

best practices

GUIDELINES TO HELP AN INDUSTRY GROW

Pick 'big picture' things

BY BRUCE WILSON

Most Green Industry companies struggle with developing and implementing training programs. It's always a topic at industry conferences. Like most companies, we've done things that have worked and things that haven't worked. What we've learned can certainly be useful as you try to improve your company training.

Identify weak spots

Start by identifying where a lack of training shows up in your operations. Focus on the things that affect the customer experience, result in accidents, show up in lost profits and cause stress in the organization. In doing this, pick "big picture" things, not isolated aggravating incidents. After all, mistakes will happen even after training people. Also, create a list of improvements you want to make through your training programs.

Before you start to develop your own internal training, look at what's already available through your trade associations, suppliers and local universities. There's a lot out there.

Here are a few things that work:

Pictures overcome the language barrier. If you're trying to improve quality, take pictures of the job done right and the job done wrong. Use the pictures to focus on correcting mistakes you see on your jobs. For example, if your mowing crews aren't creating good mowing patterns, take pictures showing what the finished product should look like if it's done right. Also, take some pictures of the unacceptable mowing job to show the wrong way.

Pick your best crews to train and orient new hires. Starting out new employees with the right



Bruce Wilson

habits is the best way to go.

For group training, train in short doses. Short training meetings on simple topics tend to work better than long training sessions. Re-

member to target your trouble spots.

Tie pay increases to learning new skills. You want the employees to want to learn new things.

Set up a training area with a TV and a VCR. Make it available for employees to view tapes.

Many tapes are available through ALCA and through equipment suppliers.

Keep in mind that training is an investment. Untrained employees cost you in many ways: lost profits, lost customers and accidents that kill your insurance rates. Make sure your investment is a wise one by establishing the outcome of your training before starting. And place some accountability on those being trained.

Sound off

The amount of training material available to landscape companies, lawn service firms and grounds departments is incredible. Professional organizations such as ALCA, PLCAA, PGMS and ANLA produce quality training manuals and tapes over a range of topics.

Many suppliers produce valuable training material as well, usually targeted to the proper use of equipment and materials. Often it's available in both English and Spanish.

Check with your distributor.

To comment on this month's "Best Practices" column by Bruce Wilson, contact him at bwilson@wilson-oyler.com. Wilson spent 30 years with Environmental Care, Inc., before partnering with Thomas L. Oyler to form the Wilson-Oyler Group, which offers consulting services. Visit www.wilson-oyler.com.



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