

Doing business in the green industry this year will be greatly influenced by the cost of materials and availability of good labor.

These issues remain from last year, when readers we surveyed admitted that the 'traditional' labor force no longer exists in the industry.

At that time, we reported that half of all employees were either foreign, female or 65 and up.

Now, whatever the makeup of the 1997-98 green industry workforce, it's just plain harder to fill the ranks. Especially with good workers.

This year we've found that 38 percent of those surveyed credit their success to reliability of their work force. Even ahead of customer renewals or new customers. Affordable wages were named by a scant five percent as being related to success. Pay what you must, just find some good help!

Near full employment doesn't help the dearth of able bodied bodies. And then there's the ones who disappear from sight after six months on the job.

"In our industry, we can't pay them enough to compete with others around here," says Paul Guthrie of Tuscaloosa, AL.

"Some of these contractors are paying \$12 per hour for someone to push a wheelbarrow. In our business, we can't compete."

As far as competition, we're told it's fierce, and not always "fair." Contractors we surveyed were divided over whether or not competition was fair. Either low-balling companies were to blame, or companies stayed away from jobs they knew they'd eventually lose in a bidding war.

Others hold out against low pricing guys, and/or accept the situation as it exists.

"There are companies out there that [price too low to cover cost of materials]," says Jeffrey Sheehan, president of Confidence Landscaping,

Campbell, CA. "They're out of business in a few years. Many of our potential clients, a significant percentage, are just price shopping and they really don't care [about quality], as long as they can get something...There's always a market for the low-price guy."

"You get inexperienced people popping up in our industry, and that drives the price down," says William Canon of Canon Russeau Landscape, Carleton, MI. "We look for customers who know who we are and that we can perform. We look for projects that have limited bid access."

Forty-two percent of landscapers expect revenues to increase in 1997. Twenty-two percent expect revenues to stay the same.

Golf course supers are concerned over the availability of mechanics with know-how.

"We're finding out that an equipment manager is probably more important than an assistant superintendent, just because equipment is so expensive, it's so sophisticated now, you have to have good maintenance for equipment," says Bob Foes of Lake Shore CC, Rochester, NY.

Superintendents are playing it smart in areas they can immediately control, such as safety. Jobs like tree climbing are subbed out. It's also less expensive that way.

On the athletic turf front, budgets continue to be the big penalty managers face. To get the dollars you want, you have to get the people who hold the purse strings, "to look at it from a safety standpoint and an aesthetic standpoint," says Roger Bowman of the University of Delaware.

The green industry is far from being a sleepy-eyed business that just gets by. It's as active as ever, and the challenges are great in every sector.

How are you getting through the current green industry year? To get in touch, call 800/225-4569, x709.

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Industry likes growth, now just wants an ordinary day



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