

The Need for Training

By Curt Harler/*Managing Editor*

While waiting in line for parts at the local tractor shop, the fellow behind me tagged me as a kindred spirit and struck up a conversation. "What's with kids today?" he asked. His shirt read Joe's Lawn Service, so I grunted in agreement and asked Joe what he meant.

"Look at this," he said, holding up a contorted blade mount. "Can you believe how stupid kids are today?"

It's a situation we all encounter and, of course, we all believe we were so much smarter when we were 15 or 17 years old. But Joe's story got worse while leading to the crux of the matter.

"He's not a bad kid at all," Joe continued. "He just does not know how to do work."

Joe's story was bizarre, but common. He hired a 16-year-old to mow lawns for his small company. The first day (about four days earlier) he took the kid out on the truck, dropped him off and told him to mow two neighboring properties. "What do I do?" the kid asked. "Mow the lawns," Joe said. "How?" the kid asked.

Joe must be more patient than I am. He talked to the kid and discovered the fellow had never started a lawnmower (let alone run a 48-in. walk-behind). "My parents have a lawn service do that for them," the kid explained.

By this time, Joe had a rapt audience of several other landscape professionals, each sharing their own versions of similar stories.

The simple fact is that many homes do not give kids the practical education and skills they require to deal with the everyday facets of life. It underscores the need for people in our industry to support local vo-tech programs, offer work-study opportunities, and otherwise help the next generation obtain the skills they need.

As for Joe, he forgot to tell his new kid that you can't drive lawnmowers over tree stumps, and that cost Joe a trip to the shop. To his credit, Joe hadn't given up on the boy. In his own way, Joe's doing his bit to train the next generation of turfgrass professionals. He also bought himself an expensive course in how to train workers. But some day that kid may buy Joe's route or become the super at a local golf course. We can only hope he'll afford some other neophytes the same opportunity Joe gave him.



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