

Two facts stand out about employee training in the lawn care industry.

1) Most companies do a poor or half-hearted job of it.

2) Those firms who believe in and concentrate on training are by far the best in the business.

Wow! What a revelation. Aren't both statements true in virtually every industry?

Yes they are. The problem with ours is that we still don't seem to recognize what many other industries have known for a long time.

We still struggle with, ignore, or avoid raising the abilities of our employees.

Here's what we lose when we don't adequately train employees:

► We send new employees a message, a clear message that we don't care about them, or about the quality of work they do. They are a piece of machinery. If we don't care, why should they?

► We send a message to our customers. Remember, our employees

are often the only link between our company and our customers. If our employees doesn't know what they are doing, if they can't answer questions or conduct conversations with a customer, if the employees' appearance and demeanor are less than professional, this all reflects on our industry, and on us business owners.

► We send a message to those who oversee and regulate this industry. An Indiana State Chemist field officer once told me that his single biggest complaint is that many lawn care technicians cannot tell him what they are applying. They don't know. Nobody has taken the time to tell them.

In Indiana, we have tried to address the training of new employees with a trade-sponsored Technician Training Program. Its purpose is to

give new employees a basic training course in lawn care.

A more comprehensive program is the Certified Turf Professional program offered by the Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA) in cooperation with the University of Georgia. To learn more about this contact PLCAA at (770) 977-5222 or (800) 458-3466.

Even without proper training, some of our employees are ambitious and tough enough to make it. It's just as vital to provide these people with additional training as it is to train new employees. These "veterans" can become leaders and supervisors. But they won't continue to be effective if they're left to stagnate. The industry changes, and so should they.

Also, these are the people that allow us to expand if a growth opportunity presents itself. But, we can't expand if we can't spare a good person from our existing operation. A business must have experienced and resourceful backup people.

The industry needs people that are trained beyond being required to listen to yet another round of weed or insect control updates, and getting their certification credits. There is a lot more to this business, and we, as owners and managers, must insist that our technicians learn this too.

This should include continued education in business management and supervision, areas that are really lacking in most of our training programs.

If you know of a good source for lawn/landscape employee training in subjects like people management, purchasing, quality control, or small business accounting, please let me know at (317) 846-7131. □

We should expand our ideas about training



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