



8 steps to crew efficiency

Follow this simple plan to maximize crew production, boost revenues in your repetitive maintenance tasks.

By JERRY GAETA

Recognize the “morning circus”? Everyone stands around the yard, waiting to be told what to do, where to go and what truck and equipment to use. Some factors, such as weather and client schedules, are beyond your control, but not this. You can avoid this and other employee time (and profit) killers by honing your scheduling skills.

Step 1: Plan with production rates

Start with a detailed estimate for the work. In the production hour-based estimating system, production rates are based upon the average amount of work that one person can accomplish in an hour.

- ▶ How many square feet of turf can be cut with a certain size machine?
- ▶ How many linear feet can be edged?
- ▶ How many cubic yards of mulch installed?

Develop these average production rates, per man-hour for your company, and adapt them for crew size and use them in any estimate.

Step 2: Plan for the year

Lay out seasonal production hour requirements of the job, such as annual planting, hand pruning, fertilizing and remulching on a year-long calendar. This will also allow estimates for bulk purchases and help regulate your labor force based on job needs. To schedule large projects, estimate hours based on high and low labor needs for the project. You may provide 12 months of service to your client, but actually cut turf on a weekly basis for nine months and biweekly for the rest of the year. Transfer these hours to a year-long schedule board, where you and your crew can see the year's schedule per project.

Step 3: Plan for sales

Build routes that optimize efficiency and reduce travel time. If you schedule your work based upon production hours, transfer to your year-long schedule board based upon crews, to see which crew routes are full and which can handle more work.

Your sales staff can focus on filling the crew schedules that need more work vs. overloading a crew with a full route. You may need to increase overtime on certain crews to handle new work, until enough work is sold to develop a new crew.

Step 4: Plan for crew scheduling and size

Plan creatively to maximize equipment use and profitability. A float crew can handle extra work and perform additional tasks on other jobs until a full work load is sold. Schedule crews for four long days and use a swing shift crew for Friday and Saturday to optimize equipment use and reduce overtime. A specialty crew to mow, prune or detail may also reduce your labor cost and maximize equipment use.

Keep crew size in mind to get maximum crew efficiency. Two- to three-man crews can adapt well to different job sites and keep your foreman working.

For larger sites, consider using two to three smaller crews together on the site. Separate the site by areas, which will allow the foreman of each crew to watch his or her people. Many firms (my own company included) increase labor productivity and profit by reducing crew size.

Step 5: Plan for prep time

Loading or unloading and travel time to or between jobs is not downtime, but it needs to be made billable. Calculate this in your estimate, as it is often the overtime hours that an employee receives. Preventive maintenance or daily cleanup and sharpening blades is a must, but have these tasks done by an evening or morning crew that is not the production crew. A loading and unloading crew or person can get things ready ahead of time for the production crew.

Step 6: Plan for equipment

If your equipment and vehicles are constantly breaking down, replace them. Remember, your client pays for the equipment — not you — if you have an estimating system that recovers the cost of equipment. Even if your equipment is paid for, it does not make you money if it is down.

Match equipment size and type to a site's needs. Always use the largest cutting width feasible to optimize labor. You may find it is better to purchase a mower with a large cutting width to reduce your labor. Market this machine to optimize its use.

Step 7: Plan for the future

Be proactive and not reactive to your customers' needs. Weekly, biweekly or monthly manager evaluations and inspections at each project site alerts you to potential problems so they can be corrected in the schedule.

It's also a great way to up-sell your client. Finally, it shows the client you are interested in the project, which builds customer loyalty.

Step 8: Plan time to plan

Stay proactive and keep up weekly with the hours spent on jobs, and scheduling becomes easier and controllable. If you match actual hours vs. estimated hours spent per service, you can compensate for extra time spent per service, and realize more control

over your jobs and make more profit.

Landscape maintenance is manageable due to the repetitiveness of the job. Keeping the same crews doing the same jobs week after week should increase the efficiency and reduce man-hours on the job.

You can spend time leading the circus, or use the time to be with your family. **LM**
Jerry Gaeta is a green industry consultant and a partner with The Good Earth, Inc., Mt. Pleasant, SC. He can be reached at 843/884-6114

One contractor tracks production for landscape maintenance, irrigation, landscape installation and extra work by job number and week to get an accurate picture of production flows.

Landscape Maintenance

Regular Labor Hours		Weeks				Total
Job #	Job Name	1-8	1-15	1-22	1-29	
1156	Benchley		2.0		1.75	3.75
2221	Crown Point	1.5	1.5	1.75	2.00	6.75
1789	Oakhill	2.0		2.0		4.0
5467	Trawler		3.75			3.75
2323	Airport	25.75	30.5	28.50	32.50	117.25
7879	Brown Industries	10.50	12.0	11.50	11.75	45.75
6067	Blue Trout	4.00	5.00	4.25	4.75	18.0
3117	Piggly Wiggly	2.50	3.25	4.0	2.25	12.0
2895	Glenville Bank	1.50	3.00	2.50	2.50	9.50
3006	Johnson School	4.75	6.25	6.0	5.25	22.25
Total Hours		52.5	67.25	60.5	62.75	243.00

Irrigation

Regular Labor Hours		Weeks				Total
Job #	Job Name	1-8	1-15	1-22	1-29	
1124	Estimations	2.75	1.00	19.00	6.25	29.00
2297	Stevens		5.50			5.50
3343	Hotel 9	2.75	2.25		1.50	6.50
4440	K-Mart	2.50			11.50	14.00
Total Hours		8.00	8.75	19.0	19.25	55.00

Landscape

Regular Labor Hours		Weeks				Total
Job #	Job Name	1-8	1-15	1-22	1-29	
1281	Realty Two	28.50	69.75	96.25	30.25	224.75
8898	Smith Acres	72.75	15.75		30.50	119.00
2333	Deer Pond #2	14.50	12.50	29.50	15.25	71.75
400.1	Service Equipment		7.00	4.00		11.00
Total Hours		115.75	105.00	129.75	76.00	426.50

Extra Labor Hours

Extra Labor Hours		Weeks				Total
Job #	Job Name	1-8	1-15	1-22	1-29	
6067	Blue Trout		5.00	6.25		11.25
1998	Post House	10.25	25.50	38.75		74.50
Total Hours		10.25	30.50	45.00		85.75