

**I** remember my mother often saying that when something was hard to find, it was like looking for a needle in a haystack. Reversely, sometimes I think that searching for new employees is like looking for a haystack among needles. In other words, we often miss the obvious.

If the green industry labor shortage is as severe as many claim, then it pays all of us to review some of the basic ways in which we can search out our new employees.

What do the experts say?

## Looking for a haystack in the needles



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1) Often the best source of new employees are current ones. If your shop is a good place to work, and your staff knows what kind of help you are looking for, encourage employees to refer their friends and acquaintances.

This has two benefits. First, the potential hire may already know something about your business and the work involved. Secondly, your current employee is unlikely to refer a poor candidate

since subsequent problems with that candidate would reflect badly on them.

2) Customers often turn out to be a surprising source of good employees. One of our best came from a customer whose business was downsizing and had to let this person go. We were both in the right place at the right time. However, none of that would have happened had the customer not known of our need. Newsletters are great for this as are leave-behinds in your invoices.

3) As business owners, and as an industry, we need to be more involved in the vocational departments of our local schools. In talking to some of them, I found real interest in knowing more about opportunities in the lawn care industry. Others told me of their frustration in training students for jobs which did not then exist, or training

them in manufacturing skills when the marketplace increasingly called for service sector employees. Either way, there appears to be an opportunity here. Our Indiana State Lawn Care Association Board recently began researching how it can be more involved in vocational education.

4) More and more industries are looking to job sharing when it comes to meeting their employment needs. Simply put, it is often far easier to find two part time people to fill one fulltime job, than it is a single person. Our community is full of men and women who already have a career position but who are looking for additional dollars.

One LCO I know uses fire fighters to fill in as turf specialists. He has two routes, and four such folks to fill them. Takes a little more juggling and management, but it does get the job done.

In a similar case, the lawn care company employs second shift factory workers for four or five hours during the day. An added bonus here is that such employees may already have a benefit program through their fulltime job and, thus, will not be looking to you for one.

5) Recruiting "out of season" is something we all should consider. Before you suggest that I have my head examined, think about the real costs of passing up a good new hire simply because your business is in downtime. Such periods are often those in which someone else has laid off a qualified employee. Or perhaps an individual is looking to make a change.

Hiring during such periods also gives you ample time to train the new hire and have that person up to speed when the season starts. Most importantly, the payroll dollars you spend employing that person over the winter may seem paltry compared to headaches you could face by not being able to find needed help during the spring rush.

Many of us have to continue to rely on traditional sources for new employees. A first step is to search out previously unexplored ways of finding such people, or revisit some tried and true methods. **LM**