

Employee guidance, niche marketing are keys to growth in landscape biz

There's a lot of psychology involved in success when you have to deal with other people on a daily basis.

by Terry McIver
Managing Editor

■ Since it doesn't look as if businesses will ever be able to run without people anytime soon, it helps to know a little something about psychology when it comes to dealing with customers and employees.

The more you know about how people will usually behave in certain situations, the more successful your company, and the easier your job, says Michael Witteveen of the Garick Corp., Cleveland, Ohio.

The more you can predict how people will react, the better your chances of winning more business by working the "system" and keeping customers and employees happy.

Witteveen tries to play to what he believes are two truths about human nature: the need for "systems" in peoples' lives, and the need to be led.

Work the system—People do indeed rely on systems and routines to get them through the day. We wake at a specific hour, we drive to work by a regular route, and we do our best to end the work day by 5.

When the systems concept is applied to business, it means you have to learn the systems and routines of those you're trying to service or influence.

For example, have you ever tried to get anything accomplished quickly in a government office? Even something as mundane as renewing your license plates can be a frustrating experience, because, as Witteveen says, "the people behind the counter are working a system we don't know about."

So in a bid situation, you have to learn the paperwork requirements and approval systems involved when you work with certain agencies and companies who are your customers.

What's my job?—Witteveen says you should work your program and crew in the same manner.

According to Witteveen, employees

want to know three things:

- what has to be done;
- how they're doing;
- their value to the company.

"When you delegate, it's up to management to make sure the work is done right," Witteveen advises. "Directions must be clear to avoid confusion and wrong decision making.

"Give employees their attainable goals. What is needed for him to be successful? What are the milestones for each job? The better you can arm people with self-correcting milestones, the better the chance of the job being done right."

Stand out—In days of heavy competition, Witteveen insists that a company must have a definitive niche. Being "a great company" just isn't enough.

What does your company offer that the other guy doesn't? Decide on your niche and work it to your advantage through advertising and example.

Decisions of this sort also involve how you perform the service. On the top end,



Witteveen: There are right and wrong ways to delegate.

says Witteveen, is ultra-high service orientation. At the bottom of the service spectrum—but not necessarily in a negative sense—is quick and efficient execution of programs. Unless you want to feel the pressure from both ends of the service

spectrum, you'd best decide which kind of service you can best provide.

"It's toughest to be in the middle, with nothing to set your company apart," says Witteveen.

Witteveen spoke during an Ohio Landscapers Association local trade show in Cleveland in July.

Lawn care pros golf for turf scholarships

■ The Massachusetts Association of Lawn Care Professionals and Ohio Lawn Care Association braved record-breaking summer heatwaves to participate in scholarship golf outings.

The MALCP raised \$3400 for its turf scholarship fund at its fifth consecutive Golf Classic, held August 10 at Pine Oaks Golf Club in Easton.

Total monies raised for the MALCP Scholarship Foundation this year is near the \$16,000 mark.

The Lebanon Turf Products team took first place honors, followed by Prescription Turf Services of Middleton and Partners Quality Lawn Service of Easton.

Green industry sponsors included: Lesco; Bayer; Lebanon Turf Products; DowElanco; Cadwell & Jones; Ciba; PBI Gordon; Agriturf; Riverdale Chemical; Rohm & Haas; United Horticultural Supply; and the Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA).

The OLCA outing was held July 14 at Shamrock Golf Club in Powell, Ohio. Seventeen green industry companies were represented, and \$1100 was raised for the 1995 Scholarship Fund. Sponsors included The Scott's Co., Bayer; CLC Labs; Agri-Urban, Inc.; Gravely; Lesco; United Horticultural Supply and DowElanco.

The OLCA recently celebrated its fifth anniversary.