

BY JASON STAHL / MANAGING EDITOR

## Slam dunk, landscape style

**A**n employee of Quail Hollow Country Club is eyeing one of the upstairs ballrooms suspiciously as she goes about her daily routine. And, from an outsider's point of view, it's understandable. So far as she can tell, the group inside is composed of adults. Yet the noise coming from the room suggests there's a bunch of crazy kids inside.

But they're not kids. They're all employees or owners of landscape companies, and they're all taking directions from Green Industry consultant Jim Paluch of JP Horizons, Inc., Mentor, OH. First, they're told to howl loudly like wolves. Then, the adrenaline-laced song "Dr. Who" starts playing, and everyone is asked to perform "The Wave." Paluch then asks if everyone can give the person closest to them a high five and a back rub.

These are guys who mow grass? Yes. But this is the Leadership Jam 2000, where landscape foremen and front line supervisors can learn new skills to advance their careers.

### Radical ideas?

As Paluch paces around in front of these landscape professionals, he advocates workforce behavior that sadly would seem radical to some: saying to a fellow employee, "I want you to plant these trees because you're the most awesome tree planter," or simply smiling on the job.

"We're so into this, 'I'm the boss and work is serious,' thing," Paluch says. "If I smile, my employees will think I'm making money and ask for a raise. If I frown, they'll think we're not doing well."

Perhaps even more radical is what Leadership Jam speaker Steve Pattie, founder of The Pattie Group in Cleveland, OH, said to do for an employee who has had a fight with his wife. "Let him leave thirty minutes early and give him \$10 to buy flowers for her," he says. "It may

not solve anything, but he'll be happier coming to work."

But Paluch and his industry friends aren't just talking about how to treat employees better and build a better sense of teamwork, they're also talking about going the extra mile for customers. Marty Grunder, owner of Grunder Landscaping Co., Miamisburg, OH, tells landscape professionals to do something they may never have thought of. "If you finish a job a little early, ask your customer if he or she would like his or her car washed," he says. Now that's service.

### Progressive thinking

An "old school" businessperson might watch these guys slam dunk on a miniature basketball hoop and say to himself, "This is nonsense. These people need to get back to work." But one gets the feeling that, in these high pressure days of too much work, too little help, this kind of employee gathering is just what the doctor ordered.

Every so often, we need to take a different approach to something, however radical it might be. Now's the time to do it because times are good — we can afford to take chances. Even if you experiment with some new workplace philosophy or way to deal with employees or customers and it fails, the work will still be there.

Don't wait until tomorrow to tell your employees they're awesome — tell them today. And give them opportunities to bond and learn more about each other's unique attributes.

This all takes an open mind, which can be created by something as big as the Leadership Jam or as small as a lunchroom meeting.

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These guys should be out mowing, not goofing off...or should they?

