

**Lawn Care  
Management**

# The name of the game is service

"The key is caring and all of our people care," this, says Marty Erbaugh, general manager of the Davey Lawnscape Co., is what makes his company a steadily growing one in a most competitive field.

Davey Lawnscape is a division of the Davey Tree Expert Co., a company which has built a reputation on customized service. "The whole idea of not customizing service is new for Davey," says Erbaugh. "With our lawnscape company we now have a streamlined service. But I believe our customizing policy continues through our personnel. We try to make each client feel they are getting the best service for their money."

A lofty goal but Davey's game plan is sound. Each member of the lawnscape team must take a comprehensive 40-hour course on the principles of lawn care. And they must continue taking the course until they get a perfect score.

The course covers insects, weeds and diseases and identification, water and mowing and is constructed on the building block theory. First the student learns what the subject is, then how the controlling product works, then why it works. This comprehensive background enables all personnel to answer clients' questions or at least understand them enough to put them on the right track for answers.

"Davey's great big plus is our secretaries," says Erbaugh. "They are the first people our clients talk with. Since this is a very complaint-oriented business, if our clients can be helped on the first phone call, they are happy and we are happy."

Hiring, of course, is one of the most important aspects of

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## game is service

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Davey's lawnscape business. "We look for self-starters," says Erbaugh. "People who want to do a good job, who take pride in their work. We tell prospective employees the truth. This is the antithesis of a nine-to-five job. Sure we lose some of our people. Eventually some want to start their own businesses, but this is the nature of the individual."

All of Davey's lawn care managers and district managers begin as technicians, riding on the trucks. "This," explains Erbaugh, "gives them a clear understanding of what the business is all about. Their job entails looking a prospective client's lawn, gathering soil for a pH analysis, checking thatch and aeration and anticipating any problems which could arise. Then they call back with estimates. "Our people don't hype clients and this takes style," says Erbaugh.

Where does Davey find its future managers? At Ohio State, the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center, and Penn State, to name a few schools.

"We find a large percentage of the people we hire have a B.A. in business administration," says Erbaugh, "and we even have an M.B.A."

This personnel philosophy is far from idyllic. It is sound business judgement, according to Erbaugh. "Our product is service. And we need the kind of intelligent, qualified people who can provide it if we are to continue to grow. After all, a client could do this work himself if he has the time. We are offering to do the work for him at equal to or a little less than what it would cost for him to buy the products to do the jobs we cover with our four applications."

But Davey's service goes beyond the four applications. Should a client have a problem not covered in the program, such as aeration, thatching or fungus, the Davey technician will tell him about it and where to go to have the

problem corrected. This usually means a local contractor.

"We don't compete with the local landscape contractor," Erbaugh points out. "That's a different ball game. But, he adds, good landscaping firms are now starting to sub-contract weed control, sometimes because of licensing requirements.

Service continues beyond personnel. Each client receives a 20-page brochure with tips related to the four basic applications and are actually encouraged to ask questions.

And so a company which built its reputation on service in the tree care business begins a major expansion into lawn care. A different approach, perhaps, but the philosophy of customer service is still there.

"We feel its a sound investment," says Erbaugh. "I fully believe the lawn care business today has the growth potential that the tree care business had 50 years ago."

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