

# Guest Editorial

## How Do We Meet the Challenge?

By ROBERT FELIX, Executive Secretary  
National Arborist Association

THE CURRENT economy is providing the tree care industry with the biggest challenge that we have ever faced. As disposable income decreases, maintenance budgets shrink and part time "buzzards" become full time competitors our market can and in some instances is dwindling.

The energy crisis has already forced a reduction in budgets for tree trimming by the Utilities in many parts of the country. OSHA and EPA are also doing their part in placing regulatory limitations on our activities. Financially pressed municipalities and institutions are not contracting for the volume of tree care that they have been. Can we adjust or will we be a service of the past?

For some the answer is not even receiving consideration, much less the problem. Others are ready to meet the challenge head on and they will succeed. The days of "I have more work than I can handle" and "I never have enough men" are gone. It is a buyers market and if we wish to remain the viable industry that we can be we have to use every bit of ingenuity that we can.

Management is the key, be it in sales, production, personnel, time, equipment, purchasing or financial matters. To survive in today's economy a tree man must be an astute businessman as well as a professional arborist! Your success will be a result of your willingness to be industrious as well as smart.

Sales are the initial step. The large jobs aren't coming as easily as they used to. The average job is smaller and the buyer is interested primarily in the must items. Therefore every potential job must be sold. You must get your price but you must also endeavor to interest that customer in every possible service that he must have. A weak tree with lots of dangerous dead wood must not only be pruned but fertilized. An insect infested area must be treated. A section of line that is allowed to become overgrown will not only result in "out-ages" but will cost substantially more to trim in several years.

Your customer list is an extremely important source of new business. Review it frequently. Visit accounts that you haven't serviced recently. These people are accustomed to spending money on their trees. Although they might not spend as much as they did last time, they will certainly consider doing some of the "must" things now.

You cannot sit back and wait for orders to come to you. Go get the business. There is as much in many areas as there ever was. It just comes in smaller pieces. Regardless of the state of affairs do not sacrifice price or quality to sell a job. A job that has no profit is worse than no job at all and a poor quality job will cost you valuable professional image points.

Professionalism is another factor in this battle. Whether you are an owner, a manager, a supervisor or a climber, the man who is the most professional as a tree man and a businessman will prevail. Good tree men who are inadequate businessmen are in for trouble as are

good businessmen who provide less than competent tree care service.

Your professional trade associations, Extension Service and trade publications keep you abreast of current developments in technology and in Federal, State and local regulations. Read what you receive and listen to what you hear. If you take advantage of all of the information that is available to you the OSHA man and becoming a Certified Commercial Applicator will not be difficult. For the truly professional tree man these regulations will help rather than hinder, with some exceptions.

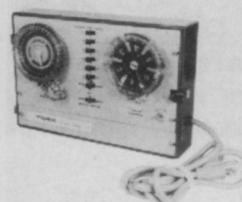
Plan your time and use it profitably. Wasted motion is needless exercise that doesn't buy steak! Depending on your responsibilities emphasize those areas which will result in the most benefit for the company. You can't afford to sit still.

Management must stay on top of expenses, accounts receivable and eliminate non-productive overhead. Let the demand determine the need. Work closely with your accountant. You don't have the margin available for too many errors. Set an example for those who work with you. If you show an interest in an area your associates will.

We can meet the challenge if we want to. The tree care industry has always been symbolic of the rugged individualism that this country was founded on. Today this rugged individualism must be applied not only up in the air but on the ground and it must be coupled with good judgement! □

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