

Ken Thomas, an Atlanta-area landscaper, started working for himself in 1986. He drew \$250 a week for 60 very honest hours' work. But he soon realized that he'd eventually self-destruct trying to maintain that frenetic pace.

"Five years ago, when I realized that landscaping was going to be my life, I knew some serious decisions had to be made," Thomas recalls.

Just as it dawned on him that he needed to grow his "job" into a "career," it recently dawned on me that you can use numbers to determine how your career is progressing. (A "career," of course, being preferable to "just a job.")

The answer to this lone question can quantify and qualify what you're doing for a living,

whether you're a landscaper, a lawn care operator, a golf course superintendent or a grounds manager.

The question is this:

What percentage of your time is spent on manual labor like mowing, chemical application and digging?

(Fill in a percentage here, before reading any further.)

Here are your alternatives, and how they relate to whether you've actually got a career or just a job:

100%: What you've got is a job—no more, no less. At times, you doubtless feel like you're on a treadmill, working long hours and getting nowhere. Unfortunately, you're destined to remain at this level unless you can create and follow a plan that allows you to assume less of your organization's "manual labor" burden.

In some cases, the plan might include moving up in the organization to a foreman's position; in some cases, it might be parlaying your experience and expertise into a new job that will put you on a faster career track; in some cases, it might even be starting your own business.

99%-50%: You're on your way to a full-fledged career in the green industry, because you've taken that huge first step by (1) being promoted at least once or, (2) hiring someone to

help you, if you own a business. Much of the journey toward a successful career in this industry remains ahead of you, however.

49%-21%: You've created a good working base for advancing your career. You've been able to delegate much of the everyday manual labor to people you can trust to get the job done.

If you're a golf course superintendent or grounds manager, you're probably handling quite a few managerial tasks by now, and have also taken a firmer grip on administrative tasks. If it's a small business, you're also concentrating more on selling.

20%-1%: Interestingly enough, this is the range in which *most* of you are *most* content.

Alan Culver at Mahoney Golf Course in Lincoln, Neb., doesn't hesitate to hop on a mower. He's been at the course for 20 years, and he's as happy as a clam.

"It might be a hard job, but I love what I do," says Culver. "I'm actually best at managing—putting all the pieces together and seeing that things get done right."

If your answer to our question is in this range, you're spending most of your time on management, administration, and short- and long-range planning—but you're still getting outside enough to keep you happy.

0%: Sorry, Jack. Unless you're CEO of a multi-million-dollar company, this probably isn't a career, it's a rat-race.

It's fine to be able to delegate all the mowing and chemical applications, but you should still be handling some of the everyday chores, if for no other reason than to "stop and smell the roses" (which probably in some way attracted you to the green industry in the first place). You may well be making money hand over fist, but I'll bet you're not as content as you were back in what you consider "the good old days."

So there you have it: my version of how to establish a satisfying career in the green industry. The above generalizations, based on hundreds of interviews conducted over the last 13 years, may be right on the money or they may be a little off-base. I'd like to know how you feel. Please phone (216-826-2830), e-mail (jroche_lm@compuserve.com) or write, and we'll use your own observations in a future column. **LM**

Is it a job or a career?



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