

We haven't heard much from you lately, probably because you're too busy to talk as the growing season gets into full swing. We know you're trying to squeeze 10 hours of work into every work day, and we understand you don't have much extra time.

That's OK. We have a busy season too — those weeks between Halloween and the New Year when several industry events, special issues and holidays collide.

Keep your cool

Although you may have anticipated this busy season, you probably still feel the pressure. After all, there is so much to do and so little time. But now is just exactly the right time to slow down and make sure your operation works right and is not getting out of kilter. Two things can easily get out of whack when everything hits the fan: customer service and your own work-life balance. Here's an example:

I got a call the other day from a well-known green industry consultant who had just been jerked around by his lawn care company. Seems they provide continuous service year to year, and to maximize the season for themselves, made the first application up here in the north in February (way before it would be useful in this climate), which also happened to be before they mailed the annual renewal notice to customers.

What's going on here?

This might suit them fine, but if you're a customer who does not want to renew, you're already stuck for the cost of the first treatment. In this case, our consultant was billed, then quickly received a rapid-fire, nasty collection letter from a California firm. After several contentious calls to the lawn care firm, plus calls to the collection firm (at his expense), he is clearly fed up. The at-

titude that 'we'll deliver service whenever we want and make life difficult for the customer' really set him off. And I haven't even told you about the customer service "specialist's" attitude.

This company may provide a decent enough service, but in the rush to get the work done, get the bills out and get collections in, they forgot the customer. They forgot to offer quick and thorough explanations of what they do and why. They forgot to make it easy for customers to respond. And they forgot to be nice because they're in a hurry.

This time of year can make you crazy with all the work that has to be done and all the new business you'd like to add. Just remember if you promise to see a potential client, do it. If you take on the work, make sure you do it right. If you claim to satisfy customers, don't disappoint them because you and your team are frazzled.

Don't forget the family

It's a delicate balance — maximizing work and your company's sanity. Which brings me to my last point. Don't forget about your own balance. It's easy to devote 90% of your waking hours to your operations this time of year. It's easy to promise you'll make up the time later. But too often, you miss those opportunities and suddenly, it's next spring's cycle again.

Slow down a little! Too much work isn't bad for you if you happily embrace it, but be sure to balance it with alternatives that relax or energize you. Make them "quality" breaks and you won't need a six-month vacation next year to feel rested. Then you can get back into work with more energy for the next 10-hour day. **LM**

Whoa! Slow down a little



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