

BY RON HALL / EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

## Help! Manager is in a funk

**E**verybody, including great performers like Tiger Woods and Michael Jordan, suffers the occasional slump.

Those of us in the landscape and lawn industry are far from immune. Our business is intensely competitive, the work can be physically and emotionally demanding, and sometimes the days and weeks never seem to end. It's understandable why some of our most proficient managers or top-producing employees sometimes lose focus.

"Ouch! This scenario sounds similar to situations that we have encountered," says K. Biene Schaefer, Landscapes By Atlantic Nurseries, Long Island, NY. "Our biggest error was avoidance. We didn't know if the employee perceived the company to be the root of their situation or if it stemmed from elsewhere."

She advises to come right out and find out what's bothering the employee. "Ask the question and be prepared for a tough

answer or criticism. Then we can tackle the problem and perhaps arrive at a win/win situation.

"Or, we may be able to extend a helping hand. In either case, the outcome will be better than if we avoid the situation. We don't have to play therapist, but we should provide a listening ear. We don't have to fix their personal problem, but we may be able to do a bit of legwork and come up with outside resources for the employee," says Schaefer.

Experienced landscape company owners are on the lookout for struggling employees, and try to get them out of the slump before their behavior affects co-workers and the organization. Or, threatens their own careers.

Steve Corrigan, Mountain View Landscape, Chicopee, MA, favors having a "heart-to-heart" with an employee whose performance suddenly sags.

"I ask the employee, 'what's happening? We have customers and team members that aren't happy with your attitude and performance. Is there something wrong at work or at home? Is there something that we can do?'"

"The team member will usually start to tell you the problems and issues that are causing this unacceptable behavior and performance. That's when we must listen!"

Corrigan says that after he and the employee talk over the points that have been discussed, they'll lay out a path to get the employee functioning as a valuable team member again. After that, it's

### Stopping the slump

- Discuss the problem with the employee. Listen!
- Determine if the problem is personal or work-related
- Jointly plot a path to get the employee back on track
- Provide adequate support for the employee to succeed
- Establish a plan to monitor the employee's progress
- Acknowledge improvement or, if performance does not improve, dismiss the employee



K. Biene Schaefer, left, says it's a mistake to ignore the signs. Steve Corrigan says act early.

### Reasons for a slump

- Same routine, same tasks each work day
- Little or no opportunity for career advancement
- Lack of direction, supervision, support from management
- Physical or emotional burnout
- Dissatisfaction with employment, pay

up to the employee.

Some problems are beyond a business owner's control. "Family issues are tough," admits Corrigan. But if the employee is suffering burnout, the solution might be as simple as some time off. "Work will be there tomorrow," he says.

— Information provided by the Owners' Network, [www.owners1.com](http://www.owners1.com), a program of JP Horizons.