



## How much of my money do you want?

What would you say if I told you that I would be willing to pay you more than you want to be paid? You'd jump at the chance, right?

Green Industry, you're not jumping. Not yet, anyway.

If I were Mr. Middle Income, my household would be pulling down a tidy annual sum, even though both my wife and I would have to hold down separate jobs. And, because of those demands, we'd have little time to spend with each other and with the kids. So we'd be looking for shortcuts in our day-to-day lives.

We'd hire a "domestic engineer" to vacuum every week. We'd have the local pizza joint deliver dinner once or twice a week. When the carpets got dirty or we detected the presence of an abominable insect somewhere inside our beloved walls, we'd call the appropriate specialists.

We'd maintain this philosophy so we could spend evenings, Saturdays, Sundays and holidays as a family. We'd play "Trivial Pursuit" after dinner; we'd watch "Indiana Jones" movies together; we'd take weekend excursions, especially during the summer.

And do you know what? We might not even realize what we'd be paying our lawn specialists. Whatever it was, we'd think, it was certainly worth it. Our lawn would be neat, trim, devoid of weeds—the envy of our neighbors. And all we'd have to worry about would be turning the sprinklers off and on.

Well, friends, many of your own customers are Mr. (or Ms.) Middle Incomes. They're people you're mighty interested in keeping. And how do you do that?

Number one, most important of all: you're going to have to pay your employees better wages because they're your direct pipeline to those valued customers. We're talking pretty hefty raises, too, for basically unskilled labor.

And, upon hearing this nasty bit of news, the first thing you say to yourself is, "I can't afford it!"

But you can. You can afford to compete with the McDonalds' of the world for that unskilled labor. You can afford to pay your line-level help \$10 or \$15 an hour.

Do you know why? Because of all the Mr. and Ms. Middle Incomes out there. People who value their time more than their money, to a point. (Don't let your costs climb over what a second income might be able to afford.)

Here's the real secret. Pay your employees more now, before you lose the good ones to competitors; pay them now, before the personnel crunch hits the industry. You can either horde the good ones now, or wait in line three years from now.

All you have to do is ask your customers for a little more money.

**Jerry Roche, executive editor**

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