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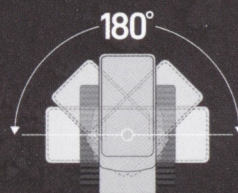


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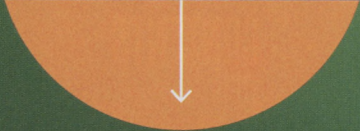
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Cover and above photos courtesy
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Brian Horn
Editor, Lawn & Landscape

“Whether they are a face on a screen or someone you see before morning roll-out, employees and their engagement in your company can be the difference between being a winning and losing organization.”

The 4Hs

I've written here about the Cleveland Browns a few times. Those past columns normally revolved around the organization being a dysfunctional and laughable mess for the past 20 years. But this season, the Browns won 12 games including their first playoff game in 200 years (it felt that long), so I will focus on something they did correctly and what you can learn from it.

In January of 2020, the team hired Kevin Stefanski as head coach, a position he's never had. But once COVID-19 hit, he had to get to know his team through Zoom meetings, phone calls and text messages. This is not an ideal way to enter your first season as a coach in the NFL.

Nonetheless, it was the way many of you had to lead your company in 2020, and some of you may continue to operate by letting some staff work remotely, or report directly to jobsites, moving forward. The flexibility is a way to attract employees and it may be a way to save on the overhead costs of having an office. But it also may chip away at the culture you have built and that happens organically by being under one roof.

You may need to get creative on how to keep the culture intact with employees not cross-

ing paths as frequently. As a way to get the Browns to bond, Stefanski used a tactic that was suggested to him by Virginia Commonwealth basketball coach Mike Rhoades, who learned of it from Texas A&M-Corpus Christi basketball coach Willis Wilson.

Stefanski had players, coaches, executives and even the team's owners, share their 4Hs – history, heartbreak, heroes and hopes. The exercise allowed individuals to learn something they didn't know about someone else and identify similarities amongst themselves – similarities they may never have known existed were it not for the discussions.

Even if you plan on going back to pre-COVID operations, you should always strive to find new ways to improve your culture, and maybe an activity like this would work for you. If not, continue to seek methods to improve your culture, whether you find it in books, podcasts, peer groups, or any other vehicle possible.

Whether they are a face on a screen or someone you see before morning roll-out, employees and their engagement in your company can be the difference between being a winning and losing organization. – *Brian Horn*

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5811 Canal Rd., Valley View, OH, 44125

Phone: 800-456-0707 Editorial Fax: 216-651-0830 Subscriptions & Classifieds: 800-456-0707

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EDITORIAL

BRIAN HORN EDITOR bhorn@gie.net
JIMMY MILLER ASSOCIATE EDITOR jmiller@gie.net
KIM LUX ASSISTANT EDITOR klux@gie.net
JIM HUSTON J.R. HUSTON ENTERPRISES jhuston@giemedia.com
BRUCE WILSON & COMPANY bwilson@giemedia.com
THE HARVEST GROUP harvest@giemedia.com
KRISTEN HAMPSHIRE CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

CREATIVE

JUSTIN ARMBURGER ART DIRECTOR jarmburger@gie.net

ADVERTISING/PRODUCTION INQUIRIES

CAITLIN MCCOY cmccoy@gie.net

SALES

DAVID SZY PUBLISHER dszy@gie.net
TRACI MUELLER ACCOUNT MANAGER tmuller@gie.net
BRIAN MAY ACCOUNT MANAGER bmay@gie.net
DANNY WALSH ACCOUNT MANAGER dwalsh@gie.net
RUSSELL WARNER NATIONAL ACCOUNT MANAGER rwarner@gie.net
STEVEN WEBB CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING SALES swebb@gie.net

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Cancellation CONSIDERATIONS

There are countless reasons why a client could cancel services, but analyzing the data can keep customers happy and help you learn from your mistakes.

By Kim Lux

Nobody ever likes to get that dreaded phone call – the one where a client is canceling services.

But there are some steps companies can take to limit cancellations, track them to learn from their mistakes and get those customers back in the future. Andrew Wesselman, of A&A Lawn Care, and Beth Berry, vice president of business development for Real Green Systems, detailed these steps during Solutions 2021 Virtual in early January.

Berry holds the “Code Red: How to Save a Customer Before They Cancel” session every year.

“This isn’t anything new,” she says. “And some of it is not preventable.”

While it may not be new, Berry says the conversation is especially important this year due to the coronavirus pandemic.



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— Jamie Hageman, Manager, GreenLawn




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"You'll need to evaluate cancellations very carefully this year," she says.

TOP CONCERNS. Whether its financial or health-oriented, Berry and Wesselman say COVID-19 has certainly caused more customers to re-evaluate their lawn care needs.

People lost their jobs, or their employment may be unstable, so they're looking to cut costs. According to Berry, as the coronavirus crisis continued, more people had their awareness or concern heightened – leading them to question the essential status of the service.

Other common reasons for cancellations in 2020 were results, weather, service, renovation, DIY and price increase.

"This year we saw a lot of DIYers," Berry says. "Many homeowners spent a lot more time at home and out in their lawn."

She adds that while customers take the reins for their own lawn care, people staying at home more also caused renovations projects to skyrocket. This in turn led them to cancel services as the improvement projects were underway.

In terms of price, Wesselman and Berry say companies should track how many canceled clients are switching to a less expensive competitor.

"You'll want to know how many people are going to that new player in town," Berry says. And if it's a lot, she suggests reevaluating pricing.

On the other hand, Berry is a proponent of slowly increasing prices every year. She recommends aiming for a 2% annual increase.

Wesselman adds that when tracking cancellations based on results and services, there is value in breaking those down by such

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factors as weeds, color or pest breakthrough.

"But don't break it down too far," he warns. "Or it gets too confusing and you won't do anything with that data."

Wesselman also says the best way to combat these common occurrences is being upfront with customers from the get-go.

"Educate the customers and get the expectations set up front," he says.

EMERGING TRENDS. Berry and Wesselman also pinpointed some expected reasons for cancellations in 2021.

Attorney General demands, water conservancy, pesticide sensitivity and new EPA and government leadership could all impact retention.

"Across the United States, many municipalities have implemented pesticide regulations,"

Berry says. "And water conservancy is on the heels of that...The way our products work well is usually in conjunction with water."

Berry says that with a new president – and new EPA director – more stringent environmental orders may go into place.

"That will impact our industry and could certainly impact the products we use and, subsequently, satisfaction and retention," she says.

SOLVING THE PROBLEM. To combat these cancellations, Berry says companies should come up with a "Cancel Save Bootcamp." She gives four steps for training employees during this learning opportunity, which she says should be "all hands on deck."

The first step is to share the financial data. "Everyone should understand the impact to the organization," Berry says.

Berry advises sharing the following information with your team:

- Annual marketing budget
- Cost per lead
- Cost per sale
- Total number of prior year sales
- Total dollar amount of prior year sales
- Total number of prior year cancels
- Total dollar amount of prior year cancels

Step 2 is all about tracking cancellations and performing a deep dive into them by reasons. Next, companies should gather feedback from all attendees.

"You want to review this with everyone in the same room," Berry says. "There's something about the comradery of it...you'll get some inside data when you get people to open up."

The final step is creating an action plan for every cancellation reason.



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Strategies to create this action plan include assigning teams by reason across all departments, incentivizing teams for measurable improvements, creating a cancel transfer protocol and establishing meaningful and targeted reinstatement campaigns.

"You have to come up with a better game plan for next time," Berry says. "The way you win back customers is that you know why they canceled and have a better alternative."

ROBIN AUTOPILOT PARTNERS WITH TURFBOT MOWING

TurfBot operates under the Weed Man umbrella, which ranked No. 8 on our recent Top 100 list.

DALLAS – Robin Autopilot USA, a robotic mowing technology company, entered into a partnership with TurfBot Mowing, a brand under the Weed Man USA ownership umbrella.

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Under the new partnership, TurfBot franchises will offer robotic mowing services powered by Robin's technology. TurfBot franchises will have access to all of the tools and resources available through the Robin platform, including patented products, proprietary software, e-learning and training services and marketing collateral.

Ranked as the eighth-largest company on the 2020 Lawn & Landscape Top 100, based on 2019 revenue, Weed Man expanded into the robotic mowing business when it launched TurfBot in 2018 to test the concept, recognizing the benefits of offering battery-powered and emissions-free robotic mowing services to customers. TurfBot currently operates in three locations and plans for aggressive expansion plans in 2022.

"We are proud to partner with Weed Man, which has a long and outstanding history as a pioneer and leader in the North American market for lawn care services," said Logan Fahey, chief executive officer of Robin Autopilot. "We are creating a strong new force in the lawn and landscaping market that will help both of our companies continue our growth as we provide more customers with the opportunity to adopt robotic mowing technology."

"Robin Autopilot was the obvious choice for us in our search for a partner with cutting-edge technology and expertise that would help us grow in the exciting robotic mowing industry," said Jennifer Lemcke, chief executive officer of Weed Man. "We believe robotic mowing has a bright future, and we look forward to working with Robin to continue the transformation of the lawn care industry through the wide-ranging environmental and economic benefits of this new technology."

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▶ STAY GREEN ACQUIRES EMERALD LANDSCAPE SERVICES

The Stay Green executive team will work closely with Emerald's 134 employees to ensure a smooth transition.

SANTA CLARITA, Calif. – California-based Stay Green recently acquired Emerald Landscape Services, a commercial landscape maintenance company based out of Anaheim, California. Terms of the transaction were not disclosed.

"What drew Stay Green to Emerald was the shared values of how business should be conducted – treating employees well and

partnering with valued clients," said Chris Angelo, Stay Green CEO. "They have the experience, resources, and capabilities to allow Stay Green to grow in the Orange, Riverside, and San Bernardino counties."

The acquisition of Emerald gives Stay Green access to a larger segment of the business community. Their existing client base consists of Class A office facilities, industrial, HOA,

hospitality, retail and municipality clients.

"It was apparent to us that joining the Stay Green family was the right move. Caring for their employees, clients and community is a shared value of Emerald's and key component on which Stay Green was founded," said Emerald Landscape Services owner John Croul. "We have no doubt that they will provide the previous Emerald clients with the same exceptional service they are known for industry wide."

Emerald will now operate under the leadership of Stay Green, which ranked No. 81 on Lawn & Landscape's annual Top 100 list last year. The Stay Green executive team will work closely with Emerald, their preexisting management, and their 134 employees over the next several months to train them on Stay Green's best practices.



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▶ BRIGHTVIEW ACQUIRES CUTTING EDGE PROPERTY MAINTENANCE

Cutting Edge Property Maintenance was founded in 2005.

BLUE BELL, Pa. – BrightView has acquired Cutting Edge Property Maintenance based in Plymouth, Minn. Terms of the transaction were not disclosed.

“Cutting Edge has earned a reputation for providing superior service, which creates lasting client satisfaction,” said BrightView President and CEO Andrew Masterman.

“They have the expertise and capabilities to provide a full suite of winter services, landscape maintenance and enhancements, tree care and irrigation services. This deal brings a service leader in a desirable Upper Midwest market into the BrightView family along with more than 110 skilled team members.”

Cutting Edge Property Maintenance was founded in 2005.

“We could genuinely tell BrightView’s executive team cares about their people, which was an important factor in our decision-making process,” said Ryan Comer, Cutting Edge founder and CEO. “We are confident that joining BrightView will provide opportunities for both our employees and our customers. BrightView is a first-class organization that the Minneapolis market is fortunate to have.”

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▶ LAWN DOCTOR'S JOHN BUECHNER DIES AT 68

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Buechner was a past president of PLCAA (now known as NALP).

John Buechner, 68, died on December 22 after a year-long battle with cancer.

Buechner was born in Indiana and spent his childhood in Fort Wayne. He graduated from R. Nelson Snider High School in 1971 and received his bachelor's degree in agronomy from Purdue University in 1975.

Once COVID-19 concerns subside, the family intends to host a life celebration at their church in Pennsylvania. He retired from Lawn Doctor three years ago and relocated to North Carolina with his wife.

Buechner was a past president of PLCAA (now known as NALP), The New Jersey Turfgrass Association and also The New Jersey Green industry Council. In 2002, Buechner was a Lawn & Landscape Magazine Industry Leadership award winner.

Buechner joined Lawn Doctor in 1984 and retired in 2018 after 34 years.

SAVATREE MERGES WITH ARBORWELL PROFESSIONAL TREE MANAGEMENT

Operations include a corporate office in Hayward, California.

BEDFORD HILLS, N.Y. – SavATree, which offers professional tree and shrub care, has merged with Arborwell Professional Tree Management of California and Washington.



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Operations include a corporate office in Hayward, California, plus six core branches located in Oakland, Redwood City, Sacramento, San Diego, San Jose and Seattle.

Founded by Peter Sortwell in 2001, Arborwell has become a provider of commercial tree care and management services on the West Coast.

"We welcome Arborwell's talented team to the SavATree family," said Carmine Schiavone, CEO of SavATree.

"Arborwell's extensive knowledge of the West Coast's unique tree care needs and experience working with an impressive scope of clientele will add a great partner to the SavATree family."

SavATree ranked No. 13 on Lawn & Landscape's annual Top 100 list last year. "SavATree shares our same core values and high-quality standards, making this a great fit to move the company forward and provide clients with continued expert service and our employees with additional professional growth opportunities," said Peter Sortwell, CEO and founder of Arborwell.

ASPIRE ACQUIRES CREW CONTROL

The scheduling application will extend Aspire's reach to smaller contractors in the green industry.

Aspire has acquired Crew Control, a scheduling software application built for the needs of smaller lawn care and landscaping companies. Crew Control is an application that simplifies the scheduling process for these contractors.

Crew Control was founded in 2018. Its founders, David Vroblecky and Daniel Higgins, are respectively joining Aspire as product manager and senior developer and will focus on the future growth of the Crew Control solution.

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▶ RUPPERT LANDSCAPE ADDS BRANCH, PROMOTES TOM FLINT

Flint will lead the new location in Dulles, Virginia.

LAYTONSVILLE, Md. – Ruppert Landscape has expanded its landscape management operations to include a new location in Dulles, Virginia. This branch joins six existing landscape management branches in Virginia – Gainesville, Alexandria, Fredericksburg and Richmond (north, south and east) – and will serve existing customers as well as new growth in the region.

“Every time we grow in the markets we

serve, it gives us more density, which means less travel time to our jobs and provides more value to our customers,” said Fred Key, region vice president. “Perhaps most importantly, it allows us to provide growth opportunities for our employees.”

The Dulles branch will be led by Tom Flint, who has recently been promoted to branch manager.

Flint attended Millersville University and has over 34 years of experience in the landscape industry. He joined Ruppert in 2012 as an area manager in the company’s Alexandria branch and broke division sales records. He was recognized with the company’s Branch Impact Award two years in a row for his dedication and contributions to the Alexandria team. He transferred to the company’s Laytonsville branch in 2015, and he was one of the first graduates of Ruppert’s Associate Branch Manager leadership development program, which was designed to prepare talented team members to take on future opportunities.

As branch manager, Flint will be responsible for the overall welfare of the Dulles branch, including the safety and development of his team, strategic planning and

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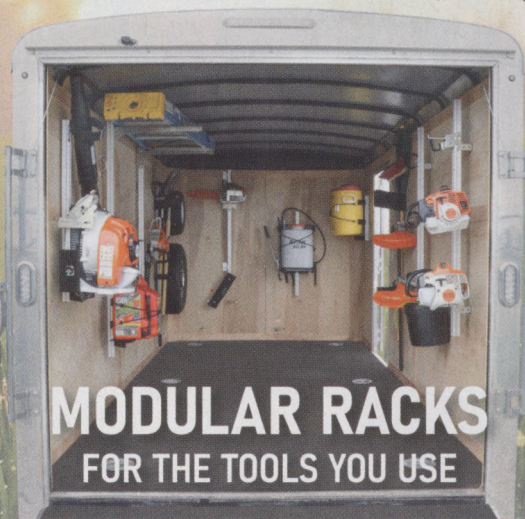
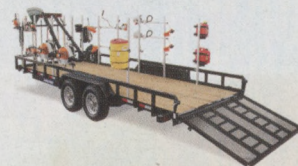


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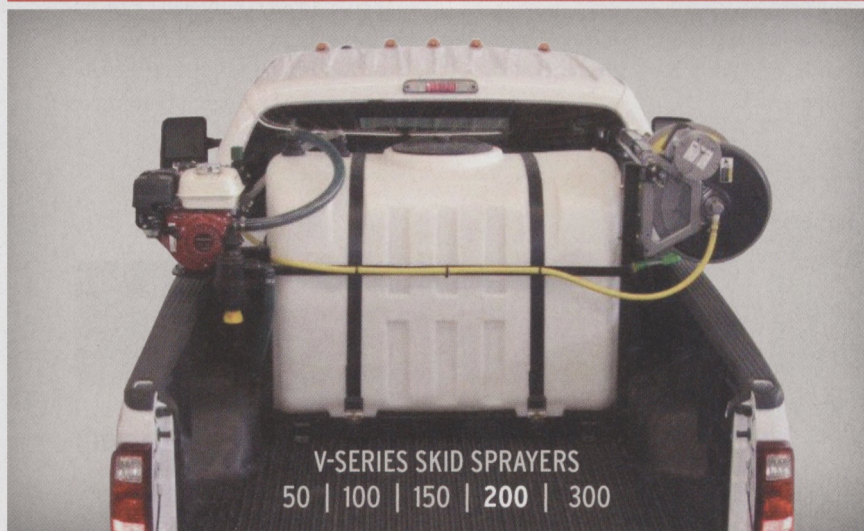
budgeting, training, customer service, and day-to-day operations.

"Over the past several years, Tom has been instrumental in helping to lead the

Laytonsville team and in building strong customer relationships," Key said. "We are always happy when our company's growth provides opportunity for high achievers like

Tom to continue to achieve their career goals. We are confident that his experience and leadership will be a good fit for our customers and our team."

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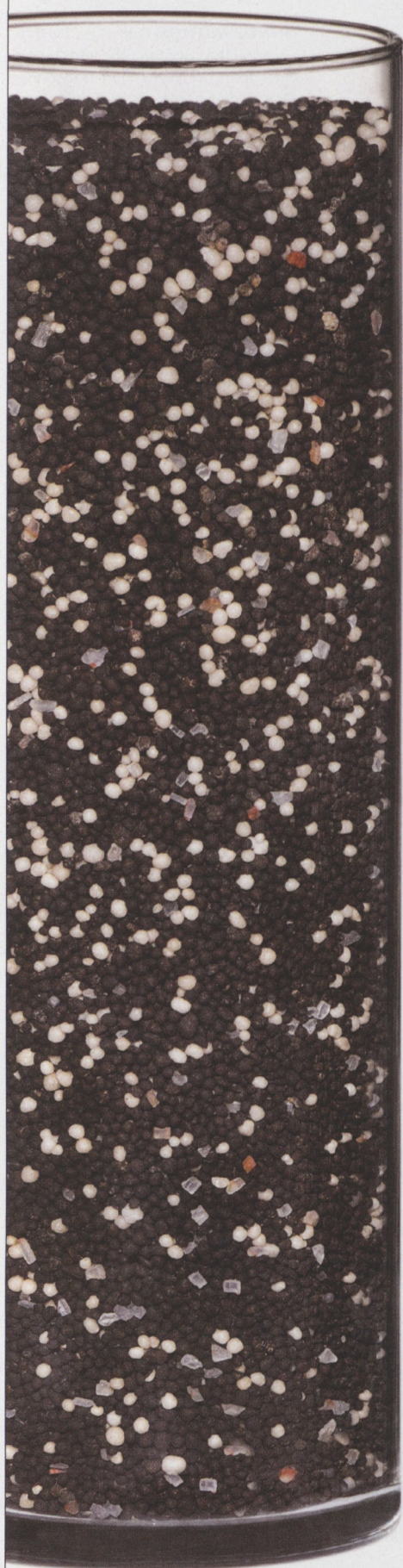
These individuals started their three-year terms Dec. 11.

FAIRFAX, Va. – The Irrigation Association recently appointed four new members to the IA Board of Directors.

- **John McPhee**, general manager of irrigation and lighting for The Toro Co. (Riverside, CA)
- **Katie Powell**, president of Munro Cos. (Grand Junction, CO)
- **Michael Roberts**, PhD, director for Rain Bird Corp. (Tucson, AZ)
- **Ted Santiesteban**, director of operations for Irrigation Components International (Daphne, AL)

These individuals started their three-year terms Dec. 11 and joined the 11 other members who are continuing their terms from previous years. The IA Board is made up of 15 people.

"These four individuals bring a diverse and broad base of industry experience and expertise to the IA board," said IA CEO Deborah Hamlin. "As the IA continues to work to support its members during this unique time, we appreciate the efforts that these new and current directors devote to the association and its goals to advance the industry and promote efficient irrigation." **L&L**



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COMMON TRUCK AND EQUIPMENT MISTAKES

→ **CONTRACTORS LOVE TRUCKS AND EQUIPMENT.** It reminds me of the adage, “The only difference between men and boys is not their age but the price of their toys.”

“Iron Man Mike” epitomized what we’re talking about. He loved his trucks, mowers, skid-steers, ATVs, etc. Unfortunately, his iron-rich diet was eating his financial lunch. What follows are some of the ways that contractors mishandle their trucks and equipment.

T&E BENCHMARKS. As a refresher, here are some general T&E cost benchmarks that I mentioned in a previous article:

- **Fuel:** 3% +/- 1% of sales
- **Mechanics, parts & repairs:** 3% +/- 1% of sales
- **Misc. (truck, auto & Inland Marine insurance, registrations, wraps, racks, etc.):** 1%-2% of sales
- **Straight-line depreciation:** 3% +/- 1% of sales
- **Total:** 12% +/- 2% of sales

These benchmarks will apply to most green industry companies. Yours may slightly vary, but the important thing is that you understand and track them.

ASSET RICH BUT CASH POOR. Bill and Emily had a small landscape installation company in the Midwest with annual revenue of roughly \$500,000. Their jobs were priced correctly but they were still cash poor. Bill loved his equipment and had two expensive skid-steers (with all the attachments), a mini-excavator and an 18-wheeler with a flatbed to haul his arsenal. T&E expenses on their profit and loss (P&L) statement were 18%+. While most of the equipment was paid for, it ate up a lot of cash and generated a lot of repair costs as it got older. Add to this the large plant and hardscape inventory that they had. A lot of it they bought in the spring for “potential” jobs. The remainder they grew on the acreage that they bought to start a tree and shrub farm.

The problem: Bill and Emily made too many “smart investments” in trucks, equipment and inventory. They were asset rich but cash poor. Their money wasn’t liquid.

The solution: Get liquid. Consider selling some of the extra equipment and don’t act on every great deal that comes along. Also, sell some of the inventory that you have for potential jobs and buy in the spring what you can sell that year.

BIDDING TRUCK AND EQUIPMENT COSTS in general and administrative (G&A) overhead. Frank had a full-service landscape company with annual revenue just at \$1 million. His field T&E costs on his P&L were 11% of revenue, or \$110,000. He would include his T&E costs in his G&A overhead costs when he priced his work. Total G&A costs (including T&E costs) were \$350,000 or 35% of revenue. He would estimate his

labor and materials cost for a job and divide the total by 0.50. This supposedly would give him a 15% net profit margin (NPM). However, at year’s end, he would rarely see a 15% NPM on his P&L.

The problem: Frank was averaging the cost of his field trucks and equipment in his pricing. This might be OK for his maintenance and lawn care services because the amount of T&E usage was pretty consistent. However, his design/build installation work required varying amounts of equipment. One job might require just a pick-up truck and wheelbarrows, while another job might require a skid-steer and a mini-excavator. His cost estimating system would underprice the equipment-intense jobs and overprice the labor-intense ones. Guess which jobs he’d win: the underpriced ones. The more equipment he used, the less money he’d make.

The solution: Remove your field T&E costs out of your G&A overhead costs when pricing your work. Add field T&E costs into your bids as it is needed. If you only need a truck and wheelbarrow on a job, put that cost in your bid. However, if a job requires a skid-steer and mini-excavator, charge both to the job in the bid. The Dual Overhead Recovery System (DORS) puts all truck and equipment costs in G&A overhead when pricing jobs, and this is a critical mistake.

CONCLUSION. These are just two of the mistakes commonly made by green industry contractors regarding field truck and equipment costs. Contractors love equipment and that’s OK if it is paying for itself. Quite often it’s not. If it was field labor, it would be like having three guys on the payroll who were playing cards in the back room all day. Every cost in the company, especially field trucks and equipment costs, has to justify its existence and be passed onto the customer with an appropriate margin applied to it. Apply these simple rules to your field T&E costs and it should improve your bottom line. **L&L**

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BUILDING BLOCKS FOR FINANCIAL HEALTH

→ **MOST LANDSCAPE COMPANIES** have managed to navigate the turbulence of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Thanks to the vaccine, we may see the economy and consumer spending rebound this year. However, it is unclear if the damage done by shutdowns and high unemployment will have lingering effects on recovery.

I think it would be wise to proceed with caution until we can see a more predictable future, maybe by the third quarter. In the meantime, keep a close eye on financial indicators.

If you do not have a financial dashboard, it's a good time to establish one. **Some items that should be tracked monthly include:**

- Balance sheet ratios such as current ratio, quick ratio, debt to equity and return on assets.
- Average age of receivables, payable days, cash on hand, credit line balance and available credit and average hourly wage.
- Operational labor percentage by service line, overtime hours, unapplied time, gross margin by service line, sales growth and net profit.
- Client retention, employee retention and lost days due to accidents.

While this is not everything, and may be more than you think you need, you do need a baseline. Items you should be monitoring daily – or weekly at a minimum – include daily bank balance, receivables received and payables paid. It is really important to do these things, if for nothing else but peace of mind.

I also think it is wise to pay close attention to your account receivable aging and get on top of the over 30-day accounts immediately. Some of your clients may be struggling with cash and start to string you out, so it's critical to stay on top of slippage.

Building a budget is essential to all businesses. If you don't have one, do it now. Then track monthly actuals against budget and look for trends. The budget reflects how you thought things would work out, and the actual is how they are actually working out. The sooner you attack variances, the sooner you can limit damage.

Labor is your largest expense. Labor can be managed at a high level by knowing what your head count should be each month. Also, you should know how much, if any, overtime you are budgeting. If your head count and overtime match the budget, you should not be surprised at month's end. You may have some individual job issues,

but the company overall should be okay. More detailed labor trackers are used by many companies that track individual job labor to budget.

You should also place controls on purchasing so that spending does not get out of hand. Limiting the number of people in the process is the best way to do this and not allowing purchases over a certain threshold or type of purchase without your prior approval is an easy way to establish oversight.

For many companies, this is second nature; for newer companies with limited management teams, this approach can be a necessary challenge. Having a good accounting department is an essential part of a successful company and an investment that pays real dividends.

Financial procedures and policies may require new planning approaches. Will you need to add new revenue streams? How much are you allocating to attract new customers, research market trends or bring added value to the table?

Last year gave us an opportunity to adjust our mindsets, develop greater connection with our teams and communities, and to invent new ways to measure what matters.

As we focus on a return to growth across our services and segments, making a commitment to improve financial reporting and performance processes will help you translate lessons learned from 2020 and improve your financial profile for the longer term. **L&L**

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WITH FRED HASKETT, CA, CTP, LICM
GREEN INDUSTRY VETERAN

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

TRAINING OUR TRAINERS

→ **MOST OF US ARE IN THE MIDST** of working on our training programs. This is an area that – as I have talked to different people around the industry – is a continuing source of angst.

We live in an information-rich environment and there are literally hundreds of places to get technical and business information. Association members are lucky to have educational programs, books, videos, DVDs and CDs at their fingertips. These represent some of the most cutting-edge information and data available.

Yet with all of this “stuff,” why is training still a constant source of frustration for both large and small companies? I do not think the problem is in finding the right stuff.

The problem is: Do we, as owners and managers, know how to teach the right way?

Do the people we charge with training – our crew leaders – know how to teach the right way?

To be effective, we as trainers need to be familiar with the nature of the teaching and learning process. We need to understand the processes of teaching, learning and training methods. This will help trainers be in touch with how people learn and retain skills and concepts.

Basically, before you try to teach, you should know how people learn, which reminds me of a couple of quotes.

“Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn.”

– Benjamin Franklin

“I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand.”

– Confucius

An effective training program must focus on the trainers as much if not more than the trainees. **It needs to examine the following three processes:**

- Teaching is directing the learning process – motivating, reinforcing, satisfying needs and creating interest all toward the trainee’s goals.
- Learning is the process by which a trainee, through his own activity, becomes changed in behavior.
- Training methods are those techniques (procedures and processes) used by the trainer to instruct the trainees in the knowledge, skills and competencies necessary to achieve the objectives of the lesson.

It also needs to examine the five basic ways in which people (adults and trainees) learn:

1. **Doing:** Performing a new job in the same way, with the same tools and equipment, under the same conditions as they must do this task in an actual real-life situation.
2. **Thinking:** Solving a real-life difficulty or problem. Getting the facts needed to solve it, discussing it with others, arriving at decisions, putting the decisions into action and testing them.
3. **Seeing:** Observing a thing being done; studying pictures, charts, videos, illustrations and real objects.
4. **Being told:** Getting information and instruction through words – written, spoken or printed.
5. **Being checked and corrected:** Learning through mistakes brought to their attention in a positive manner by an alert, competent trainer.

In an effective training program, each step is discussed in detail, as is the sequential flow of the process to achieve the maximum effect.

Providing training to your trainers will make them more comfortable and less fearful of their role as a trainer.

Once the training program is embraced, it allows an organization’s trainers to have the familiarity and the self-confidence to train their team members consistently and thoroughly. The result is a safe, competent and effective workforce.

As we all know, training is not a full-time job – it is an all-the-time job. If your trainers have the right tools, they can get the job done for your trainees. **L&L**

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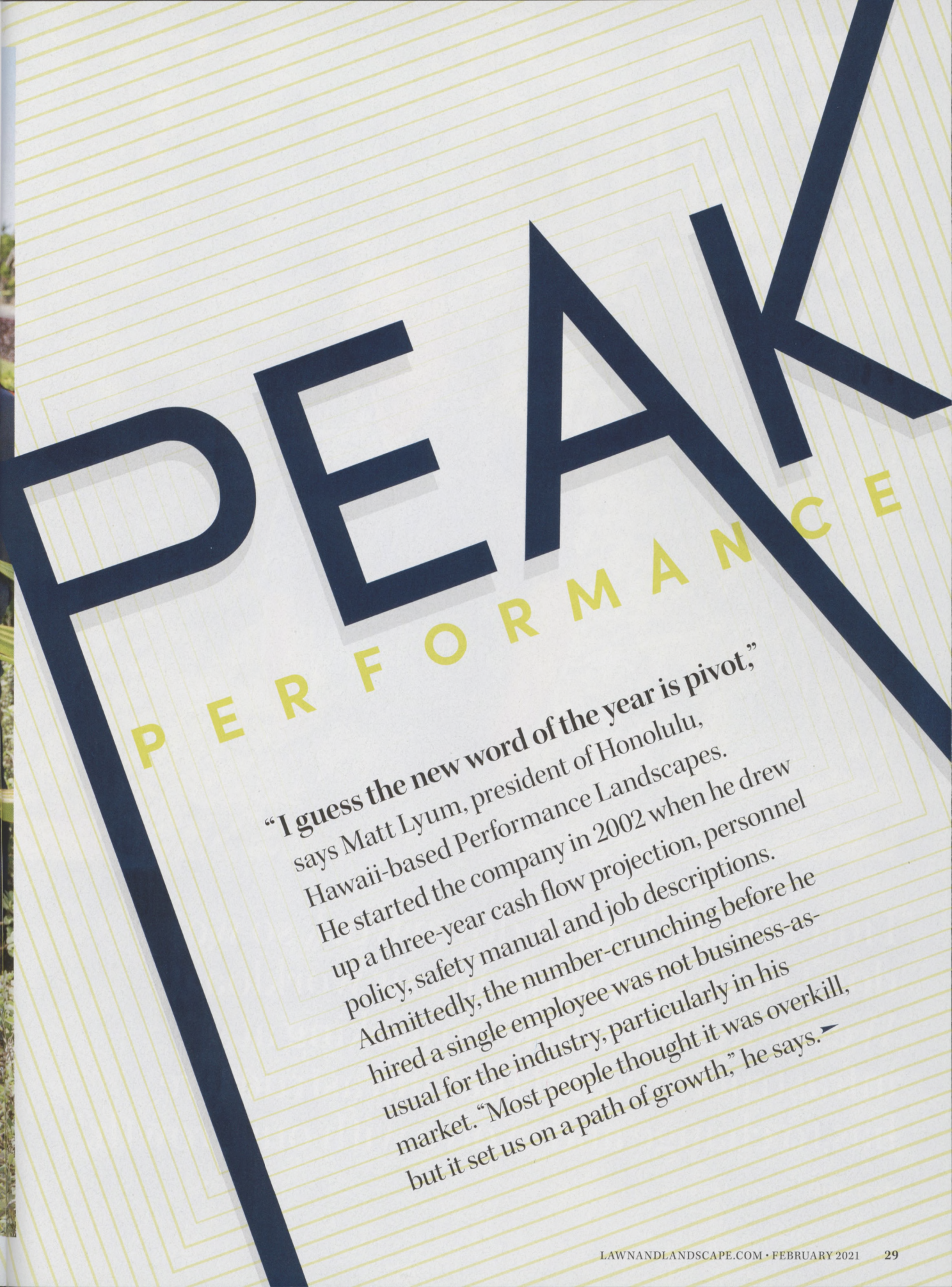
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Building a solid business infrastructure has positioned **Matt Lyum** and **Performance Landscapes** to grow thoughtfully, train thoroughly and deliver quality.

Story by **Kristen Hampshire**



PEAK

PERFORMANCE

“I guess the new word of the year is pivot,” says Matt Lyum, president of Honolulu, Hawaii-based Performance Landscapes. He started the company in 2002 when he drew up a three-year cash flow projection, personnel policy, safety manual and job descriptions. Admittedly, the number-crunching before he hired a single employee was not business-as-usual for the industry, particularly in his market. “Most people thought it was overkill, but it set us on a path of growth,” he says. ➤



“I intentionally turn down work so we don’t have big jumps in our workload. We always have to keep looking at infrastructure, and that infrastructure has to change and evolve with our growth.”

MATT LYUM, president, Performance Landscapes



► So, the plan was to land work in the Association of Apartment Owners (AOAO) sector – Hawaii’s version of HOAs. Lyum tapped into his family business’s real estate contacts, reaching out to property managers to let them know he had started his business, a pivot from his previous career in landscaping and composting.

“I called these property managers that my dad and family knew and they were all excited and encouraging me, saying, ‘A year from now, we’ll have a bid coming up, so we’ll keep you in mind,’” Lyum says.

A year?!

“I’m thinking, ‘I need money now,’” Lyum says. “My cash flow projection said I’d be hiring in the upcoming months. I had to pivot right away.

“I rushed and got my contractor’s license, which in my business plan was not until year two. I jumped into install work and then the maintenance followed.”

Earning a contractor’s license requires working in the field for at least three out of the last 10 years. Lyum leveraged experience working for a previous licensed landscape contractor, plus the compost company had a landscape division with licensing.

“I was able to use that to qualify,” he says, adding that he passed the test within a month’s time. This fast ramp-up was necessary because potential clients were requesting install work and the new business already had a growing pipeline of opportunities.

Since then, consistent growth has followed.

Performance Landscapes evolved from Lyum and his business partner and operations manager Benny Abregado, to more than \$7 million in revenue and 120 employees, a large portion of which are Filipino and are embracing Performance Landscapes’ customized training and opportunity to work on the island’s high-end properties.

Lyum says of the business, “This is scalable. I don’t even see an end in sight to our growth right now.” In fact, he turns down potential clients in order to preserve quality and ensure the infrastructure is in place to deliver on the company’s standards. Currently, Performance Landscapes services 24 HOAs on The Big Island.

“I intentionally turn down work so we don’t have big jumps in our workload,” Lyum says. “We always have to keep looking at infrastructure, and that infrastructure has to change and evolve with our growth.”

RAMPING UP REPUTABLY. Referrals feed new accounts to Performance Landscapes because property managers are looking for providers that understand Hawaii’s tropical nuances and what this means for landscapes. “We have year-round insects, pests and weeds, so you have to be up on your horticulture skills to identify those and know how to treat them,” Lyum says.

When he started the business 18 years ago, there were “lots of mow, blow and go” contractors. “But if you don’t control irrigation, fertilization and pests, you can really lose control of your landscape quickly,” he says.

In essence, Performance Landscapes has “taken control” of the high-end market because word passes on the island. Lyum rewinds to the first year in business when a friend of his received a wrong-number phone call from a woman seeking a landscaper. “He convinced her to call me, and she was on the board of one of the largest HOAs, which was a big leap into that market,” he says.

Lyum met with this new contact and she hired him. A year later, the HOA board requested an RFP from Performance Landscapes. But the property, called The Peninsula, was 43 acres, “and we were still too small to ramp up,” he says, always thinking infrastructure.

So, Lyum declined the opportunity. If he said yes, he’d have just 30 days to find staff and acquire equipment. “They actually liked our honesty, and they gave us 90 days to ramp up,” Lyum says.

The company recruited 10 more employees, which was a 30% jump in labor. Performance Landscapes relies on referrals to recruit new team members, offering a \$1,000 bonus paid out during a year’s time to crewmembers who bring a qualified, hard-working employee to the table. “It helps motivate them to get good guys, and they want to do that anyway because they don’t want dead wood working with them,” Lyum says. The bonus is paid monthly until the \$1,000 cap is hit as long as the new employee stays on board.

With a phase-in plan to handle the account and ongoing recruiting, Performance Landscapes took over the property maintenance and has been working there ever since.

HOA properties are bread-and-butter for Performance Landscapes, but entering the military property management sector has provided stable income and advanced the company’s safety training. In 2007, Lendlease reached out to Lyum. Lendlease is a private military contractor in the real estate industry and has a number of properties in Hawaii. “Usually, we don’t do government work because it’s in the low-bid world, but I talked to them and toured the site,” Lyum says.

They were looking for something different. “They wanted a high-quality service provider,” he says.

Lyum’s wife, Tracey, who is a financial adviser and does the accounting for Performance Landscapes, helped changed Lyum’s tune. In 2007, the country was on the brink of a recession and she saw the writing on the wall. “She said I might want to consider a customer with a 50-year federal contract,” he says.

Performance Landscapes has been servicing Lendlease properties since then, and the account has grown exponentially, from 300 homes to now more than 5,000 and counting. Plus, the work has been recession-proof and resulted in safety and training protocols that Lyum says makes Performance Landscapes a better business.

For example, Lendlease implements the military AHA, Activity Hazard Analysis. “So,

you have to analyze each piece of equipment or activity, come up with a training program and workers have a laminated card signed off by a supervisor saying he is trained for one year," Lyum says. "Every year it expires, and they have to retrain."

Lyum loved the concept and adopted it as a best practice at Performance Landscapes. Every year, the company hosts a training day. The workweek is cut to four days and staff is paid overtime on the fifth day, which is set aside for field activities and education. Team members retrain on every piece of equipment.

"We think this is a better way to operate, and we've grown from it," Lyum says.

Meanwhile, Performance Landscapes creates its own training manuals and videos, primarily because the company translates English into the Filipino language of Ilocano. Landscape training manuals are widely avail-

able in Spanish, but not this dialect. "We make our own in-house training flyers, and several of our supervisors and managers are fluent in English, so now we are doing in-house training videos," he says.

Recruiting from the Ilocano Philippine farming communities has resulted in building an agronomically strong team, which is important to Lyum.

"They have an awareness of plants and plant management," he says.

Similar to how Performance Landscapes has grown its client base, it expands its team through referrals.

"Our people almost prequalify people for us," he says. "They have already talked about our company and our values, our attention to detail and professionalism. So, a lot of the guys who come to us say, 'We want to work like that, too.' It cuts the interview process way down."

SYSTEMS WITH AN EDGE. If you see Performance Landscapes on the road, you'll notice their vehicles because of the professional logo.

Plus, the enclosed vans aren't the usual truck-and-trailer outfit. The service vans are windowless, which prevents theft. They're easier to drive on the volcanic Hawaiian topography. And it's easier to jet through traffic, which can be merciless during rush hour.

"A truck and trailer have physical difficulty getting around town and to different jobsites," Lyum says. "And because our streets follow the contour of the land, our crews are winding up and down hills, and truck-and-trailers are a little bulky for that. So, we use the vans that are lockable for mobility, maneuverability and security."

With growth a theme, the fleet has expanded and so has Performance Landscapes' need for warehouse space. A major milestone

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was purchasing a location – its third move – in Honolulu, where industrial real estate can cost up to \$300 per square foot.

But being in town was critical for reducing drive time, Lyum says. As everyone files into the city to work, the crews are driving against traffic.

“We save what we pay in our mortgage in travel-time costs,” he says. “And, buying our own property really stabilized that part of the equation where a landlord could raise the rent or evict us.”

Another stabilizing force is how Performance Landscapes uses time-motion efficiencies for estimating through online property measuring software. “We set up production rates and did some random checks on our crews and modified those a little bit,” Lyum says.

With those rates and the measurements software provides, Performance Landscape can accurately job cost. And once a year, Lyum reviews those numbers to assess whether price increases are necessary.

“If we are doing really well with time on a property, it will not get an increase. But if we are behind, there might be a price increase,” he says.

Looking ahead, Lyum says that Performance Landscapes, like every business, is anticipating the end of the pandemic.

Though, he’s grateful to be in an industry that is deemed essential and that his accounts are HOA and military vs. hospitality and retail, which are struggling. Sure, some jobs have been postponed, but other areas like installation have accelerated. In fact, the company was wrapping up a CARES Act-funded job in December.

Acquiring plants and landscape materials continues to be a challenge across the green industry, and it’s no different for Performance Landscapes. Back to the word of the year: pivot.

With one job, Lyum is working with the architect to re-specify plants and extending the project through 2021. He plans to contract grow a lot of plants.

Continued growth is on the docket, though. Performance Landscapes created another layer of management to allow for career development. “We just have to be conscious of not growing too quickly,” Lyum adds.

With all the pivoting during the company’s history, in many ways it was prepared for the pandemic. And, there have been many silver linings. Lyum names this one specifically:

“One of our HOA accounts applied for the local building industry ‘landscape of the quarter’ award because of our service,” he says, proud. **L&L**

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The **next** software solution

The right labor management software can help tackle common tasks more efficiently. **By Kimberly Lux**

In today's world, business owners are looking to technology to solve their everyday problems and help streamline operations.

Nate Moses, CEO of Precision Landscape Management, in Greenville, S.C., says good labor management software can be one of the most essential tools for a landscaping company.

"Like the CRM that you use for your business, it's very involved and the more involved you are in it, the more you get out of it," he says. "You have to utilize it almost on a daily basis to get the most out of it."

TAKING THE PLUNGE. Moses admits he didn't go looking for a labor management software, and it took him awhile to commit to the investment.

"The product came to us. The salesperson who taught us about it is someone we knew from their previous job," he says. "He knew the business we were in and knew that labor management was a key part of what we do. We did a lot of our own research, too. It was prob-

ably three to four months since he first told us about it before we decided to pull the trigger."

Daniel Henks, owner of the Missouri-based Earth Effects Outdoor Living, was turned on to his software by a local colleague. After getting the referral, Henks says he made sure to test it with a few members of his team before committing to it.

"We started using (the software) three years ago and had used a few basic types of software before but decided through another local company to give it a try," he says. "I came to love it pretty quick just because of the efficiency and how things tie together from being out in the field and then coming back to the office and it's all tied in."

One of the things Moses says he likes most about his software choice is how tech-forward it is.

"It's a technology company that handles HR and payroll rather than a HR company trying to use technology," he says. "We feel like it gives us a lot of advantages on the reporting and predicting side that traditional payroll and HR software has not."

The process for us started with our office manager really spearheading the project. When you're implementing something new, **I think it's really important that one person owns the project.**"

NATE MOSES, CEO,
Precision Landscape
Management

ABOVE: Crews at Earth Effects Outdoor Living are fairly tech-forward and have learned to embrace labor management software.

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TECHNOLOGY



Moses didn't seek out labor management software, and it took him awhile to commit to the investment, but now it's an integral part of his business.

GETTING IT TOGETHER. Moses and Henks both say the process of implementing the new software was time-consuming but well worth it.

"Obviously, there's a huge learning curve," Henks says. "I still say I'm not using it to its full potential because there's so much you can integrate and automate, and I just haven't had the time to fully use it. But, even at using it to 35 to 50% of its capacity, I still find it to be a huge value."

Onboarding the new software took Moses' company about two months to complete.

"There's a lot of work that goes into it," he says. "The process for us started with our office manager really spearheading the project. When you're implementing something new, I think it's really important that one person owns the project."

After getting it set up, the next step is introducing it to the masses.

"When we rolled it out to the company, it was a tiered rollout," Moses says. "There were three or four weeks where we rolled out specific things. And that went very, very well since it was planned intentionally."

Henks says his software came with a convenient way for his crews to learn it on their own time.

"There were training videos galore, so you could have your staff watch videos on their phones even to see how it works," he says. "That saved a lot of time."

And after training the staff, the next step was encouraging employees to utilize it. Henks says he let employees practice using the new technology for a few weeks before they officially went "live" with it. This way they felt more confident using it when the time came.

"The biggest challenges were getting it set up the right way...and then

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LOOK BEFORE YOU LEAP. Henks and Moses both did a great deal of research before selecting software.

training both the office and guys in the field. There's different levels in people's ability when it comes to technology," Henks says. "Young people gravitate to it really quick and wonder why you didn't do it sooner, and the older generation says, 'I don't want this new thing. And how in the world am I supposed to learn this?'"

When it came to those older employees, Henks says he allowed more time for training and knew some hiccups might occur during the early stages. But, he says they continued working with those employees.

Moses says the software was well received at Precision.

"I'd give the reception an eight out of 10," he says. "People are typically resistant to change, but there was enough frustration with our previous software that they were a little more open to the change."

REAPING THE BENEFITS. Moses says the advantages of labor management software are endless.

"We've been using it now for about six months," he says. "It's made our payroll process shorter. It has made reporting for our team members better, and it's made our team members more involved in the process."

Communication is always key, and Moses says the software has made it a breeze.

"It allows us to do things like make company announcements and schedule company events," he says. "Some other features it has is that you can survey your staff on different things...and you can also link it with Indeed and other job-tracking software."

But Moses says there's one special feature that really sold him.

"The technology, once you've used it for a while, can help predict what employees may not be satisfied in their position based on your turnover trends and other common things," he says. "It has GPS and looks at where people are driving from, how long they've been in the company, how long they've been in this role and who their supervisor is. It looks at all these different factors and tries to predict that employee's long-term success at the company and prompts you to proactively have a chat with that person."

For Henks, the labor management software is all about saving time.

"It's a lot more efficient. It takes care of a lot of the things that you'd have to bring paper into the office for and enter," he says. "I also use it for marketing some and could use that heavier."

Henks says other perks include a customer portal for online payments and he's able to keep an eye on crews out in the field.

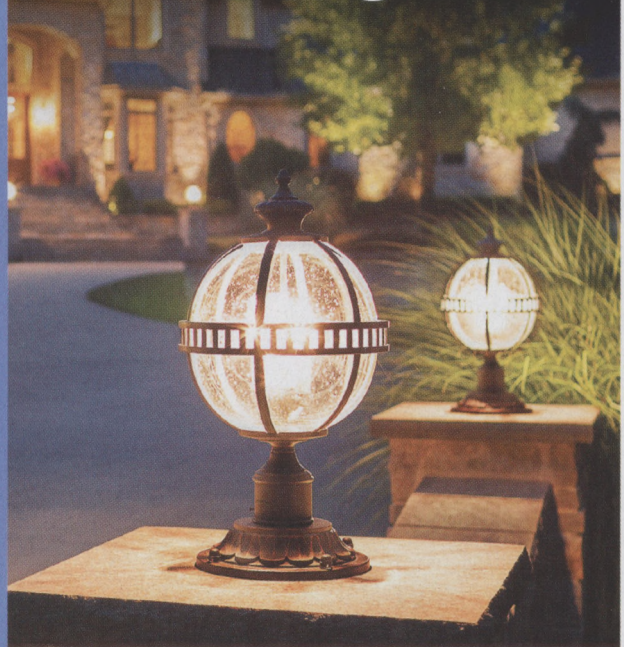
EMBRACING THE TIMES. The pair believe that the software, and technology in general, is necessary to keep their companies moving forward.

"Like anything in life, you have to keep up with changes or you get left behind," Henks says. "One of the reasons I like technology is because I like things to be seamless. I'm not a huge company, there's 15 of us on average, we don't have the time to do lots of extra things. Anything I can do to push the processes through faster is important."

Moses says he recognizes that some may be hesitant of the expense but staying stagnant in business could be even more costly.

"When you're analyzing software you really have to not think about what the expense is but what additional efficiencies you can get out of your business when you do implement it," he says. **L&L**

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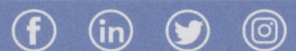
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Diving — DEEPER — *into* — DRIP

Drip irrigation has become more commonplace in recent years, and irrigation companies are keeping up by designing more products to increase efficiency and ease installation.

By Kim Lux



An increasing global population, droughts and a move toward more sustainable options throughout the industry has led to drip irrigation becoming more popular.

Because of this, irrigation companies are working to provide products that are more advanced, environmentally friendly and speed up installation time for contractors.

BENEFITS BEYOND SAVING WATER. The primary advantage of drip irrigation is ultimately water conservation.

"It's the most efficient form of irrigation because it's putting water directly where it's needed," says Peter Lackner, product manager at Toro. "And that's especially true of subsurface irrigation where it's putting water directly at the root level."

Rick Foster, principal product manager with Rain Bird's landscape drip business unit, calls drip irrigation a problem solver, since it eliminates overspray that winds up on cars, parking lots, sidewalks and other areas where it's not wanted.

Foster says another perk of choosing subsurface drip irrigation is it reduces acts of vandalism.

"Drip irrigation can be installed subsurface...which means you don't see it. And if they can't see it, they can't damage it. Unfortunately, vandals see a spray that's popped up and they give it a kick," he says. "It happens."

The amount of water needed to run a drip irrigation system also attracts more contractors.

"As the population increases, and there's more and more demand on the infrastructure, we're losing more water pressure," says Rick Hall, market development director with K-Rain. "Drip irrigation, by nature, is a low-pressure delivery system. It's not going to suffer the same long-term effects of an overhead system."

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Area

Volume

ft

ft²

yd³

Show

Parent Group

None

Services

Bed Maintenance / Weeding

Measurement: 12,383.12 sq ft

Time: 1h 14m

Edging Mulch Beds

Measurement: 3,219.77 ft

Time: 9h 45m

Mulch Bed Pre-Emergent Appli

Measurement: 12,383.12 sq ft

Time: 1h 14m

Mulching

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Time: 47h 46m

Vertical Edging

Measurement: 3,219.77 ft

Time: 1h 10m

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Area



Hall adds that during times of droughts, where water conservation is critical, some communities give relief or exemption to water restrictions where drip irrigation systems are installed.

ADVANCING THE APPARATUS. Since drip is becoming increasingly more popular, irrigation companies are making a wider range of products to keep up with demand.

Netafim has been working to provide more options when it comes to flow and spacing.

"Dripline used to be about .9 gph (gallons per hour) flow and 12-inch spacing. Most manufacturers still only have one or two flow rates," says Mauricio Troche, vice president of sales for specialty markets at Netafim. "With our farming background we understood the need for multiple flows to meet different soil or plant types."

Netafim manufactures equipment with flow rates as low as .26 gph to as high as 1.16 gph, coupled with spacings from six inches to 24 inches.

Troche says the company is also making more check valves for slope and elevation changes.

Rain Bird has been making advancements with check valves too, by adding them to each emitter in the dripline system.

"In a drip zone, or any irrigation zone, when you complete the irrigation cycle and the valve turns off, typically all that water drains out at the lowest point in the zone," Foster says. "And that's a lot of wasted water...so, one of the other advancements that's happening is the integration of check valves inside each tiny, little drip emitter."

"So, instead of having an in-line check valve, which have been around for years and years, that are big and bulky and the size of

your fist, the industry has developed tiny check valves that are located in each individual drip emitter," he adds. "And what that means is, when the zone shuts off, all the water stays in the drip line."

Rain Bird also has a patent for its copper chip technology in its new XFS Subsurface Dripline.

"When you go subsurface, you have to protect the devices from root intrusion and that's a big problem," Foster says.

"One of the most important advancements is the use of copper located right in the drip emitter itself. Copper is known to resist root growth, so as roots get closer to a high concentration of copper, the growth of the root is interfered with."

Hunter is also getting into the copper game, and Robb Kowalewski, product manager for Hunter's valves and micro-irrigation division,

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says a copper dripline will debut in Q1 of 2021.

However, Kowalewski says one of the company's tried and true products is even better at preventing root intrusion.

"What we consider to be our better invest is our Eco-Wrap and our Eco-Mat," he says. "The Eco-Wrap is a dripline that has a fleece lining wrapped around it. It is more root-resistant than copper and, because of the fleece, it actually moves the water better under soil."

Lackner says Toro still has a flagship products, the DL2000, which uses a cylindrical emitter that's also tolerant of debris.

Additionally, Lackner says Toro is working on creating products that ease installation.

"We revamped our drip zone valve kits about three years ago, and with anything with drip, it's important to have a filter on the line as well as a pressure regulator," he says.

"The revamp we did was basically consoli-



Using copper in drip irrigation systems has become more popular because it's root-resistant.

GOOD THINGS COME IN SMALL PACKAGES. Rain Bird's check valves have gone from the size of a fist to small enough to fit on your fingertip.

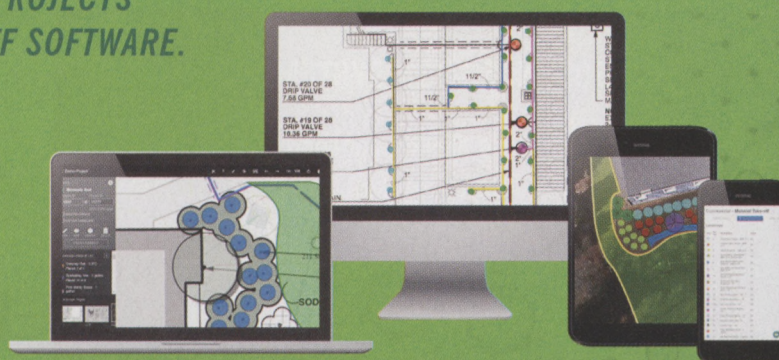
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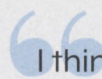
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I think the way people design will probably modify globally...and because of that, drip irrigation will continue to grow and be more and more relevant.”

ROBB KOWALEWSKI, product manager for Hunter's valves and micro-irrigation division

dating our regulators into one model that can tolerate a wider range of flows. We've got essentially a universal flow pressure regulator...that makes things easier for the contractor to install.”

Furthermore, Toro's tri-lock fittings fit multiple size driplines, which helps contractors when retrofitting or dealing with maintenance issues.

Rain Bird has also been working to speed up installation.

“We've developed pre-assembled units we call control zone kits,” Foster says. “Instead of having to go find all the individual components, and confirming they all work together, we've done all that work for them.”

Netafim has created its wheelbarrow tubing dispenser and Techlock Fittings with the motto “keep it simple” in mind.

“The tubing dispenser is just that. You put a roll onto the wheelbarrow. Like a lazy Susan, you're able to move it around easily and dispense tubing quickly,” Troche says.

“The Tech Lock fittings are meant to be used instead of insert fittings when you think you might move the tubing again or want to change the design down the road. They are meant to be used in smaller spaces.”

MAKING DRIP A MAINSTAY. Hall believes that drip's popularity plays into contractors being more educated on the subject.

“I can recall years ago that drip was considered a splurge or a luxury,” he says. “But today it's become common practice in a lot of areas. Irrigated areas are becoming smaller and smaller as populations expand, so drip is very much mainstream today.”

“The need to throw water great distances are limited to athletic fields, golf course, large parks and places like that.”

And Hall says drip irrigation will only continue to evolve.

“I would suspect that as drip continues to grow in popularity, you're going to find more companies offering creative ways of quickly installing it,” he says.

Lackner too believes more people will embrace drip irrigation, and other sustainable measures.

“I anticipate we'll see more fluent water infrastructure expansion and people using more retreated water to water their landscapes,” he says.

Troche says Netafim has been looking to encourage more people to use reclaimed water as well.

“As more water agencies and states require the use of reclaimed water, we have developed two options,” he says. “We've always had a reclaimed option that drained completely

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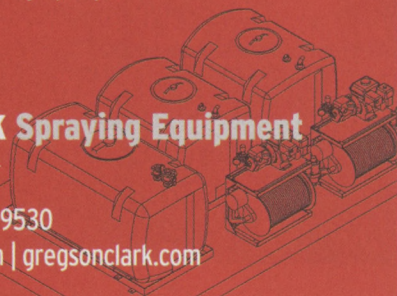


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and with our emitter filtration and new copper oxide root intrusion technology, we now offer a reclaimed check valve version for projects that have elevation changes."

Kowalewski also says an increased focus on the environment will lead to more landscape designers to incorporate drip.

"I think drip irrigation will continue to

grow at a higher pace than overhead sprays," he says. "I think the way people design will probably modify globally...and because of that drip irrigation will continue to grow and be more and more relevant."

But with so many options out there, Kowalewski says it can be difficult for contractors to know exactly what to choose.

"I think there are some many (products) that it's confusing so I think companies will probably consolidate products," he says.

Foster says simplifying the installation process is more important now than ever.

"Sometimes, simple innovations like pre-assembling a system may be very helpful for customers," he says.

"I think it's important especially with a tight labor market, and COVID-19, contractors want to do work with smaller teams and get in and out of the jobsite quickly." **L&L**

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Celebrating your differences


The background of the page is a solid light yellow. Scattered across it are various 3D geometric shapes: a large orange ring, a smaller blue ring, a large orange triangle, a blue triangle, a yellow sphere, a blue sphere, a white cube, a yellow cube, and several smaller spheres and triangles in orange, blue, and yellow. The shapes are rendered with soft shadows, giving them a three-dimensional appearance.

Understanding the diversity in your workforce could do more than boost your team morale. **By Jimmy Miller**

Richard Lehr believes refocusing your efforts on diversity and inclusion is a slow burn – it's not easy and it won't come quickly.

"It's wading from the shallow end to the deep end," says Lehr, the legal and human resources adviser with the National Association of Landscape Professionals. "It's not diving into the deep end."

Lehr presented during a session called "Focus on Diversity and Inclusion: Implementing Meaningful Initiatives in your Organization" at LANDSCAPES 2020, which was held virtually in October due to the pandemic. Pam Dooley from Plants Creative Landscapes in Georgia hosted the panel, which also included Lehr; Brigitte Orrick, the director of recruiting and employee development from the Davey Tree Expert Company; and Mari Medrano, the human resources director from CoCal Landscapes.



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The panelists acknowledged that efforts to celebrate workforce diversity are often well-intentioned, but they can lose steam unless the company undergoes a significant culture change.

"We need to change our mindset," Medrano says. "Not only as owners, but we need to change the mindset with our employees out in the field as well."

LOOKING FOR THE RIGHT THING. Lehr specifies that a focus on diversity should not be company owners seeking to make their employees conform to one specific cultural identity. Avoid assimilation – it's not the end goal, nor is simply tolerating everyone's differences.

"What we're really focusing on is to appreciate the various backgrounds and beliefs that individuals have," Lehr says. "What we really want to do is understand, respect and celebrate the differences that individuals bring to the workplace."

Lehr says that when we hear the words "diversity and inclusion," the focus tends to be on race, sexual orientation and gender identity. But really, he says company owners should be thinking in a broader view of what makes each member of their companies unique.

Yes, this viewpoint includes a look at race or sexual orientation or gender identity, but it should also include language skills, geographic background and work experience. It can include preferences like learning style, favorite foods, social style or hobbies, too.

"One of the mistakes we make is we look at it too narrowly," Lehr says. "There's a richness within our own workforce that we can learn about."

It's not just about the employees: Lehr says a "thorough, wall-to-wall" focus on diversity and inclusion is an effort to bid jobs to female-owned or minority-owned companies at a higher frequency. The outreach to do work with these companies needs to be strong, and Lehr challenges landscapers to consider how they're doing this in their own communities.

But Lehr says one of the reasons the process of truly embracing diversity and inclusion can be so difficult is because there are plenty of people who come from areas that truly were not that diverse. In other words, some folks were raised in spots where people didn't think too differently from one another, and diversity in race, ethnicity, or even sexual orientation may come as a culture shock.

Even still, Lehr says it's important to go through the meticulous growing pains of this process should they exist. That's because the benefit of a company that embraces each other's differences is one that has a strong culture overall.

"Individuals are not spectators, they're participants," he says. "Organizations that have less of a focus on inclusion and diversity tend to be cultures that are more siloed."

HOW TO GET ROLLING. Orrick says Davey Tree launched their initiative in a four-stage process, of which they're only midway through.

First, she recommends collecting data and analyzing it thoroughly. Examining the existing workforce and determining ways to break it down into categorical data is helpful. And if company owners find that they can't break it down into some types of categories, that means there's not even visibility at the company.

“What we really want to do is understand...the differences that individuals bring to the workplace.”

RICHARD LEHR, legal and human resources adviser, NALP

For example, Orrick says Davey Tree found they didn't offer many ways for employees to select themselves as military veterans or share their sexual orientation preferences in company surveys. Obviously, employees should have the option to opt out of answering any of these questions, but Orrick says they should be able to opt in to addressing their status, too.

This type of research helps companies evaluate spots where they're succeeding in their efforts on hiring or recruiting with diversity in mind, and it highlights areas where the company can improve.

“What we did learn is that just by examining our workforces, we found some pockets of success and some pockets we needed to pay attention to,” she says. In particular, she found that at Davey, there was decent representation from women and minorities

Continues on pg. 54



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STRONG CASE for a STAND-ON



Some landscape companies are trading in their walk-behinds and riders for stand-on mowers.

By Gregg Wartgow

Thanks to its shorter profile and enhanced agility, the stand-on mower is becoming the preferred mowing machine for more landscape companies. Nate Hrobsky, owner of Nate's Landscaping & Snow Removal in Milton, Wis., first began using stand-ons several years ago. Now he won't use anything else. It's all about productivity.

"We mow some very large commercial properties," Hrobsky says. "We typically need three 60-inch mowers going at once. The biggest advantage we've found with stand-ons is that we're able to get as many as four on our big trailer. When we were using riders, we could only fit two."

Some landscape companies have found that a stand-on is a good match for smaller properties, too.

"If we are mowing anything less than a half-acre, we use either a 48-inch rider or 36-inch stand-on," says Alex Kirby, owner of Trifecta Lawn Care in Lexington, S.C. "I personally wouldn't want to be standing all day to mow. But in our market where there are a lot of smaller subdivision yards, a 36-inch stand-on is great. It fits through any gate, is excellent around beds and eliminates the need for push mowing. A stand-on is also lighter which is good for delicate turf. Plus, we can flip the platform up and turn it into a walk-behind if we have to, like if the grass is pretty wet. Overall, the flexibility of the stand-on has been awesome for us. We don't even own any walk-behinds."

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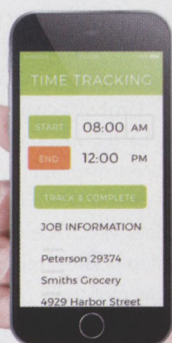
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MAINTENANCE

Brad Behr, owner of Copper Creek Cuts in Macclenny, Fla., also uses a 36-inch stand-on for his smaller residential accounts. For increased productivity, he switches to his 48-inch stand-on to cut the larger front lawn, like common areas of an HOA or spots where gates aren't an issue. Added productivity is just one of the reasons why.

"There is some slope to the terrain surrounding two ponds in those common areas," Behr says. "The larger the wheelbase, the better the mower is going to do on slopes. From a safety standpoint, I wouldn't even want to attempt mowing those ponds with a rider."

SAVING TIME. Kirby says that by completely removing walk-behind mowers from his operation, maintenance crew productivity has skyrocketed.

"Using stand-ons instead of walk mowers has allowed us to add another two or three properties to each route," Kirby says. Having a stand-on on the trailer also helps when a rider unexpectedly becomes inoperable. "Before, the crew would have been done for the day because it wouldn't have been possible to finish the route by push mowing. But with a 36-inch stand-on, the crew can still get through the mowing without too much lost time," Kirby says.

DJ Aldrich, co-owner of Aldrich Landscape in Sylvania, Ohio, says stand-on mowers have been a boon to his crews' productivity as well. The company began experimenting with its first stand-on a few years ago, replacing one of its intermediate walk-behinds. Now all of the company's intermediate walk-behind mowers have been replaced by stand-ons. In fact, at Aldrich Landscape, the zero-turn rider has even been replaced.

"We have found that a stand-on is quicker than a sit-down," Aldrich says. "You have a much better point of view. Everything is out in front of you so you don't have to worry about anything that might be a couple feet behind you. Your turns can be faster. We've also found that the balance is a lot better. For the most part, your center of gravity is over the back wheels. You can turn a bit faster with less risk of tearing up the turf."

Hrobosky says his crews have come to appreciate the fact that visibility is better on a stand-on. Since an operator is standing upright, it's easier to see over hills, shrubs and other obstacles.

Stand-ons can also be advantageous when debris is in the mower's pathway. "The operator can easily step off of the mower because the blades shut right off," Hrobosky says. "Then the operator can grab the piece of trash, stuff it in a garbage bag or pail, jump back on and get back to mowing. It's so much faster than if you're on a riding mower."

EMPLOYEE ADOPTION. For veteran employees who are used to sit-down mowers, switching to a stand-on may be met with some initial skepticism. It pays to be patient and to remain enthusiastic. "Experienced employees will eventually come around," Aldrich says.

Aldrich says it was interesting to watch his employees come to accept the concept of stand-up mowing. For those who had experience operating riders, it took a few days to get the feel. "The quality of their mowing was the same, but it took a little while until they became comfortable and started getting really efficient," Aldrich says.

To help expedite the learning curve, Aldrich set up cones in his parking lot so employees could get some extra practice at the end of the day. "The hand controls are a little different," Aldrich says. "Our new employees

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT. To help employees get acclimated to stand-ons, set up a practice course where they can learn to adjust to the new hand controls.



Stand-ons can provide a better vantage point to see debris and can make it easier to see over hills compared to walk-behind and seated mowers.

who had never operated a zero-turn rider picked it up pretty quickly. They're all 19 to 25 years old and play video games, so the hand controls came pretty naturally." Another slight difference employees might run into relates to preventive maintenance.

"Since a stand-on is more compact, it might be a little harder to work on than a zero-turn," Behr says. "A lot of it depends on the manufacturer and how it designs things. With one brand I've tried in the past, you have to bolt from both the bottom and top of the spindles. With the kind of lift I have in my shop, changing the middle blade was almost impossible for me."

On the other hand, Aldrich says that with the right design, a stand-on mower can actually make preventive maintenance a little easier.

"The nice thing with a stand-on is that there are no safety bars going around the mower to block off parts of the engine," Aldrich says. "With the stand-ons we use, the engine is right there and easy to get to. Oil changes are easy."

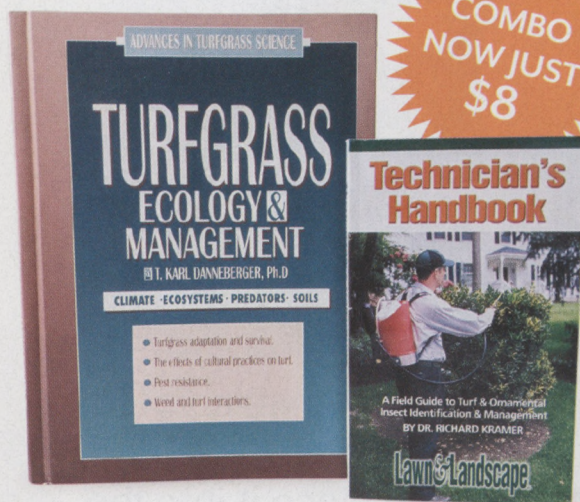
When asked if there are any downsides to a stand-on mower, Hrobsky could only point out how someone feels at the end of a long day of work.

"Honestly, the only thing I can say is that for a guy like me who is 44, comfort can be an issue," Hrobsky says. "Stand-up mowing for eight hours can leave me pretty exhausted. But that's not really an issue because my crews are doing the mowing for me now. They are mostly in their 20s and have no issues whatsoever. In fact, they all tell me that they would never go back to a riding mower now." **L&L**

The author is a freelance writer based in Wisconsin.

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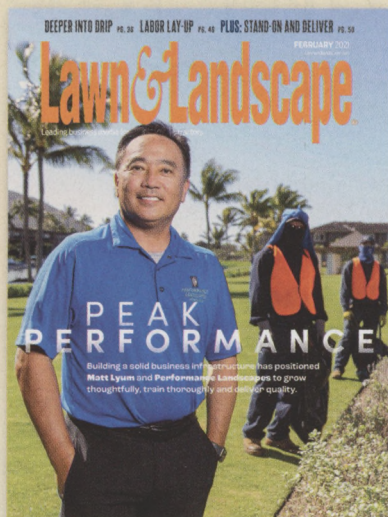
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BUSINESS FOCUS

Continued from pg. 49

in the consulting part of the business but significant underrepresentation in other areas.

So, after companies evaluate where they stand with their current workforce, Orrick says employers should then transition into the strategy development phase. She says they noticed some trends that stood out – again, some positive, some negative. They saw minorities at the company tended to actually stay longer before leaving Davey Tree than their majority counterparts, which felt like a victory.

That said, Orrick says they also learned some surprising things as they started asking employees questions about the data they collected.

For example, women who work in the field at the company told employers that they needed better fitting uniforms and equipment to help them do the job comfortably and safely.

“We also learned that women don’t always have access to regular bathrooms in our field crews. That was another really big learning moment,” Orrick says, adding that some of the men also felt the company needed to better provide this to their employees. “Some of these initiatives were just good common sense.”

Orrick says one key element to their strategy development phase was also looking at the company’s marketing materials. To successfully recruit minority employees, Orrick says the materials should show people who look and talk like them. She also says building a strong mentorship program will help retain the employees a company recruits.

Orrick says the company’s still in the strategy phase, but the implementation phase will take place over the next year. This includes creating accountability to not only celebrate these individuals, but also establish strong protections for them and clear pathways to promotions down the track.

Eventually, Orrick says they’ll enter an evaluation period. What did they learn? What do they want to implement further? She says any initiative like this requires a pilot phase. There will be some wins – some areas where the company clearly progressed – but there will also be spots where the company must continue to improve.

A FINAL FOCUS. The LANDSCAPES 2020 presentation concluded with a segment from Medrano, the president of the National Hispanic Landscape Alliance, which joined forces with NALP in April.

As the human resources director at CoCal in Colorado, Medrano says she’s seen her company become predominately Latinx employees over time. She says they’ve been solely Latino-owned since 2011 and they’ve got a diverse set of executives, plus a middle management team that’s 100% Latinx.

She also says that a focus on diversity really comes to understanding the views and values of all employees. This leads to better flexibility, such as granting women employees who work in the field the time to drop off their kids at school should that be an issue.

But to understand those viewpoints, it first comes down to understanding.

“Often we don’t look the same in gender, color and economic status,” Medrano says. “We as business owners and leaders need to do a better job of inviting minorities to the table.” **L&L**

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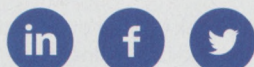
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AN AVERAGE DAY

Krisjan Berzins, president/CEO,
Kingstowne Lawn & Landscape



→ **A few years ago, Krisjan Berzins arrived at his office, and an employee commented that he hadn't seen Berzins around in a while. The employee caught Berzins off guard so his response was defensive, and Berzins realized later that it was the wrong way to react.**

Interviewed by **Brian Horn**

"The proper response would have been, 'I trust you so much that I don't need to be here every minute, looking over your shoulder. I have faith in you to get the job done.' And that would have been a great way to totally disarm it. But I didn't react that way."

Lesson learned for Berzins, who doesn't want to sound arrogant, but after years of trial and error of delegating, he's settled into a good spot as president and CEO. His normal workday looks different than it did a decade ago. **Here's Berzins' average day.**

I am generally in the office 2 to 3 times per week. If I'm going into the office, I'm up around 5 a.m. and in the office by 6:15 a.m. If I'm working from home, I'm probably up by 6:30 a.m.

Obviously, my alarm clock is on my phone, so, once I turn the alarm off, I'm generally looking at any recent text messages or emails that came in overnight. I'm just looking for something that might be urgent. Otherwise, I'm not getting into business right away.

I love coffee. I am a bit of a coffee snob, so I enjoy trying different types of roasts and different types of coffees. So that's the first thing, I'll generally have two cups and then I switch over to water for the rest of the day.

Commute is anywhere from 15 to 20 minutes. On satellite radio, I do listen to Fox Business and that's almost exclusively what I listen to in my truck. It's a lot more business talk than it is political talk.

First thing I do when I get in, I like to stay down downstairs and greet as many people as I can with a smile on my face and an elbow bump at this point. I might find someone that recently had a baby or they had a family member that was ill and ask them how they're doing. I'll probably have a quick chat with our operations manager and then I'll head upstairs and get out of her way.

I am pretty removed from the day-to-day operations, but I do handle recruiting for the most part. I focus my energy on strategy. For financial analysis, we do have a CFO, but I review finances on a monthly basis with her and our financial consultant.

I have a workout routine where I'm working out early afternoon, generally three times a week. That also keeps me from having a big lunch, because I know that I'm going to be working out. And if I wanted to go out and have a big lunch, I will occasionally take staff. I would much rather do that than have some formal meeting in the conference room or in my office.

If I am at the office, I'm out the door generally by 12:30 p.m. or so, and then I'm working out and putting two to three hours in at my home office. Sometimes it's longer than that, it just depends.

As corny as it sounds, we still eat together as a family. No phones at the table and we discuss whatever we feel like discussing.

I love to grill. So, I'll probably grill three, sometimes four times a week. I'm an audiophile, so I have the Bluetooth speakers out there on the deck and music and the grill going. That's my sanctuary for 20 to 30 minutes.

I'm actually guilty of letting the hours creep into evening before I unplug. I'm not a big television guy.

I do have one other hobby: It's called iRacing. I have a whole rig down in the basement that has the racing seat and the custom wheel and pedals. I race a lot of the guys virtually. It has become very popular now that COVID has changed things. I also race my vintage BMW four or five times a year at racetracks around the country.

I wish I went to bed earlier, but I would say generally, I go probably around 10:30 p.m. **L&L**



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