do your profits. Combine this with the statistic that nearly two-thirds of all workers leave their job due to quality of the day-to-day relationship with their direct supervisor. This means it's up to you to create an environment where they want to stay. **L&L**

The author is founder of Guide to Greatness, a consulting company based in Arizona.

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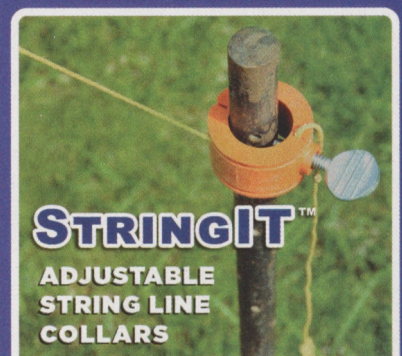


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WORKPLACE BIBLE

A handbook puts all employees on the same page when it comes to many aspects of a company.

By Robin Roenker

If creating (or updating) your employee handbook feels more like a chore than an opportunity, you may want to rethink your approach.

"I think a lot of companies think of (writing a handbook) as torture, but they don't have to be that onerous. They don't have to be that difficult. And they don't have to be that time-consuming," says Christine Soderlund, owner of Soderlund Enterprises, a talent acquisition and strategic sourcing company.

Done correctly, an employee handbook offers a perfect first opportunity for your firm to outline and share a sense of your company culture, values and goals – not to mention providing employees an easily accessible resource that answers common questions about payment procedures, requesting vacation time, workplace protocol and much more.

Here, we offer a few strategies for crafting an employee handbook that's both user-friendly and engaging, while still including all the necessary information for your current and incoming employees.

WHY HAVE A HANDBOOK? There are no laws requiring a business to have an employee handbook, Soderlund says. But, if you don't, you're making a misstep.

Think of your employee handbook as an essential pillar in the relationship you're building with your new employees, says Jason Drent, administration director at DJ's Landscape Management in Grand Rapids, Michigan. "In conjunction with the job description and offer letter, a handbook helps build a clear, consistent foundation for a productive employer-employee relationship," he says.

In addition to its role as a relationship-building tool, the handbook can also serve to dispel questions or disputes about workplace policies, often before they happen. As such, it can "protect (both) employees and the business from misperceptions, miscommunications, and the potential for lawsuits," Soderlund says.

A well-done handbook outlines not just regulations for employees, but also their benefits and protections, from how to request bereavement leave to what to do if they've faced workplace harassment. In that way, it offers "not just rules, but also protection to the employee," says James Hornung Jr., president of Elbers Landscape Service in Buffalo, New York.

Having a professional, engaging handbook that clearly articulates employee benefits, including payment schedules, vacation leave and more can help distinguish your firm from competitors without one. In a tough job market, it can be an important key to luring and retaining skilled employees, Hornung says.

DECIDING WHAT TO INCLUDE. You'll want to work with experts from your human resources and legal teams when drafting your employee handbook to ensure it includes all the information your firm may be legally required to share. These are based on federal, state and local requirements for businesses of your size and in your location. While no federal guidelines require companies to have an employee handbook, employers may be obligated – depending on applicable statutes – to inform employees in writing about their rights regarding issues such as family medical leave, equal employment, non-discrimination policies, sexual harassment and worker's compensation, for example.

When working with your team, there's no need to build your employee handbook from scratch since templates are widely available. Hornung outsources his payroll and human resources management to an HR solutions company, and therefore receives templates and assistance in crafting his firm's handbook via their HR experts.

Drent has used templates and employee

handbook builders available to members of the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM). Guidelines are also often available via industry trade associations, says Hornung, who is a member of the Sports Turf Managers Association and the New York State Nursery & Landscape Association, among others.

These templates can be helpful in providing a framework of information that you'll likely want to include, including sections to address basics such as: definitions of employee types (full-time, part-time, and seasonal); attendance policies; work hours, daily breaks and overtime procedures; workplace safety; and an outline of employee benefits, including vacation, sick time, family-medical leave, jury duty and worker's compensation.

In addition to these general categories, be sure to also include specific workplace policies of your firm, whatever those may be. DJ's Landscape Management's employee handbook has a section on its drug-free and smoke-free policies, which prohibit smoking on client properties or in company vehicles.

Similarly, Elbers includes specific guidelines about use of company cell phones and company vehicles, as well as proper uniform attire and social media usage, including a restriction on posting privileged business information online. "Often, when an employee steps out of line, it's not malicious. It's just due to lack of awareness," Hornung says. "So, we try to offer the handbook during our onboarding process and then review it with our employees seasonally to help with that ongoing education process."

SETTING THE RIGHT TONE. Begin your handbook with a welcome letter from your company owner or CEO to share "basics about the core value and mission of the organization," Hornung says.

Having a mission statement at the front of the handbook is essential, Soderlund says. And while this might sound daunting at first, Soderlund makes the task approachable for her clients by asking them to explain why employees should want to work for them instead of their competitors down the street.



While it's important to cover all the basics, you want the end product to be "as succinct as possible," Drent says. "You want no more or less than what's needed, so that your employees embrace the handbook as a resource."

Soderlund agrees. "If you're putting out a long, telephone-book-like document that people will not read or use, that really doesn't help anyone. You want to make it something that people actually want to read and engage with," she says.

But how do you make an employee handbook engaging?

Start with what you're calling it, Soderlund says. "The term 'employee handbook' makes you think of a long, boring, hard-to-read set of instructions. Calling your employee handbook something else – like "Team guide" or "How things work at our

company" – offers a fresh opportunity to tell your company story, what it is and why others should care," she says.

Add in sections that highlight the culture of your workplace. Do you offer bonuses when employees receive their CLT or IPM certifications? "Talk about that," Soderlund says. "Find ways to communicate how a job with your firm is more than just a paycheck."

DEVELOP A USER-FRIENDLY DOCUMENT.

Update your employee handbook – or team guide – at least annually and consider making its unveiling a fun event for employees. Soderlund says a staff barbecue or morning coffee and bagel gathering could work.

At the event, add in short Q&A contests with simple prize drawings to see if

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SIMPLIFY. UPSELL. DOMINATE.

This simple three-step process single-handedly changed the way we did business at Callahan's Lawn Care and Property Maintenance.

By Mike Callahan

For more than 15 years, the spring rush was driven by an antiquated sales process at my company, Callahan's Lawn Care and Property Maintenance; one that required human horsepower every step of the way, from answering the phones to hand-delivering estimates to customers' doors. It took a lot of time and energy to close a sale, and if we didn't move fast enough, the prospective clients continued shopping around for service.

It wasn't until we began using automations that we really started to grow our bottom-line profits by removing the friction from the sales process. Ultimately, taking the following three steps allowed us to sell less and grow faster:

- **STEP 1:** Simplify your core product offerings.
- **STEP 2:** Win their trust and upsell services.
- **STEP 3:** Dominate the neighborhoods where clients reside.

SIMPLIFY. Simplifying our core product offerings meant identifying our gateway services. These gateway services can be defined as two or three core offerings that anyone in your office, or even a virtual assistant, can sell over the phone. At Callahan's, these gateway services included lawn mowing and fertilization/weed control. These services became the foundational pillars that allowed Callahan's the ability to quickly turn estimates around and sell work live over the phone. These services were key as they are easily priced by measuring the potential client's property online via satellite imagery.

Once gateway services are identified, it becomes critical to create a pricing matrix. This will take some time to calculate up front but the payoff is undeniable. The matrix should contain a base price that denotes your minimum threshold. For example, imagine a fertilization price matrix. You might start

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TABOR'S LANDSCAPING AND GARDEN CENTER

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Chris Kline, production manager • Erik J. Tabor, president

The project was designed to give the backyard veranda style and flow. The property had two small patios connected by a set of four steps, and a grade change of approximately 12 feet.

The yard was divided into three elevations, ultimately tying the top of the yard to the veranda to the lower patio, where the home has a walk-out basement. The lower level was the first area to have the Vienna Classic Pavers installed on a permeable base atop geo-textile fabric.

The middle patio was installed next, followed by the second set of stairs, and then the final, upper patio. Approximately 2,000 square feet of Dutch Quality Ohio white stone and vein limestone veneer were installed on the sitting and raised walls throughout the backyard.

Finishing touches included the addition of an outdoor kitchen with a large granite counter and a four-burner gas grill.

Dividing the job into three elevations proved to be a challenge for Tabor's but after disassembling and using some recycled materials they were able to pull it off. The waterfall has to be built with a retaining wall which added an extra step to the project.

"We are particularly proud of the freeform fireplace," Tabor says. "It's custom designed and built. We created an arch opening using stone left over from the original construction of the house, which was Indiana limestone. The mantle is a piece of old curbstone from the city of Youngstown, Ohio, that we cut in half to create an eye-catching, large mantle."

The wet cast hearth and top caps match the steps and wall caps that were installed throughout the yard following completion of the kitchen and fireplace.

—Lauren Rathmell

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“Often, when an employee steps out of line, it’s not malicious. It’s just due to lack of awareness.”

JAMES HORNUNG JR., president, Elbers Landscape Service

Continued from pg. 87

employees have read and understand new changes to the document. “You could hand out \$5 gift cards or new company swag to winners,” Soderlund says. “You don’t have to spend a lot of money, but it’s a way of conveying to your employees, ‘We care about you, and we want you to know this’ in a much more engaging way than having a manager simply say, ‘Read this.’”

At Elbers, new employees are introduced to their handbook in a face-to-face orientation with their manager or foreman, who reviews and draws attention to sections the firm deems most significant. “That gives you the opportunity to highlight the things that are really important with the new team member,” Drent says. “We feel like if we’re treating (the handbook) as a valuable resource and approaching it that way, then the employees are much more likely to treat it the same way.”

You’ll want to make professionally translated Spanish or other non-English versions of your handbook available to staff members for whom English is a second language, so that all employees are on the same page. Similarly, all staff members – whether full-time, part-time, or seasonal/H-2B – should be provided with a copy of the handbook upon hiring.

If you use H-2B employees, add a section covering your firm’s H-2B policy (ensuring that it mirrors U.S. Department of Labor policies), as well as specifics on timing of hiring and rights and benefits provided to temporary, non-agricultural workers, Soderlund says.

If you have additional, specific details to share solely with H-2B employees – such as information about access to housing or transportation – you could include those on a separate document, as Drent does.

And, while you’ll want to include some basic information on safety protocols in your employee handbook, you may want to provide more specific guidelines on workplace safety procedures in a separate, dedicated safety handbook, as Hornung does.

Finally, to help ensure that your handbook becomes a document that your employees actually read and use, give some thought and care to the presentation of the handbook itself. “If it’s presented in a very formal, dry way, it’s not going to be received,” Soderlund says. “Thanks to social media and the ways we communicate now, these documents can be created in a little bit more approachable way than they used to be.”

Guidelines surrounding human resources and employment policies can change from year to year – on both the state and federal level. To help your employee handbook stay in sync with these policy changes, consider subscribing to email alerts from the Department of Labor, your state-specific or industry-specific employment associations, and/or human resources associations like SHRM, Drent says.

“There will be some sifting involved, but it’s a good way to make sure you’re not missing those changes as they come,” he says. **L&L**

The author is a freelance writer based in Kentucky.

Lawn & Landscape®



LAWN & LANDSCAPE MAGAZINE is once again looking for the best employees in the industry and we need your help. If you have an employee who has gone above and beyond in their position and should be acknowledged, now is your chance to have them publicly recognized in our publication.

Send us two to three paragraphs explaining why your employee should be chosen. Your entry should include concrete examples/stories of how this

person has improved your company either culturally or financially, and how they have set a good example for other employees. Please include the employee's title and number of years at the company.

We will choose a few winners from the entries we receive and interview them for stories in a future issue of Lawn & Landscape.

You can nominate any employee who works for your company – crew members, office workers, foremen, etc.



Email submissions to Editor Brian Horn at bhorn@gie.net.
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ONCE TRUST IS ESTABLISHED,
it is time to upsell additional
services with higher profit margins.

Continued from pg. 88

with 0 - 3,000 sq/ft of turf for a base price of \$55 and add \$5.50 for every additional 1,000 sq/ft of turf. This standardization of pricing allowed us to create quick quotes that could be sold over the phone.

UPSELL. Once trust is established through sales and provision of initial services, it is time to upsell additional services with higher profit margins (i.e., aeration and overseeding) which in some cases doubles the lifetime value of the client. Following initial service at a new client's home, a field manager would perform a quality control check with the main intention of gathering all data we would need to provide any additional estimate for a later service. This included recording information in our CRM regarding shrubs, square footage of landscape beds, ornamental trees and grasses and any other pertinent information about the property that might help us with estimating for additional services in the future. Once this information was collected in our CRM, we were able to enter clients into a monthly upsell process with property-specific pricing.

We approached the upsell from an educational standpoint. We educated the client regarding what steps they should be taking to upkeep their yard or landscape one month in advance of the need for the work. Included with the educational materials was a soft offer to help if they needed it.

DOMINATE THE NEIGHBORHOOD. The final step is to replicate this process in the neighborhoods where you win work. We focused on the immediate geographic areas around our newly realized clients.

Every time we landed a new client, our office waited one week before sending out a series of mailers to the surrounding homes to entice the neighbors to sign up for one of our gateway services. Each time we landed a client, we would follow the above process of a quality control visit and soft upselling. This system allowed us to build route density, minimize drive time and maximize profits.

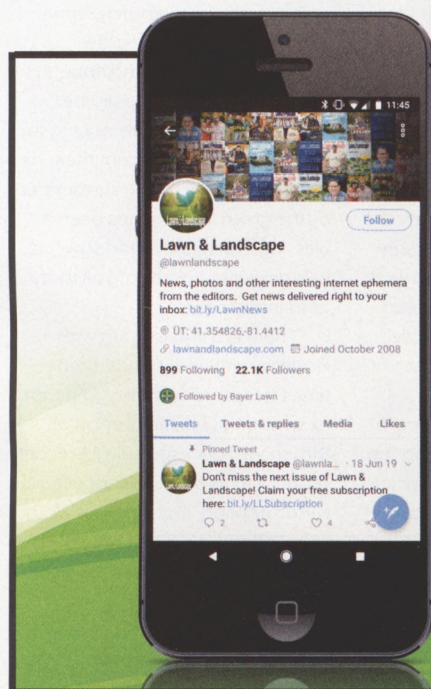
PUSHING LIMITS WITH AUTOMATIONS. The critical component that kicked Callahan's into overdrive was automations. A

couple of years ago, we began utilizing an automated Facebook messenger bot to sell gateway services. Clients enter property information, and, in turn, the bot provides live property-specific pricing and estimates for immediate approval by the prospective client.

We also began using automated reminders to assign the 30-day quality control and data collection visits. Finally, we began using third party software to drop geo pins near new client properties in essence collecting the addresses of the nine closest neighbors to the new client. The software then automatically sends mailers alerting neighbors to our services.

Standardizing this process allowed me, as the business owner, to work on the business, not in the business day-to-day. The sales machine continued without my involvement every step of the way. The system created consistent growth and boosted bottom line profits by raising our existing clients' lifetime values. As crazy as it may seem, selling less truly helped us grow faster. **L&L**

The author is CEO of consulting company SimpleGrowth and the former owner of Callahan's Lawn Care & Property Maintenance.



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STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Harrison Bond

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

brings you the perspectives of horticulture students and insights into the future of the industry.

By Jimmy Miller



It wasn't too long ago that Harrison Bond thought he wasn't going to work at his family's tree care company in Atlanta.

Early on in his time at Mississippi State, Bond says he wasn't thinking about company culture. He was leaning toward working somewhere bigger, perhaps in another region of the country; after all, he had practically spent his whole life surrounded by his family's company.

But after three internships at Atlanta Classic Tree Service, the company his dad started in 1987, Bond seems to have changed his tune on that entirely. He noticed that people laugh and hang out together in the mornings there, or have company dinners together after work. He's noticed how loyal some of the employees have been to his father, including one foreman who's stayed for over 20 years.

Now, Atlanta Classic is where Bond intends to work after he graduates in May.

"I was kind of chasing money and I wasn't really thinking about culture, but once you're in it and it's something you enjoy doing, I think it completely changes your mind on how a job would be," Bond says. "It really shows how important (culture) is and how it changes your complete perception of a job. It's more of a hobby that you get paid for."

Bond says he always spent time on the crews growing up, which he believes helped him learn the ropes of the industry before he first drove the 4.5 hours west to Mississippi State, where he's working toward a landscape contracting and management degree. To satisfy the internships requirement necessary to graduate at school – and to work at home over the summer instead of elsewhere – Bond has officially worked in various capacities at Atlanta Classic Tree Service.

Currently, he's working more in the office than before, learning the ins and outs of sales and financials that he never had a chance to work on previously. Working alongside his mother and others in the office, he's seeing the behind-

the-scenes business work not often explored at internships. Bond says he's even helping out with acquisition talks as Atlanta Classic eyes another company, which is an experience he doesn't believe he'd have anywhere else.

This also helped him back at school. He's currently taking online classes to finish up his degree, but Bond says he felt comfortable with some of his classes because he had already experienced those lessons.

"I think one thing was, I was able to become a foreman on one of our crews early," Bond says. "Having that little bit of leadership from that, when we had group projects, I was able to help lead the way."

Of course, that also works both ways: Bond is able to bring some of what he's learned at school to his family's company, where he feels his ideas have been considered helpful, such as his computer skills and job estimating ideas.

Bond says he ultimately wants to help Atlanta Classic grow throughout Georgia and, though he's served various roles in the company, he's currently hoping to one day lead a sales team there as a sales manager. Being surrounded by the green industry has been a blessing in disguise, Bond says, as he's grown to appreciate all that goes into the field.

"There is a little stigma with working with your hands. Sometimes people may think you're not as smart, but I think through all the innovation, especially in recent years... I think some of that stigma will disappear," Bond says. "What people don't see is just how much thought and how much skill goes into all this." **L&L**

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