

## Hire to grow

**Learn how Bozzuto Landscape revamped its employee interviewing process to identify and hire the best candidates**

BY JASON STAHL / MANAGING EDITOR

**H**iring quality people fuels a company's growth. Nobody knows this better than Tom Davis, president of Bozzuto Landscaping Company, Laurel, MD. He was afraid his company's interviewing process had become ineffective and inefficient, and would soon slow the good growth his company had seen.

### **The problem: inefficient interviewing process**

"We probably had 10 different people doing interviews, depending on which department was hiring, so we had 10 different styles of interviewing going on," Davis explains. "The interviews were taking too long, and too many interviewees were being bounced around to too many managers for second opinions."

Davis's biggest fear about the jumbled system was that it would eventually impede growth by allowing bad people to be hired and good people to slip through the cracks.

"Bringing the right people into a company is so key," Davis says. "You can only hire from your gut for so long; you can only get lucky so many times."

### **The solution: set up a system**

Following the advice of some colleagues, Davis hired two professors from the University of Maryland, specialists in interviewing strategies, to help him create a reliable interviewing system. He spent five hours familiarizing the professors with his company. They, in turn, spent seven hours teaching the interviewers a new process. They suggested, and the company implemented, five changes:

**A new phone questionnaire.** Questions were developed to be asked over the phone to extract as much information about candidates as possible prior to them coming in. This would save time for the managers because it would limit the number of people coming in for interviews.

**An on-site questionnaire.** Questions were developed with the goal of getting interviewees to talk and think aloud during an on-site interview. This interview would have a start and stop time.

**An on-site job fair questionnaire.** "At job fairs, you have 15 minutes to meet with a candidate," Davis says. "We shrunk the questionnaire down to cater more to college students and identify things like eye contact, dress, speech, communication, etc."

**Two-person sit-in and time limit.** Two

## Vitals

**Company:** Bozzuto Landscaping Company

**President:** Tom Davis

**2001 gross revenue:** \$7,500,000

**Employees:** 110

**Services:** Full-service landscape company

**Customer mix:** 100% commercial

managers would sit in on each interview, and the time limit for each interview would be 45 minutes. "If you ask the right questions and they can't figure them out in 30 to 45 minutes, there's a problem," Davis says.

This revamping of Bozzuto's interviewing process occurred last May, so, with a year gone by, Davis can now say it was well worth the \$1,500 it cost him.

"It's improved our interviewing process and loosened up our managers who were wasting time with bad candidates," Davis says. "It was a great investment because it will last us for years."

Davis says he initially had the interviewing process change directed at candidates for supervisor positions and higher, but now they use the process for crewmen as well.

"We have people who are now managers who started as laborers, and that's a huge success story for our company," Davis says.

"If you want to grow, hiring right is the first step. I don't think it's ever too late to start." **LM**

## Homework overcomes objections

**Grounds director prepared himself with research before making his big pitch**

BY JEFFREY MCGINNIS

**P**aul Monahan, director of buildings and grounds for the Warren Township High School District (#121), Gurnee, IL, has lots of grounds and landscaping tasks to do every day. Like most public schools, however, he has to work with a limited budget.

He felt the most efficient way to accomplish all the maintenance chores he and his grounds crew faced was to replace an older, although still serviceable, tractor with a newer piece of equipment capable of performing many different maintenance tasks.

**The problem: tight budget, old equipment**

His big challenge was convincing the school board to spend money for the new type of tractor board members weren't familiar with, a Carraro SuperTrac unit.

In building his case, Monahan took a logical, business-like approach in making a presentation to the school board. He did a detailed comparison of various tractor models and their capabilities prior to submitting his request. He compared different features, then matched that up against the school district's grounds job requirements.

Because he researched his department's



Monahan can now plow snow and drop salt all in one pass with this new unit.

needs and several different models of tractors, he was able to present a convincing case for the particular model of tractor he desired. The board voted to buy the more expensive compact tractor model, mostly because of Monahan's claim that he could derive more use out of it, including the reversibility of driver controls.

**The solution: buy a multi-task machine**

"The old tractor we had wasn't powerful enough for us, and it was too big to use on our campus sidewalks for winter snow blowing and salt spreading," Monahan says. "For snow blowing, we would actually have to hook up the attachments and drive in reverse, craning our heads around to see where we were going. It wasn't easy."

Monahan's new reversible model eliminates that discomfort. Now, he puts the snow blower in front of the machine and the salt

spreader behind it, completing two functions in one pass. The tractor also adds options, including heating, air conditioning and a stereo for his workers who have to sit for long periods in the tractor. "My guys love it. Winter or summer, they basically fight each other for the chance to drive the tractor," he says.

But what moved the school board to approve the purchase, he believes, is the many different uses Monahan squeezes out of this one machine, with some functions being front-attached and others rear-attached, thanks to the unit's reversibility feature.

He uses the unit for snow removal, salt/sand spreading, mowing, athletic field overseeding, infield grooming, turf fertilization, aeration, rolling, moving dirt, and weed control by adding a 200-gal. spray attachment with a boom arm.

"It's excellent on sidewalks, like when you're doing the snow blowing work. When you turn a 90-degree corner, the articulating part of the tractor allows the rear attachments to track exactly to the path of the front tires. I don't hear any more complaints about scraping fire hydrants or parked cars, which is a relief." **LM**

— Jeffrey McGinnis is a partner with Gaul Advertising Inc., Wayne, PA.

### Vitals

**Institution name:** Warren Township High School

**No. schools in district:** Two

**No. grounds employees:** 17

**No. of acres maintained:** 39 acres

**Equipment used:** Carraro Supertrac Tractor

**Grounds maintenance budget:** \$100,000