

BY SUE GIBSON / EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Kick the habit

Some years back, I finally kicked the habit. It was one of the toughest things I've ever done. For years, I exhaled that last puff of the day and told myself, "I'm quitting tomorrow." But each new day dawned and that ingrained habit of coffee and cigarettes took over. It was easier to put off quitting.

Along the way, I tried every wacky trick: nicotine-hoarding filters, going cold turkey, nicotine gum, New Year's Eve resolutions — but I couldn't quit, not until I really wanted to quit more than I wanted to smoke.

So how does this apply to your life as a professional landscape manager? While this is no advertisement for quitting, we all know how addictive nicotine can be, and I think our day-to-day habits are just as addictive and damaging to our operations.

There's a parallel between kicking ingrained habits and doing what you know you should do for yourself or your organization. Trying new things can be uncomfortable, painful and scary. But many of our old habits (like old shoes) should be changed. Here are a few examples:

Ignorance is bliss

Whether we deserve it or not, this industry has a reputation of not being too concerned with formal education in either technical or management topics. Unlike our golf and grower colleagues, this industry is perceived as being pretty easy to enter and frankly, I think too many people think they're experts just because they're in business.

You may not feel up to speed in horticulture or agronomy, basic business management, computing/Internet or human relations. So do something about it. In 2001, why not make formal education in the subject of your choice a personal requirement, then make it a habit? While you're at it, make that a requirement for your employees, too.

Same old, same old

Years ago, we all thought acupuncture was bizarre. Now, our insurance companies often pay for it as a viable treatment and even old-school physicians admit it works. There are new treatments entering the landscape world, just waiting for you to think outside the box. As Doug Brede's article on page 42 explains, some alternative materials may turn out to be just what the plant doctor ordered. Do you use the same products year after year? Maybe it's time to try looking for new solutions.

Business without a roadmap

I owned a business too and I know how easy it is to get wrapped up in the daily, weekly and monthly operations without coming up for air. But are you really going to enter another year of business without a solid, detailed plan for the year? What's your strategy for competing and getting more money for your services? How exactly will you become more profitable in 2001? Make yourself a roadmap and take the time this winter to define these goals clearly. It's one habit you won't regret breaking.

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