

Time to raise the bar

Are you as successful as you want to be? If you're not getting the hourly rates you want, the clients you prefer or the good employees you need, you probably need to ask if your organization has a long-term future. Do you have a professional approach to business?

Let's define that first. I see a "professional" organization as one with two main elements:

- A solid business and operating foundation, and
- a desire to improve constantly.

These elements cover just about every piece in the organizational puzzle. But what is a "solid foundation?" Any successful company has:

- products or services that work,
- customers who want them,
- systems producing those products or services profitably and efficiently,
- people who work better together than they do individually,
- healthy (but probably not perfect) finances, sales and marketing and operations, and
- long-term prospects for success.

Whether you're Jack's Lawns with \$80,000 in revenues or General Electric with \$253 billion, these principles apply.

It's pretty obvious if you don't have a solid foundation, but what if you are just doing "OK?" What if you do things "pretty well," but not exceptionally well? Do you have a long-term future?

That depends on how you define a successful future. You might make enough for beer money or become rich beyond your dreams. If you want to be comfortable in retirement or pass the business along to your family, you need more than beer money now.

Are you interested in improving? The editors of *Landscape Management* think that building first-class organizations is a process needing benchmarks as measures of progress. We've assembled a Best Practices panel of experts from the industry to help us develop these measures. Those folks know their stuff and you can benefit from their experience. If you're managing an in-house grounds organization, these benchmarks also apply.

What do they mean? Benchmarks give you a goal to shoot for and compare against. They will help you insure long-term growth,

profitable and efficient operations, cultures that attract and keep good people and systems that deliver top quality services.

That "kaizen" thing

Hand-in-hand with building a strong foundation is the focus on constant improvement. The Japanese call it "kaizen," and it is a culture in which everyone in an organization participates. Once you start looking for improvements, you'll have the resources to take your organization to the next level. But the first step is deciding to get serious about making your organization first-class.

We start our Benchmarks series this month on page 30, with coverage of how to improve your organization's public perception. We'd love to hear your own ideas.

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