

## His business runs him

**W**hich is worse: too little work or too much? I suspect most of you think not having enough is worse, and you're right — it's horrible to scramble for business. In fact, it's a direct cause of many sorry practices:

- low-balling to "buy" business (and usually, unprofitable work).
- taking jobs outside your core business (construction, if you do maintenance, for example). This wreaks havoc on your costs, systems and customer or supplier relationships.
- accepting jobs that are too big but promise lots of money. These usually escalate into a nightmare of surprising costs, stresses and schedule crunches.
- adding new services unrelated to landscape. These may compound your operating problems.
- entering a new niche without understanding it, like adding a new branch or jumping from residential to commercial. You may be in for nasty cost, competition and operating surprises.

There's probably a direct correlation between the rate that cash flow ebbs away and the number of mistakes contractors make to correct it. In many cases, those quick solutions become long-lasting headaches.

### He's out of control

I just had a conversation with a frustrated landscape installation contractor who is frantic for help. Just this year, he's added employees and taken on several new landscape installation jobs, as well as adding construction work that is not landscape related. He's doing a time-consuming installation *at cost* for "family," plus other miscellaneous jobs to give his employees work and keep his business going. He doesn't have time to create the designs he likes because he's on a treadmill every day, "running" his business.

But his problem is that his business is running him, he's working seven days most weeks, and he's burning out as fast as a Fourth of July firecracker.

Have you over-extended yourself? You may be doing it to "keep the business running," and, of course, it's great when the money keeps rolling in.

But ask yourself if you can do this more simply, more profitably and more enjoyably. You can, if you focus. Working yourself to a frazzle is not the best lifestyle, especially if you want to be creative and profitable. If the goal of a business is to be an organization doing good work and sustaining itself for the long haul, is this how it's done?

### K.I.S.S.

If you're over-extended, force yourself to take a few days to regroup. Discover what you do best and how you can be profitable *at that one thing*. Most landscape organizations do not need 15 different services to maintain themselves — one or two (done well) suffices very well.

Find your core strength, then find how to get professional help to make it profitable. Local government and industry organizations offer lots of free advice, or you can pay accountants, attorneys and consultants for more specific help.

Do yourself a favor and simplify your operations. Get help making those few good things work. You'll be surprised at how satisfying that can be.

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