

BY SUE GIBSON / EXECUTIVE EDITOR

## I'd buy time if I could

**H**ave you ever felt like this? I have 10 new projects on my desk, plus the usual day-to-day assignments, all of them needing my attention, and now I'm not complaining, but if I knew more about juggling I'd feel better.

You must feel the same when the Spring rush comes. Those urgent telephone inquiries, scheduling and estimating challenges, employee training demands and fast-growing landscapes all need your attention, and they need it now. Whew! No wonder you're feeling pressured.

I'm amazed at how much more work an ordinary person can accomplish when they are challenged. The experts tell us people are just as productive when they work for four long days rather than five regular ones, or when they have incredible pressures to meet a schedule. Who hasn't accomplished twice as much as usual on the day before a vacation?

Those who have devised effective time management systems know exactly what it takes to be efficient, and most of us discover it on our own when time is short: it's planning for your priorities.

In May, the priority is production. Get the work done, get the new employees assimilated, get the schedule tweaked, get those phones answered, get out and make new estimates. Get it all done and don't even think about slacking off — there's no time.

Right now, you're probably as focused as you're going to be for the rest of the year. But what is "effective" when you have enough to keep yourself busy 18 hours a day? That's where the planning comes in. Be realistic and know you won't get everything done. That will give you insight into your real priorities. If you spend this month working hard on just your top

priorities, you'll have one heck of an effective time. Guaranteed.

### D.C. in a nutshell: low-balling

Several D.C.-area contractors recently told me some large area firms continue to "buy business" by low-balling maintenance contract bids (read more about this in our cover story: "Market under the Microscope," starting on page 28). This brings two conflicting thoughts to mind:

There's nothing wrong with providing "economy" service at "economy" prices. Sure, most of you want prices to climb for everyone in the industry because this sets a higher value on your services and makes it easier to be profitable in a highly competitive business. For some, it might be the first time you truly are profitable.

But if I believed all that I'd be naive. That's business and customers get what they pay for. They can pay more if they want higher levels of service.

Low-balling doesn't always work that way, however. When your customers are used to high quality service (and those extras you provide for free), and they switch because of an irresistibly low bid, they may be disappointed with the new contractor and even the industry as a whole.

No wonder so many go back to their old providers. It proves that relationships often do mean more than money.

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