

## Employee problem?



So, Mr. LCO, you've set up an organization where every employee is familiar with corporate policies and their required duties. You've put together an efficient hierarchy of supervisors and a pleasant work environment. Your employees look upon each other as friends, they're making competitive salaries and enjoying job security. Well, that's nice of you, but you haven't given them anything they don't expect.

Today these work characteristics represent mere environmental factors, not the motivating elements you may have envisioned them to be. That was the eye-opening message delivered by green industry consultant Mike Hiller at the Landscape Exposition in Nashville recently. "If you've done all of this... it's no big deal," says Hiller. "That's your job. These things are only important if you don't have them or if you do and they don't work."

In the employee's mind, says Hiller, the opposite of satisfaction is not dissatisfaction but apathy. To motivate people, you need to present them with challenging work where they can achieve recognition for their achievements. They want to feel like an integral part of your company and that they can grow and develop as a person as well as an employee while under your roof.

It has become obvious after meeting many of you in the past several months that attracting and keeping employees is a major concern. "Kids are making \$8 an hour at McDonald's, for crying out loud," is a statement I've become too familiar with.

Finally in Nashville an answer emerged. And that is, as far as money is concerned, you get what you pay for. If a teenager can make \$8 an hour slinging hash and your going rate is \$5.50, you'll never have the quality employees you think you deserve.

To get them, keep your recruiting channels open year round, notes Hiller, by staying in touch with others in the industry, schools and employment agencies. Often your best recommendations will come from people presently in your ranks. Why not offer them a bonus for all their referrals that pan out?

Next, develop a thorough, professional interviewing process where you follow up on the recommendations of a branch manager. A simple rule: the more time you spend in the interview process the better off you're going to be.

Then, once you have good people on board at a competitive wage, keep their life interesting by challenging them to be the best worker on the team. Give them an award when their crew goes through a season without damaging equipment or tickets to a football game when they successfully attract new customers.

It's often difficult to justify spending extra money for anything these days, but remember that there is more potential in any employee than there is in the best piece of equipment. By tapping that potential you'll increase production and get the additional benefit of enriching someone's life, as well as your own.

Will Perry, managing editor

### EDITORIAL STAFF

**Jerry Roche**, Editor  
**Will Perry**, Managing Editor  
**Terence McIver**, Associate Editor  
 Office: 7500 Old Oak Blvd.  
 Cleveland, OH 44130  
 (216) 243-8100

### MARKETING STAFF

**Dick Gore**, Publisher  
 Office: 455 E. Paces Ferry Rd.  
 Suite 324  
 Atlanta, GA 30305  
 (404) 233-1817

**Jon Miducki**, National Sales Manager  
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 (216) 243-8100

**Robert Mierow**, W. Coast Representative  
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 Office: 7500 Old Oak Blvd.  
 Cleveland, OH 44130  
 (216) 243-8100

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