

best practices

GUIDELINES TO HELP AN INDUSTRY GROW

What's your time worth?

BY RON HALL /
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Please check our math for errors. There are seven days in a week, 24 hours in a day and so, by our calculations, each week contains exactly 168 hours.

How valuable are these hours to us, particularly the 56 hours a week we spend running our companies? ('01 LM State of the Industry report)

Judging by how we sometimes use them — hours we're supposed to be providing for our families, saving for our kids' educations, building a nest egg for our retirements — they're not worth much. Otherwise, why do we part with so many of them by providing sales prospects with free consultations and landscape designs?

Clayton Smith, who started LandSmith, Corp., Fredericksburg, VA, in 1999, is learning he can't afford to give away too

much of his time chasing sales. After 21 years with the U.S. Marines, Smith says one of the hardest things he's having to learn in the landscape business is saying the word "no" to price shoppers.

"You won't sell to everybody, no matter what, but we have got to learn how to deal with the 'tire kickers' right from the beginning," Smith tells LM. "If you let them, people will get you out to their house and get a plan and a sketch from you and then shop it around and get somebody else to come out and put it in for five percent less.

"It really is ridiculous that we give away so much of our time, our consultation time, our design time."

Smith says he's doing a better job of pre-qualifying poten-



Clayton Smith says landscaping is as tough as the U.S. Marines.

tial clients by discussing what they want and what they're expecting to pay before he goes any further. If it's a landscape plan they want, he'll be glad to provide it, using professional design software — at a cost of \$300 to \$400 for most average-sized front yards.

"No one that I've done work for, as far as I know, goes to an office and works for free," says Smith.

Even so, most landscape professionals provide clients and potential clients with valuable free advice and, sometimes, design services in pursuit of new customers and more sales. Okay, there are legitimate and specific cases where this is justifiable. But how much of your time are you willing to give away in consulting with prospects or providing them with design ideas?

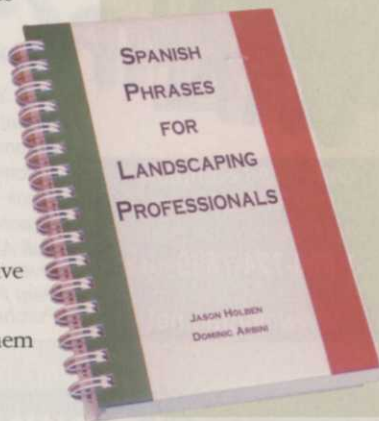
If time is money, why do we give it away?

Sound off

Did we waste our time advising you not to waste yours? What do you think about our take on free consultations? Let us know.

Every month we provide space for feedback. (See "Let's Here It" on page 10.)

If we print your comments we'll mail you a copy of "Spanish Phrases for Landscape Professionals" by Jason Holben and Dominic Arbini. To learn more about this book, call 303/863-1685 or send an e-mail to StockPotSpanish@hotmail.com.



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