

# EMPLOYEES: your biggest assets

*So treat them as such, with opportunities to grow within the company.* by JON EWING

**A**t Landtrends, San Diego, Calif., employee retention has been regarded as a very important element to the success of our business.

I believe employee retention begins when *you believe* it is important.

You must understand that employees are your "biggest asset." This is a philosophy I learned from Ken Cook, founder of Springtime Growers, and president and founder of Signature Trees.

#### **Sports analogy fits**

"You're only as good as your worst player," is an observation that is as true as the concept that employees are your biggest asset. A strong firm can only grow, represent itself, complete quality projects and service a multitude of clients with a good staff.

Let your staff know that they are important to you. I tell my employees that my number one responsibility in the business is to provide them with a "growing opportunity." It is imperative that I create an atmosphere which enables my employees to grow.

#### **Levels of growth**

You'll find there are varying levels of desired personal growth. Some employees strive to be great gardeners, sales people, managers, or, perhaps, supervisors. You, as an owner or business manager, should assess a person's interests, and provide a road map for his or her success, not drive the car. The employee must drive his or her own vehicle. They're the one who makes it happen.

You first have to know why employees are your biggest asset. Then, set an example, by complimenting employees in front of others, and privately.

Keep employees informed with notes and letters the firm receives from clients or other industry professionals. Involve them. Spread out responsibilities.

Help individuals succeed by giving them attainable goals, then praising their efforts. Set the next goal a little further out and make it just a little more challenging. Make it a pleasure for your employees to realize the satisfaction of attaining their goals.

Set company goals and objectives with your staff's

input. Their input will result in their buying in to the purpose of these efforts.

#### **Clear road map**

Have a clear organizational chart and then break-out the responsibilities and criteria of each position. List each area of responsibility and think of what characteristics and knowledge are required. Define the roles your field crews serve. At Landtrends, we no longer use the term "laborer." We now break out our field staff as follows: novice employee, gardener, advanced gardener, leadman, foreman, supervisor.

Manage them well, develop work opportunities within the desired product range. Sell good jobs that fit your business focus.

Develop evaluation forms that clearly define the individuals current capabilities and illustrates what their areas for improvement are. **LM**

*Jon Ewing is president of Landtrends, Inc., specialists in landscape services, San Diego, Calif. The company's "Landscape Maintenance Training Program" has become one of the models for the green industry.*

## Is turnover an opportunity?

There are things employers can do to reduce their turnover rates and take advantage of the vacancies.

—Who does the hiring? Do they understand the critical success factors that determine the best fit between the applicant and the job? Sit in on the next interview they conduct and see for yourself.

—Do you conduct pre-employment screening on new people? Do you believe everything they tell you? Have you checked back with the previous supervisor?

—Do you have a formal employee orientation session? Do employees understand where they fit in, and how important their performance is to your business?

—Does anyone sit down with new employees and see how things went after their first week on the job?

—Track "turnovers" in regard to: how long they worked for you, who they worked for, what kind of work they performed.

Track this for a while and you'll get an interesting slant on your turnover trends.

—Dave St. John and Larry Fish, FSJ Services, Inc. FSJ is an Atlanta-based human resource consulting firm.