

**C**ustomers are not swarming to your company for services. Employees are turning over at a higher rate than ever. Productivity seems to be slipping off.

If these conditions are not happening in your company this year, you are an exception and in the minority in the green industries.

Why the sudden change of events? Psychologists have extensively researched the effect of work environment on the human component, the employee. Through this research, they have identified certain specific factors that influence productivity for the outdoor work industries. The three factors that appear to be specifically applicable to the green industries are physical, human and organizational.

For many jobs involving a lot of physical labor, a pattern of productivity emerges over a period of time. Influencing the worker are many factors that can cause a reduction or increase in his or her job performance efficiency. Some of the factors in the green industry are:

1. Customer interaction or the lack thereof;
2. Route scheduling efficiency;
3. Drive time to service customers;
4. Production quotas;
5. Service calls or re-treats; and
6. Equipment breakdowns.

Knowing this has led to our research into the productivity efficiency of employees in the lawn care or maintenance industries. The chart on the following page reveals the fruits of our labors:

From this daily productivity efficiency table, it is evident that employees who work longer hours per day may not produce the financial results that you might expect. In addition, we found



# BOOST PRODUCTIVITY, BOOST PROFITS

Efficiency, morale and pride are three keys you can use to turn the lock of productivity. Once that lock is turned, you can open the door to profitability.

by Ed Wandtke, CPA

that employees who were asked to work more than 10 hours for an indefinite period of time often "took a day off" to recover, relax or even look for a new job.

So how can you increase productivity and still retain your employees? Let's look at the three key factors that influence productivity in the green industry.

The amount of physical effort needed to perform all of a job's tasks will influence an individual's level of productivity. *Physical effort* is defined as exertion, lifting and weather.

Two industrial engineers, Frederick W. Taylor and Dr. Gilbreths, extensively evaluated the work in a job to determine if there was a more efficient method of performing the tasks. But when was the last time you went out to see your employees performing their tasks? Have you developed a system that all of your employees follow to complete their tasks? Do you let each employee do what is most comfortable for him or her?

Over the past 10 years in the green industry, I have found that many employees, left to their own devices, do not realize the most efficient methods to perform their tasks. Efficiency frequently is not achieved until an employee works on the same or closely-related job for up to three years.

Knowing this, I have advised our clients to develop a job task sequence list for each of their vehicles. Whether it is chemical lawn care—liquid or dry—or lawn mowing and property management, a list can be developed. By developing the work sequence and task split lists, you can achieve faster training time of new employees and less downtime on properties because someone is wondering what to do next.

Reviewing the

work sequencing for each day can also lead to increased productivity. For example, use non-work time to reach the farthest drive location in order to reduce "windshield time" later in the day as an individual or crew tires.

All companies in the green industry must recognize the effect of the weather on an individual's performance. Rain may make mowing very dangerous or difficult. Applying dry fertilizer in the fall or spring when the property has a fresh coat of dew may lead to the spreader or applicator tipping over. Wind and rain may keep a liquid lawn applicator from working. The heat of the summer frequently lowers production.

Yes, there is a relationship between the weather and production in many companies. Most companies, though, do not recognize many ideas that can help the employee stay on the job rather than quit at the sight of bad weather. Some companies are even able to increase productivity in the heat.

What is being done by those companies who are realizing this increase in productivity?

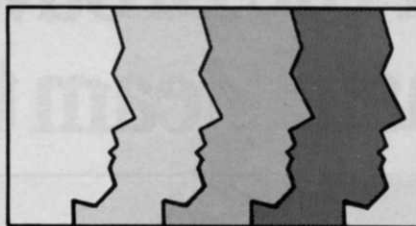
1. Companies are recognizing that liquid refreshment breaks in the field are as much needed as coffee breaks are needed in the office. Do you encourage your employees to take such a break? If an employee does not want to take the break, encourage him or her to. It will result in sustaining a higher work productivity level all day than for individuals who do not take the break.

2. Make your employees take a lunch break. This is not only a time to add nutrients to the body, but it can also serve as a refresher to the "will." The best lunch break is when employees eat out of the production vehicle. I encourage employees to go to a park or shaded area to sit down and relax while they eat their lunch. This will allow the individual to recover better, and it will help increase productivity after lunch.

3. Increase efficiency in getting your employees into and out of the office each day. Don't let the day go to waste because there is no plan when vehicles leave the shop or when they return. One of the most common reasons for inefficiency is the "stand-around-and-wait" routine. Whether this is morning or evening, tasks performed immediately after this delay frequently contain more errors or have been performed very carelessly. One way to avoid this is to have a plan for all individuals when they arrive each morning and then when they return in the evening. Have you checked your production employee area recently in the morning or evening?

4. Provide a cool container system in each vehicle so that the employee

## MANAGEMENT



## IN BUSINESS

has a permanent place to store liquids. Many companies today are even providing the liquids in an effort to better attend to their employees' physical needs.

The attitudes of a company will influence the productivity of its employees. As we saw during the Chrysler turnaround, Lee Iacocca told the employees and the world that they were winners. He went so far as to bet the company on his hunch. But you are not as large as Chrysler. How can what he did work for you? What did he do?

**He told his employees that he believed in them.** Speaking to all levels of employees in the company and being interested in what they have to say made the individuals feel like they were more than an employee. Do you take the time to speak to any of your employees as you meet them? Do you know their names?

**He worked like his employees at improving the company for the long term.** Being a salesman, he sold the image of Chrysler everywhere. What are your best skills? Have you used them as intensely as you can to improve the company? Do you or your managers ever take the time to work a day alongside your employees to realize how hard the work really is? Don't be too proud to do the physical work. Your employees will respect you and the company for your efforts.

**Being an employee of "the new Chrysler Corporation" started to mean something.** What have you done for your employees? Are there clean

uniforms for all employees of the company? Do individuals feel good about working for your company? Have customers made comments about the quality of your employees?

Motivation of the work force needs to come from the top and be reinforced by every manager in your company. The higher the morale in a company, the higher the productivity of all employees. Keep your managers' attitudes positive and the feeling will spread through the company. In some instances, we have seen companies which have positive attitudes find that the total hours needed to service all of the customers shrinks. High morale in a company will also lead to fewer employee turnovers.

The Japanese and West Germans believe that productivity can be managed. But, in those countries,

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*By developing the work sequence and task split lists, you can achieve faster training time.*

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productivity is regarded by the individual as a personal responsibility. People and the organization are treated with great concern because they believe that "We must and will succeed." The success of these countries in increasing productivity and quality of work life must be judged in terms of their own principles, culture and lifestyle.

Peter F. Drucker said in *Managing in Turbulent Times*, "...the employee on all levels, from the lowest to the highest, needs to be given genuine responsibility for the affairs of the plant." Participative management may have developed in the manufacturing industries, but it is applicable to the green industries today.

Increased productivity must be addressed by all individuals in a company. Management should take the lead and be certain that the efforts are translated into meaningful actions once the course is identified. Here are some suggestions:

*Bring your employees into your need for higher productivity. Seek their input. Implement it. Make your company the one customers want to provide their service and individuals want to work for.*

You will hopefully reach your goal of employees coming to work for a company they really believe in and enjoy working for. **LM**

### EMPLOYEE PRODUCTION

Hours on job	Productivity efficiency
Start to 4	100%
4 to 6½	75%
6½ to 8½	60%
8½ to 10	50%
More than 10	50%

Source: The author