

Blowing leaves, darkening days and brooding skies — clear signals that the end of the year is coming. It's time to take stock of what we've accomplished this past year and what we didn't do so well. It is a terrific exercise to do individually and as an organization — to look back on the year's successes and failures just when you're planning for next year.

Maybe time is on our minds here at LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT. Usually our articles look forward, with tips on buying, planting, managing in the future. This time, our cover story ("Summer Success Stories" page 20) looks back at how green industry professionals around the country tried new approaches and made them work in 1998.

Their ideas ranged from using a new sales approach to working with new landscape materials to outsourcing work for the first time. They took the leap with new management software (a frightening idea in itself if you've ever switched computer systems), experimented with high- and low-tech products and invested in the future by building new facilities. These ideas worked for our examples and something similar may work for you.

One thing each organization did to ensure its success was to analyze thoroughly, plan well and implement the project in the right way. You probably already know how risky new ventures can be without good planning and execution.

What is important to recognize is that every risk worth taking should offer substantial reward — why else would investors buy junk bonds? In fact, many previously "successful" investors are getting a real education in the meaning of risk this fall. For those who have only seen their investments continuously ratchet up in the past few

years, this market's roller-coaster ride is pretty sobering.

That shouldn't stop you from investing, or making new business plans, as long as you've tempered your risk with analysis, planning and a balanced approach. If you aren't already planning ahead for 1999, start by reviewing your own successes and failures of this year, and try to incorporate that knowledge into your new initiatives.

Although we've presented success stories, we know how prevalent failed ideas are. Painful as it may be, this is the time to study your failures and figure out what you did wrong. Did you jump too quickly into a project or purchase without thinking it through? Did you let a false deadline rush you into a critical decision? Did you fail to look at how your idea would affect your finances, your workload, your management structure, your customers, your employees, your own life? Did all your good analysis and planning go to waste because no one was able to "make it happen" the way you planned?

Don't beat yourself up too hard. Remember that even the "big boys" make mistakes. Remember "New Coke?" The Edsel? GM's failure to change the name of its Nova model for Spanish-speaking markets ("No va" means "no go")? Once you've figured out what you did wrong, consider what you should have done to make it right. We don't usually get to "do over" in life, except in our minds. What financial or staff resources could have made the difference? What extra knowledge about your market, your competitors or your customers could have helped your initiative along? What did you fail to anticipate? This kind of insight is golden because it can neutralize future risk and it can keep you from failing next time.

A critical element of taking risks is to learn from the mistake, put it behind you and keep on trying. Why? Because the rewards are worth it. Because it's fun and that's what brought you into this business in the first place. Because you are good enough to beat your competition in many ways. Being successful is why investors keep coming back and why we are already looking forward to next spring's growing season. **LM**

What's your success story?



Sue Gibson

SUE GIBSON
Executive Editor