

Take 9 steps to teach managers to think like owners

Training managers to make decisions like a business owner is easy, essential and can provide more benefits than you may think.

BY JONATHAN GOLDHILL

TAKE AWAY

With trained managers in place, owners can quit obsessing about their businesses in their personal lives.

Owners should focus on the big picture for their company's growth strategies; managers should be able to shoulder the day-to-day responsibilities.

Make sure you equip managers with the training, authority and resources to make such an arrangement work.

WHAT WOULD your business and life be like if you took a four-week-long, guilt-free vacation where you didn't check in with your office? What would it be like to return from vacation to find that everything operated smoothly without you?

While it may be difficult to believe, it's possible.

Your main goal as a landscape business owner should be to design and shape a business that serves you and works independently from you. You want a business that will run on autopilot and continue to generate revenue continuously despite your absence. When you take a vacation, you should be able to feel guilt-free about leaving your business in the hands of your managers. But to accomplish this, your managers must have an owner's mentality.

As a business owner, it's your responsibility to think about the big picture. You should be focused on your company's purpose, direction, strategy, structure, systems, people, goals and accountability processes. Meanwhile, your managers should be focused on the day-to-day result areas: planning, organizing, staffing, supervising, delegating, measuring and reporting.

How do you get managers to think and act like owners? From my observation during the past 25 years working with thousands of small businesses — including landscape contractors — owners and managers can become more effective leaders by following these nine steps:

1 Regularly face reality. Observe what is and isn't working in your business. Have the courage to change what needs to be changed, while developing the wisdom to know what's unchangeable.

Design and shape your business so that it both serves you and works independently from you.

continued on page 80

continued from page 78

2 Define and clarify your vision, goals and direction. Share your goals with your managers and take control the entire time, from execution through completion.

3 Manage your key resources. Manage your time, staff and money wisely. Effective stewardship of time, labor and capital enable you to leverage your most vital resources and grow faster than competitors.

4 Provide educational opportunities. Learn and implement strategic and systematic approaches in each of the functional areas of business (sales and marketing, for example), and share this information with others in the company. It's vital to share information with managers to facilitate better decision-making.

5 Implement systems. Well-run businesses have processes for everything. Accounting has a process, selling has a process, etc. Have managers learn and participate in installing these processes within the company.



6 Be a strong financial steward. Improve your understanding of your company's financial statements. Know your ratios — and those of your competitors. Increase the financial literacy of your managers, because they need to understand the key performance drivers in your business. Put an incentive program together so employees can share in the bottom line.

7 Hold individuals accountable. As Thomas Edison once said, "Vision without execution is hallucination." Likewise, having goals and making decisions without holding people accountable undermines management effectiveness. Provide frequent feedback to keep everyone on course and motivated to do better.

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8 Listen and ask for guidance. Receiving guidance from within and outside the company — and from within the industry — is crucial. Engage in learning from mentors to challenge yourself, and find new ways of thinking about your business.

9 Learn to delegate and enjoy life. Commit to giving up micromanagement by valuing and trusting your staff and delegating with authority and control because you've put systems in place and have the right managers running them.

A shift in focus

Implementing all of the above will likely make you change your way of thinking and develop a more focused approach to your role. Re-engineer your mindset. Many of you didn't start out with training in business ownership, leadership or management. You had a passion for and technical aptitude in landscaping. So, now you need to shift your activities to bring out your brilliance and the talents of your managers, too.

To escape the details and headaches of your business, you must make the great mental leap from that of employee to manager, and entrepreneur to business leader. You must acknowledge your technical bias, addiction to being busy and uneasiness with delegation. You must adopt the big-picture mindset of a chief executive and strategic manager — and be a chief executive in mind and spirit to get the results you seek.

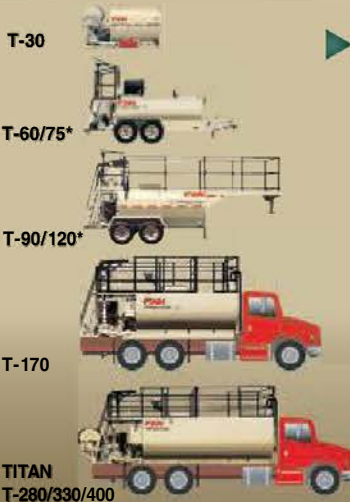
If you don't start thinking like a chief executive, it'll be nearly impossible for you to start behaving strategically and working on your business in a proactive, purposeful manner. For many owners, jumping this wide chasm from manager to leader is tough and terrifying. However, you'll never escape a workaholic existence unless you stop being a detailed-oriented technician masquerading as an owner. Stop focusing on the technical work of the business, and focus on the entire business, such as your staff.

The choice is yours. Step up and be a leader. **LM**

The author coaches leaders of growing companies in the landscape industry. Learn more about his peer group coaching programs for owners and managers by calling 818/716-8826, emailing Jon@TheGrowthCoachLA.com or visiting TheGrowthCoachLA.com.



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