

The Labor Crunch:

Finding Good People

Finding and hiring people with potential might be Job 1, but it's easier said than done. This series will show you alternatives and ideas from many industry experts

Demographics are against you, and they won't improve anytime soon. The fact is, the United States birthrate has slowed enough to cause a real problem in the workforce. There are not, and will not be enough people to perform the work that economists project to be there in 2001, 2010 and beyond (some say for 30 years).

Add to that the difficulty of day-to-day landscape installation and maintenance work, the lowest unemployment rates in years, the high competition for employees across all industries and the lack of year-round positions in many landscape organizations — it's a recipe for disaster.

Immigrant labor has relieved some of the pressures and new government H2B regulations make it easier to get legal employees (even then, it's not cheap), but the fact remains that immigrant labor is only a partial solution. And most likely, the political pressures for the next few years will keep the United States from allowing huge masses of immigrants in to solve the problem.

As more 'baby boomers' opt for professional landscape services and as the economy continues to roll as predicted, your opportunities will grow. And as more people continue to retire early and job openings grow with the economic boom, your hiring opportunities will continue to shrink. You've got a problem.

Want ads won't do it anymore. Internet searches, industry recruiters and programs that bring professionalism to the industry help, but don't solve the problem. The answer lies in working long-term to find new sources of employees, hiring and keeping them, providing satisfying and challenging career paths and responding to their needs for benefits and possibly alternative systems to get the work done. These could include new work schedules, more company services or investment in additional labor-saving equipment.

Our series on labor solutions starts here and will continue in upcoming issues. This month, we look at the labor picture and give alternatives to traditional recruiting and hiring. We'll follow-up with more ideas on training, building alliances, retention and improving your organization.

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