

BOARD VIEWS BUSINESS SKILLS, COMMUNICATION AS KEYS TO GROWTH

Dale K. Manbeck



Dale K. Manbeck has been president of Manbeck Nurseries, Inc., in New Knoxville, Ohio, since 1971. He is also serving his second term as president of the National Landscape Association.

Manbeck received a Bachelor of Science in Landscape Horticulture in 1965 from Ohio State University, Columbus. He has always specialized in the business aspects of landscaping and nursery management.

In addition to his role at NLA, he is past president of the Ohio Nurserymen's Association and is a member of the Member Development and Dues Committee of the American Association of Nurserymen. Manbeck is also on Ohio State University's Citizens Advisory Board and the St. Marys City Board of Education.

He lives in St. Marys, Ohio, with his wife and two children. Hobbies include racquetball, tennis and golf.

The future of the nursery industry, I feel, is very bright. As we move forward the demands on our business will continue to increase partly from the government (taxes, reports, consumer groups) and partly from the management needs of our own businesses.

Not long ago, it was felt that to succeed in our industry the most important factor for success was to be a good plantsman, however, I do not believe this to be as important as management skills. We must know what our costs are and be able to fiscally manage them as well as to project them into the future.

Under management we must consider personnel management and the important part it plays in our organizations. Don't misunderstand, knowledge of plants is still important and will continue to be as the consumer becomes more and more aware of what they want from us. Proper management will help us serve our clients more professionally.

As we pursue the discretionary dollar, which we must do, we as individuals and organizations have an opportunity to participate in an advertising program that will help us achieve that goal. The Nursery Marketing Council is being initiated by the American Association of Nurserymen. The Nursery Marketing Council is established to supply the nursery industry with professional market research and analysis and the resulting advertising and public relations to increase the sale of plant materials and related products. The Nursery Marketing Council is funded solely by voluntary

contributions of the retailer and wholesaler together. Its activities are performed for the benefit of the entire nursery industry and those businesses that serve to support and enhance nursery products.

This will have a very positive impact on our industry and its continued growth.

Roger Funk



Roger Funk, Ph.D., is director of research for the Davey Horticultural and Landscape Institutes, both divisions of Davey Tree Expert Co., in Kent, Ohio.

Funk holds the patent for Arbor Green, a slow release organic fertilizer for hydraulic application, and is credited for a no-drift

nozzle used by lawn care companies.

He received his Ph.D. from West Virginia University in 1973. Funk is active in many state turf associations and is often a speaker on their programs. He is also a member of the International Society of Arboriculture, the International Horticultural Society, and the Institute of Biological Sciences.

It is our opinion and conviction that the arborist industry has, particularly in the last ten years, experienced a gradual and progressive upgrading of standards resulting in a high degree of professionalism. Horticultural science and research has developed technology to assure quality materials and procedures for the health, vigor and remedial care of trees and shrubs. Engineering has continued to improve tools and all types of power equipment in our industry to achieve greater production and improved safety to the workmen with no sacrifice to quality.

Government regulation has been costly to companies but has increased safety and quality standards. The Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) established safety procedures and equipment that all companies must use. Federal pesticide regulations as well as state licensing of companies and certification of applicators has provided a standard base of technical understanding and responsibility for the industry.

Personnel development has been established as a key requirement by all governmental agencies engaged in horticultural services with excellent study material and instructors involved in seminars and work study programs. In the educational section, it has been our observation that colleges are improving on the curriculum to assure that graduating students have both theoretical and practical application backgrounds.

Perhaps the greatest challenge for the future is increased communication among the various segments of the arborist industry.

Although the governmental regulatory agencies have established environmental and safety standards, these agencies cannot do their jobs without cooperation from the industry. Arborists must work with university and industry scientists to coordinate research with the needs of the field personnel. Companies should also encourage personnel to participate in the various training programs and symposiums to improve their knowledge and performance.

The time and monies expended in research and training and in complying with government regulations represent an investment in quality service to the public — the goal we should all be working toward.

Robert Felix



Bob Felix is the executive secretary of the National Arborists Association.

As a student at Adelphi University he helped develop Harder Tree Service. He eventually became executive vice president and controller of the company which owned and operated three tree service

companies in the New York/New Jersey area.

In 1972, Felix was elected president of the National Arborist Association and in 1974 he became the full-time executive secretary of the group based in Wantagh, NY. Felix is also a member of the International Society of Arboriculture, American Society of Consulting Arborists and the New York State and Long Island Arborist Associations.

He is married, has three children, and resides in Wantagh, NY.

Our industry is very healthy. Our market is bigger than it ever has been and is growing. Our sales are increasing in real dollars as well as inflated dollars. From the information available to me, it would seem that profits have increased proportionately.

In the private sector of tree care there is a tremendous increase in the degree of sophistication of management. This recent manifestation extends from marketing to business practices. Our professional arborists are offering full service tree care and making their clients aware of it.

Our utility tree trimming contractors are also experiencing real growth. Sure, the competition is tough but hasn't it always been? Every utility contractor I have spoken to speaks of putting on more crews.

Our industry is also in quite a transition. Thirty years ago, most commercial arborists, and certainly most NAA members were members of the Davey Alumni Association operating, for the most

part, small to medium size companies. They were purists, somewhat unsophisticated, but dedicated, determined individuals. Many of them have been quite successful both as arborists and businessmen. Their achievements are well known to many. They have been the backbone of this industry.

However, a younger generation is now making its mark in the management of our industry. They, too, are alumni but from a variety of companies. Some from colleges and universities. Our industry is also attracting people whose training has not been in arboriculture or horticulture. We have C.P.A.'s, attorneys, investment bankers, business administration majors, and the like, swelling the ranks of the management of tree care companies.

Our newer managers are not necessarily purists. They tend to be more opportunistic, venturing into other areas of the green industry or totally different fields. We find arborists in the lawn and landscape industry, of course, but we also have some in interiorscaping, environmental reclamation and horticultural products distribution and sales. We have one member who leases and sells recreational vehicles, another who owns a boat building company and one who owns a hotel.

This diversification has not diluted the level of professionalism one bit. The quality of the work being done today is as good as it ever was. In fact, the search for knowledge, the willingness to experiment and the desire to upgrade the quality of work done by employees increases every year.

Needless to say, we also have our problems. I have some specific concerns in this regard. I'm concerned about the small and medium sized companies endeavoring to get into utility trimming.

There seems to be a feeling that this is where the money is, no hassle with hundreds of individual customers and no need to train proficient climbers. Not true!

I'm concerned about the heavy investment by medium sized companies in new equipment because a utility asked for another crew. I'm very concerned about the fact that this "catch up" game that the utilities are playing might suddenly disappear. Then what will you do with that expensive piece of equipment?

I'm concerned about production personnel. Historically, when things in our industry have been good, there has never been enough men. That hasn't changed, but the segment of the labor market from which we can draw trainees is narrowing all of the time.

Our price structure has not been accelerated enough to keep pace with increased minimum wages, unemployment benefits and other government subsidized programs. We must be constantly aware of the need to anticipate not only rising labor costs but rising costs for benefits, insurance equipment, gas, oil and those indirect expenses that never seem to be able to be cut down.

I'm also concerned about research for our field. There is a great deal of research being conducted on tree problems but the results of this research don't get to the right people or enough people. How much research is being duplicated? How much do we never see? **WTT**