

CREATING GOOD LEAD

Successful landscape pros share what they've learned about developing leaders in their operations

BY JASON STAHL /
MANAGING EDITOR

Every landscape and lawn company owner knows how difficult it is to find quality employees. It's even more difficult to find employees with good leadership skills or with the potential to develop into leaders. But finding those leaders is an integral part of running a business and ensuring its future success. The question then arises: Can leaders be created? If so, how, and what kind of system can be put in place to ensure leadership creation continually occurs?

Not impossible

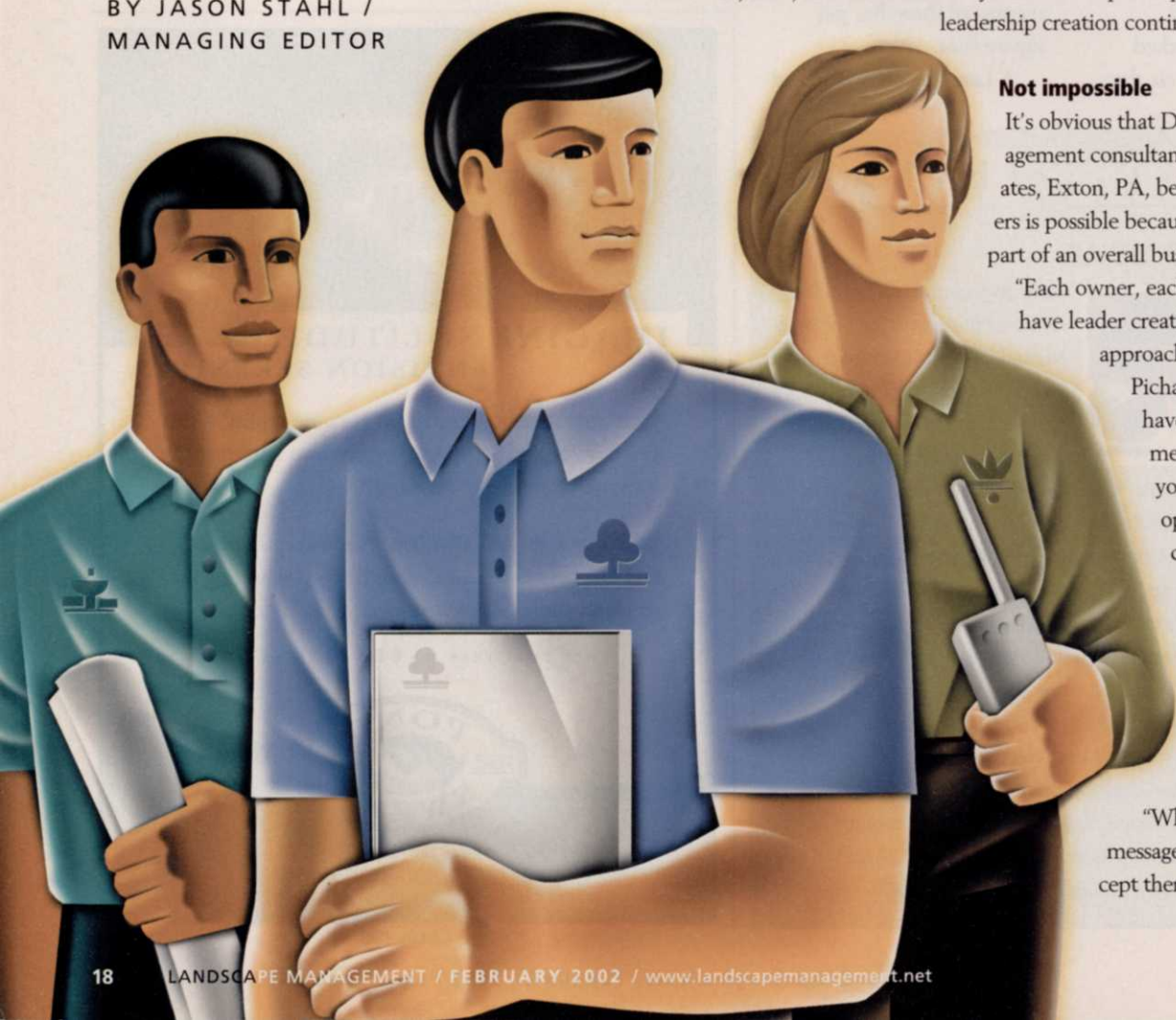
It's obvious that Daryl Pichan, management consultant with Kraft Associates, Exton, PA, believes creating leaders is possible because he espouses it as part of an overall business philosophy.

"Each owner, each manager must have leader creation as a fundamental approach of what you do,"

Pichan says. "If you don't have that as a fundamental approach, you're missing a huge opportunity in your company."

Pichan cautions, however, that acceptance of employees as they are, not how you want them to be, is also important.

"When people get the message that you don't accept them, they develop a



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bad attitude, they leave, or they don't participate."

Another important thing to remember before going about leader creation, Pichan says, is that competencies don't equal capacity for leadership. "There is no correlation between being able to install properties properly and leading."

Pichan explains: "Who do we tend to promote to positions of leadership? Competent people. We tend to look at their competencies and say, 'They know how to run all of the equipment, so let's make them a leader.' Maybe that will work. It depends on the kind of coaching and training you're willing to give them. But if you're making all of your decisions based on their competencies as opposed to their capacity for leadership, my guess is that you're going to get yourself in trouble on occasion."

Gotta want it

Dan Standley, owner of Dan's Landscaping and Lawn Care, Terrytown, LA, takes it one step further by saying that not only does someone have to have the capacity for leadership, they have to want to lead.

"They have to be thirsty and want to drink the water," Standley says. "Otherwise, you're just wasting valuable time and money."

Standley's main strategy for creating leaders within his company is taking his employees to industry trade shows and exposing them to influential people and hoards of educational material. "I had a guy 13 years ago who walked to work and the only time he pushed a mower was in high school for his parents and now he's

Test time

When it comes to creating leaders in her crew, JoAnn Smallwood of Smallwood Design Group/Smallwood Landscape, Naples, FL, relies on professionals outside of her company to administer tests and training.

Specifically, Smallwood employs the services of Talent Plus, an international consulting firm that provides a selection and development system that fosters company growth by maximizing human resources. Part of the system involves a test to determine how likely it is that a certain person can become a leader.

"It determines whether or not a person has the base talent needed to grow them into a leader over time," Smallwood says. "It's definitely possible to mold someone into a leader. It's more about understanding people."

To gain that understanding, Smallwood relies on other tests such as the Myers-Briggs personality profile, and an instinctive drive test that indicates areas that complement an individual's personality.

For more information on Talent Plus and Myers-Briggs, visit www.talentplus.com and www.cpp-db.com.



Both Dan Standley (left) and Chris James believe the faster you can determine whether or not a person is a leader, the better.

a supervisor," he says. "A lot of it had to do with my involvement with him — providing him with education materials and doing a lot of hands-on activities with him, including mentoring."

Chris James, president of Chris James Landscaping and Snow & Ice Solutions, Midland Park,

NJ, echoes Standley's view that time is of the essence when it comes to creating leaders.

"Some people will step up and become leaders, but others won't," James says. "The quicker you can make that assessment, the happier you'll be and the happier they'll be."

One of the things James looks at when trying to identify leaders is who steps up when someone is on vacation or sick. "It's when the foreman gives someone a little extra responsibility, and then afterward you assess how he or she did," he says.

Give them an opportunity

For those individuals you see growing into leadership, Pichan advises that you need to make the commitment to develop them into a leader.

"Commit to 30 minutes a week with them and do that for a month," Pichan says. "Take a look at how they're functioning and how they feel about their work. Do that individually and set an agenda by saying, 'I have specific things I want you to work on.'"

Dave Peabody, president of Peabody Landscape Construction, Columbus, OH, committed to making 26-year-old employee Joe Hivner a leader from the start. Peabody has developed close relationships with two local colleges, The Ohio State University and Columbus State University, by offering internships to students studying in the schools' landscape programs. This ensures that the recruits have the skills necessary to become leaders. Hivner was a recruit from Ohio State, and Peabody made him a crew leader right away.

"Within the first year he was pro-

Leaders should...

- Listen and understand well.
- Make decisions: Make a choice and act on it. Don't say, "I think." Be positive. You need to know what you want and where you want to go.
- Follow through: If you're a leader and you say you're going to do something, do it.
- Be failure functional: The ability to see failure as not fatal and to keep moving ahead.
- Have life zest: Have an energy and vibrancy for life.
- Have vision: for your job and company.
- Be focused.
- Have emotional wisdom.
- Have positive self-regard: Recognize your strengths and compensate for weaknesses.
- Be available.

— Daryl Pichan

moted," Peabody says. "He just took on a lot of self-responsibilities, made quick decisions, communicated well with the staff on the job site and in the office, and it came back to me that he was really sharp."

Peabody also says working side-by-side with Hivner showed him how sharp Hivner was. "He was motivated and had a take-charge attitude. He was always at work on time, and made sure work was done in detail."

Peabody's experience with Hivner and other employees who were created into leaders has led him to believe it starts early. "A leader is developed from youth," he says. "The most important thing is that they're good listeners. Someone who tends to listen rather than react quickly tends to analyze the situation at face value and take the next step."

Establish a leader culture

W. James Ormond, co-owner and vice president of the landscaping firm Barringer & Barringer, Charlotte, NC, believes that creating leaders begins with creating a work atmosphere that cultivates leaders.



W. James Ormond says everyone should get a chance to be a leader.

"We consider everyone in our firm a family member," Ormond says. "Not everybody is a born leader, but everyone should get a fair opportunity."

Ormond takes a unique approach to hiring, too, in that he hires people who fit the company's culture, not just the position. In fact, he has hired some people when there was no position available, and instead created a position for them.

Also, new hires are put under a 90-day probationary period which "allows us to check them out, and them to check us out," says Ormond.

Two of the most important characteristics of leaders, Ormond believes, is integrity and empowerment. "True leadership is creating followership," he says. "You have to get folks to desire to be on the same page as you. If you lead by directing, you'll create a disaster."

Establish a game plan

The bottom line, Pichan says, is that companies who want to start creating leaders need to develop a game plan. He espouses a training plan that revolves around:

- knowledge
- attitudes
- skills to function more effectively as a leader
- habits

"You should have a specific plan with specific steps to take and it should be

Setting the stage to create leaders

1. Identify potential.
2. Look for threads of success: Ask, "Tell me again about your life, beginning with high school...what were you involved with, what did you do?"
3. Is the person teachable?
4. Can he or she be a team player with you?
5. Does he or she have personal integrity?
6. Is this really the kind of work he or she wants to be doing?

— Daryl Pichan

written out so that you can refer to it," Pichan says.

Also, Pichan makes it a point to remember that people want to know how long you're going to be working with them. Then, find someone who knows how to do training, and expect to dedicate six months to a year to getting them to the next level. Generally, Pichan says the trainer-trainee process involves four steps:

1. I do it, you watch me do it, and I tell you what I'm doing.
2. I do it, and you tell me the steps I'm taking.
3. You do it, you tell me what you're doing.

4. You go out on your own, but I stay in contact with you so I can see how you're making it because I want you to be successful.

"Each new responsibility requires training," Pichan says. "The number one problem

in every company is the desire to give away responsibility without giving training to get people to the point where they can really do the task."

Training, as Pichan says, is an investment, not a cost. **LM**

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