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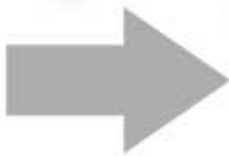
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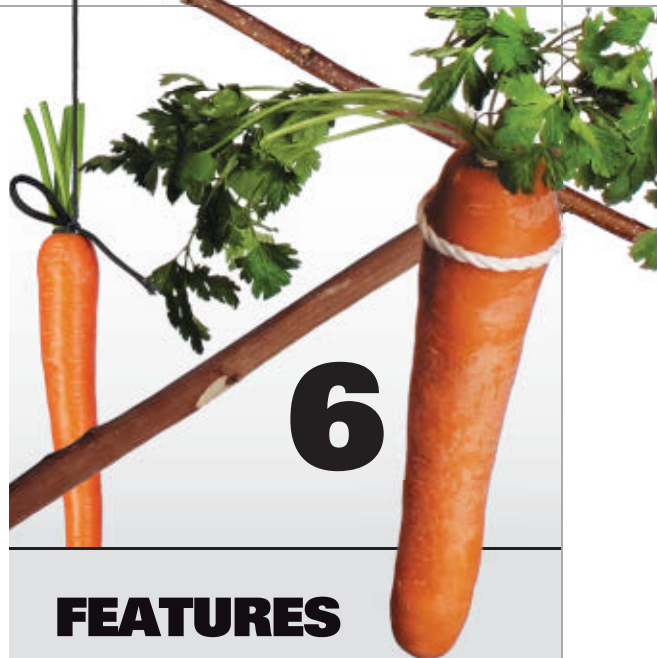
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PROVEN SOLUTIONS



## Three green services that can't miss

**G**reen, sustainable — or whatever you call it — is here. It offers us limitless opportunity. Few industries stand to gain as much from the growing consciousness among the public that we must conserve our resources and protect our environment as we do. But with this incredible opportunity comes responsibility.

Take this responsibility seriously. It's the future of our businesses and of our industry. Start by identifying, researching and providing those services and products that offer the greatest return in terms of environmental benefits and to the health of our businesses and our industry.

Using green merely as a marketing hook and promoting green services that aren't genuinely green is self-defeating. If the market sees through this veneer (and it will), you will be finished.

Here are three services that deserve your consideration because they offer recognizable environmental benefits and, in most cases, measurable returns for customers and for you. Could there be more compelling reasons for providing them?

**1. Green roofs.** Any landscape company expecting to be a leader in a major or mid-level metropolitan region should learn as much as it can, as fast as it can, about green roofs. Green roofs offer so many benefits they'll eventually be specified for almost all new major public and commercial buildings.

**2. Water-efficient landscaping.** There will come a day (one that has already arrived in California,

Florida and elsewhere in the United States) that every landscape you install and maintain will have to be water-efficient. This means acquiring specialized knowledge and skills encompassing such areas as native/regionally adapted plants, installing and maintaining smart irrigation systems and providing water harvesting products and services, to name a few. The use of potable water to irrigate landscapes will be limited and become increasingly expensive in many parts of the United States.

**3. Holistic turf/ornamental care services.** While synthetically produced fertilizers and pesticides have a legitimate place in our industry, many lawn service companies are shifting efforts toward a plant health care (PHC) philosophy. PHC recognizes the use of these products, but mostly to solve specific problems that aren't otherwise manageable. Chemical products are valuable tools as long as they're used for the right purposes, in the correct locations, at the appropriate times and in the right quantities.

Liken PHC to your own health, which is dependent on eating correctly, getting the proper amount of exercise and avoiding harmful environmental conditions. Staying healthy, of course, is preferable to daily doses of medicine. The same goes for the turf and other landscape plants we maintain.

Offering PHC, of course, offers a more complete system of care. It requires scouting and monitoring, and a thorough knowledge of plant/soil relationships. PHC (or whatever your particular term for it is) will grow as a choice for our customers as the green movement grows.

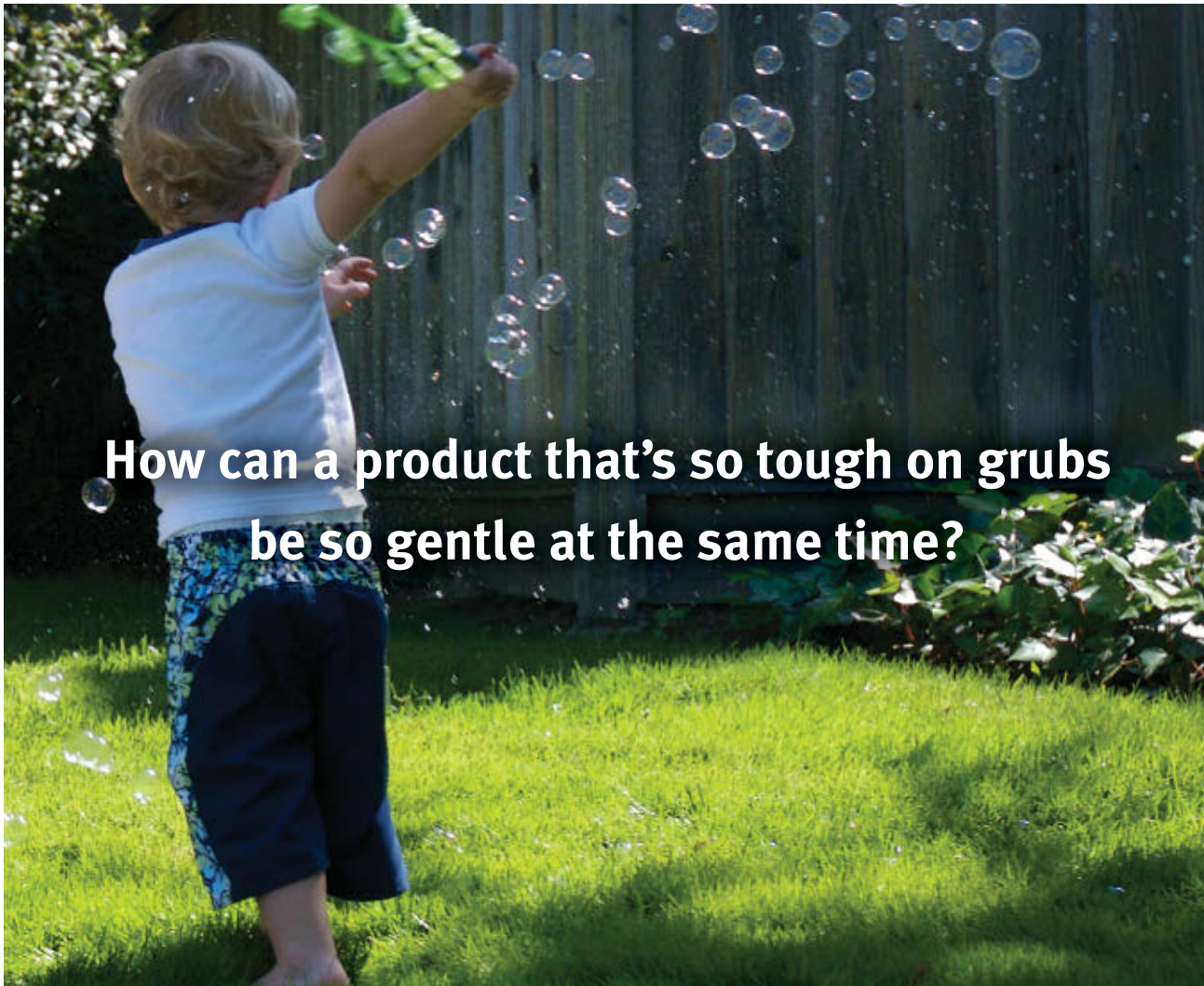
You won't master these — or any other sustainable initiative or service — without a well-thought-out plan. Avoid the “ready, fire, aim” syndrome. Otherwise, you disappoint. Even worse, you might become disillusioned with the concept of green itself. That would be a shame.

We have so much to offer in terms of improving and restoring our urban environments, as well as increasing the value of our businesses and our industry, if we proceed intelligently.

---

**Avoid the “ready, fire, aim” syndrome.** Otherwise, you disappoint. Even worse, you might become disillusioned with the concept of green itself.





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REPORTERS OFTEN ask business owners, “What’s your company’s greatest asset?” The almost-universal refrain: “my people.”

Whether all business owners actually believe that or not, usually there are a few employees at every company who deserve such special recognition — all-star employees who outwork, outsell and/or outperform most others in the company (and sometimes most others in the industry). It’s not necessarily that the other teammates aren’t meeting or even exceeding expectations. It’s just that one guy, or a small group of employees, does it better, faster — almost every time.

“Many people can give the impression they are stellar for a short period of time, but in my eyes the term ‘stellar employee’ is reserved for a co-worker who is extremely reliable and dedicated, and can manage and work well with others over a *sustained* period of time,” says Steven Jomides, owner of Lawns by Yorkshire, based in Westwood, NJ.

Whether it’s sheer luck or a company culture that allows individuals to excel, *continued on page 8*



# CARROTS

---

Landscapers and a consultant share tips to recognizing, rewarding, retaining and fully leveraging your all-star players.

BY **DANIEL G. JACOBS** MANAGING EDITOR

Industry insiders say its 'grow or go' time for slouches and grouches — employees who under perform or have bad attitudes.

BY **MARTY WHITFORD**  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

# AND STICKS

THEY CALLED him “toothless Frank.” He didn’t smile much — for obvious reasons. He was a perennial under performer with a national lawn care company. He didn’t seem to care what management wanted him to do. But one day, Frank’s manager sat down with him and said, “We’re having difficulty getting you productive. We’ve tried almost everything. What’s it gonna take?”

“Teeth,” Frank replied.

And according to Bill Hoopes, president of Delaware, OH-based Grass Roots Training & Consulting, that’s exactly what they gave him — new teeth and a new outlook on himself

and his employer.

“Frank turned on a dime,” Hoopes says. “Overnight, he became one of the company’s most productive and loyal employees.”

The lawn care company didn’t even have to pay for Frank’s new bridge and other dental work. One of its managers simply asked his dentist to give Frank an extreme mouth makeover and accept an affordable, monthly payment plan for the work.

“For every turnaround story like Frank’s, there are nine others with unhappy endings,” notes Hoopes, who served as director of training for Barefoot Grass *continued on page 12*

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when business owners find star employees, the top challenges are how best to reward them without making others jealous, preventing competitors from poaching them and figuring out a way to clone them.

### Recruiting & retaining winners

There are countless books and strategies touting foolproof solutions to hiring quality employees. And while technology might help weed out the misfits, anyone can look good on paper or online. In many cases, you really don't know what you have until you've made the hire.

"Regardless of the interview process and all of that pre-work stuff, we don't know until we get them out in the field, whether they have the aptitude or the will or any of that other stuff," says David Weekley, master pond builder and owner of WaterScapes Pro, Charlotte, NC. "Usually, we can tell in the first three or four days if they have what we're looking for."

It often takes several swings to get a hit. In the past five years, Weekley has hired between 30 and 50 people to fill his three-person staff.

"It's not tangible at all. It's about observation," Weekley says. "The formula I'm looking at is not written down. The trait I found that fits well in our organization is a dedication to really learning the craft. We're artists, when it comes right



**"YOU CANNOT TRAIN THEIR GENUINE INTEREST TO LEARN AND GOOD ATTITUDE."**

— David Weekley, Waterscapes Pro

career opportunities arise," Wilson says. "And, of course, you should pay them at the high end of the pay scale for those positions.

"Employees also respond really well to public

recognition," he continues. "Recognize them in front of others: Highlight what they're doing so well; call attention to them in a positive way."

Jomides says a few well-timed, carefully chosen words serve as great motivators.

"Praise and acknowledgement go a long way — along with an occasional lunch and maybe even a company-paid trip to the annual Green Industry Conference," Jomides says.

Such perks and public pats on the back are a great way to recognize workers who consistently go above and beyond their job descriptions. But remember: Hard work affects more than just your company.

"A lot of all-stars put in major overtime," Wilson says. "They are away from home a lot. If you give them something they can share with their spouses and children, the entire family will appreciate your company more."

It's the "happy wife, happy life" approach to managing.

"It's buying them lunch," Weekley says. "It's offering to do things outside of the work that can help them. Anything they want to do to improve their lot, I am in favor of, whether it's education or supporting an outside interest. If they're happy at home and overall, then they're certainly going to be happier at work."

It's not all about the green.

"Retention is not all about money," Jomides says.

"People want to be part of a team and know there is a future for them. Encourage co-workers to get involved

and listen to what they have to say. When possible, promote from within and encourage and communicate a succession plan for your staff."

### Risk versus reward

Few argue rewarding stellar work is a problem. But there can be a downside. The challenge rears its head when those who don't receive the recognition become jealous.

"If it's not part of a prescribed benefits plan, other employees might find out about it and think it's favoritism," Wilson says. "You have to be careful."

You also need to consider Uncle Sam's take — literally. Such employee rewards might be taxable to the employee.

"If you don't put it on their W-2s (tax forms) at the end of the year, and you are audited, you could face a tax penalty,"

*continued on page 10*



**"RETENTION IS NOT ALL ABOUT MONEY."**

— Steven Jomides, Lawns By Yorkshire

down to it. Any characteristics of a great artist are the kinds of things we're looking for — not just the creative side, but also the ability to work with a team."

The atmosphere you create has a lot to do with finding and developing all-stars. When he ran his own Green Industry company, Bruce Wilson sought to promote from within.

"We had a culture of train your replacement," says Wilson, now with the Wilson-Oyler Group consultancy and a *Landscape Management* columnist. "To move up, people had to train their replacements — so they would focus on coaching the better employees and encouraging them to step up."

### Celebrating the best

It never hurts to offer all-stars fatter paychecks, but it's not the only way to win — and keep — their attention, hearts and talents.

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## COVER STORY

*continued from page 8*

Wilson warns. "One thing about the government: They don't miss many opportunities to shove their hands in your pocket."

Rewards can have a positive effect on other workers, encouraging them to work harder, but there is one key caveat.

"Co-workers will learn to respect the stellar people in the organization," Jomides says. "Resentment comes when someone is granted stellar status who has not earned it."

### Nature & nurture

How many business owners have fantasized about cloning their best employees and creating a staff of super sales reps, fantastic foremen and wonderful workers? The general consensus seems to be that while exceptional talent is a gift from God, whatever abilities exist in a person can be enhanced.

"The part of it you cannot train is their genuine interest to learn and good attitude," Weekley says. "You can't instill that. That comes from inside."

Some gifts come from above, and others from the home. "Family upbringing has a lot to do with this," adds Jomides.

Wherever it comes from, talents can be honed.

"If they have a great attitude and want to learn, then the rest of it you can build — whether it's loyalty to the company or production quality," Weekley says. **LM**

## LOSING YOUR BEST SALES REP

One way to reward your best salesperson is to make him or her a manager. But what if that person is lousy with working with subordinates.

"This happens in a lot of companies with sales forces," Wilson says. "They have a really good salesperson and make him a sales manager. They lose their best sales person and promote a person who doesn't know how to manage people. That's very, very common. The challenge with that is your best sales person could get de-motivated if you pick somebody else to be the sales manager."

Weekley says it's worth the risk. "You'll never know if they can manage unless you give them a shot," he adds. "To not take the risk is to be satisfied with the status quo, which is fine if that is the track you're on." — DJ



Good workers aren't always good managers.

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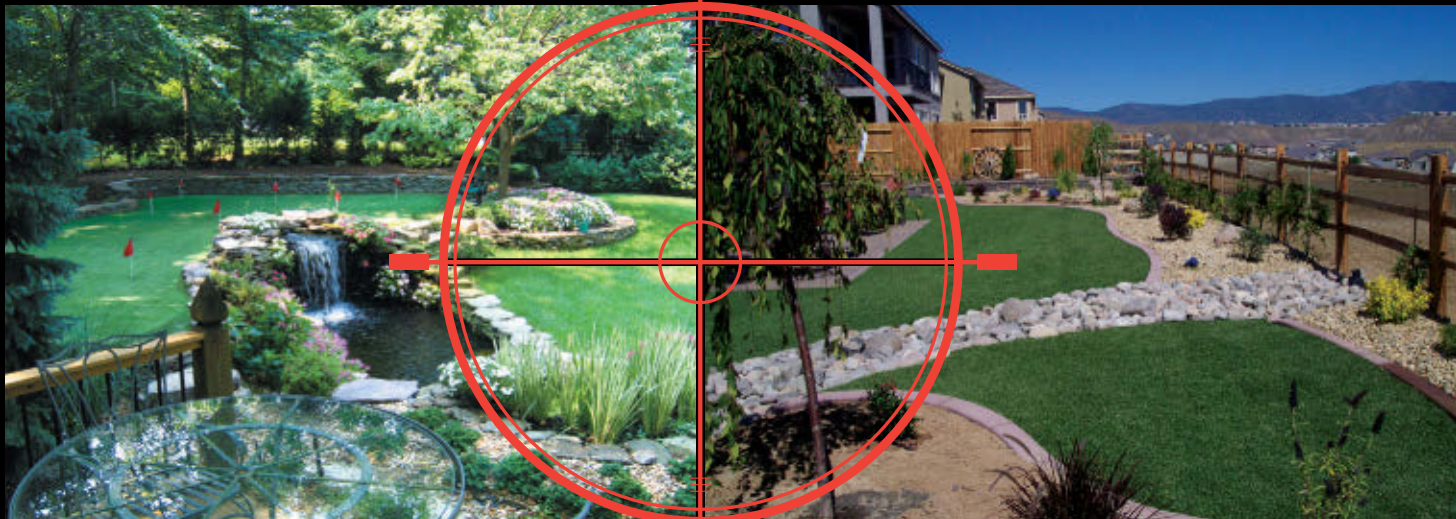
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## COVER STORY

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and Scotts Lawn Service before founding his consultancy. “But if we work harder to find and deliver what matters most to each one of our employees — when it makes sense — then maybe we can find and keep more good people.”

Show your employees you listen and truly care, and many (not necessarily most) will listen more closely and care more, in return. But sources say motivating a sluggish and/or grumpy employee to revolutionize his thinking and behavior is a team responsibility shared by all who touch that individual — the hiring manager, direct supervisor, training director and business owner — as well as, of course, the marginal man himself.

### Hard look in the mirror

Once upon a time, in a land not so far away, a certain company held a three-day, off-site management meeting. When the meeting moderator asked



## “MOST PEOPLE PROBLEMS BEGIN AT THE VERY BEGINNING”

— **Bill Hoopes**, Grassroots Training

each manager to openly share his or her Achilles’ heel with the group, one of the enlightened actually proclaimed, “My biggest weakness is my people.”

Sadly, Hoopes and other industry insiders say this manager is far from alone in playing the blame game. Many Green Industry managers need to take a hard look in the mirror. Perhaps then they’ll see their biggest weakness is hiring, developing, motivating, rewarding and retaining good people.

“The single-biggest hindrance to developing productive teams is poor hiring — or, as they say in the tech world, ‘garbage in, garbage out,’” Hoopes notes. “Most people problems begin at the very beginning.”

Hoopes says most landscape and

lawn care companies have poor recruiting programs, if they have them at all. Many fail to leverage popular social media, such

as LinkedIn and Facebook, or even key virtual job boards including, among many others, [HortJobs.com](http://HortJobs.com), [CareerBuilder.com](http://CareerBuilder.com), [Monster.com](http://Monster.com) and [Craigslis.com](http://Craigslis.com).

“Without cutting-edge recruiting tools, we’ll never attract the best of the best,” Hoopes says.

Landscapers also must improve their people interviewing and selection techniques. They also need to regularly sharpen their people’s skill sets and job performance with mandated, formalized training and daily coaching, Hoopes says.

“Too many Green Industry businesses treat their people like any other resource — like a tire on a truck — when, in fact, people are *the* resource,” Hoopes adds.

*continued on page 14*

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*continued from page 12*

**Addition by subtraction**

No doubt, the mirror reflects plenty of growth opportunity for hirers. But many times an employee is an under performer and/or has a bad attitude and is incorrigible. Hoopes and landscapers say slouches and grouches must not be tolerated.

“In these cases, you have to do something — and, for the record, doing nothing doesn’t qualify as ‘something,’” Hoopes says. “I work fast, using a three-strike system. It’s ‘grow or go’ time. People are too important to settle for less. We owe it to them, ourselves, and our companies and customers, to help these people reach higher ground fast.

“Be careful not to waste time trying to save a dead duck,” he warns. “Build a people culture to avoid the problem in the first place.”

Sometimes, cuts equal gains. Last summer, for example, Burlington, MA-based Mac’s Landscaping laid off seven of its 22 employees and individual productivity rose 25%.

“We cut four for under performing and three others for having bad attitudes — they weren’t team players and wouldn’t change,” says President Gerry “Mac” McCarthy. “Our 2009 sales were down 15% because of the recession, but we did the work with 33% less people.”

At age 55, McCarthy has ridden out a few economic storms: “1975 and ’89 were bad, but this, by far, is the toughest, longest-lasting recession I’ve endured — and I don’t see it ending until 2011.”

McCarthy’s two sons, Keith and Shawn, work for the business and

*continued on page 16*



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**4 PEOPLE PRINCIPLES**

**According to Bill Hoopes, president of Delaware, OH-based Grass Roots Training & Consulting, the cornerstones to maximizing individual productivity and minimizing people problems are:**

1. Recognize that individual productivity begins with the hiring decision.
2. Reasonable expectations and procedures must be set, understood and accepted by all.
3. Realize initial socialization, training and transition to routine — transition from the warm-and-fuzzy training room to the often cold, wet and harsh real world — will have an impact on future productivity.
4. Team and individual activity (what you are doing) and performance (how you are doing it) must be tracked, and coupled with appropriate daily coaching responses. — MW

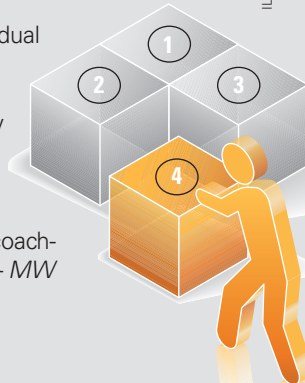


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## “LESS THAN 10% OF SLOUCHES AND GROUCHES CAN BE TURNED AROUND”

— Kurt Kluznik, Yardmaster

*continued from page 14*

nudged Dad to part ways with “the strays and BAs” (bad attitudes).

“For 35 years I’ve been Mr. Nice Guy. I give employees first, second, third — you name it — chances,” McCarthy says. “But in this economy, there’s zero room for weak people — or those who employ them.”

### Grow or go

“Less than 10% of employees who are slouches or grouches can be turned around,” says Kurt Kluznik, president

of Painesville, OH-based Yardmaster.

Kluznik should know: He’s attempted plenty of people makeovers since launching his now-300-employee, four-branch business 38 years ago.

“Of the select few I’ve seen do an about-face, many didn’t do so until they were working for themselves,” Kluznik notes. “I used to ask myself, ‘Why couldn’t we harness that?’ But I don’t any more. I now know the ‘it’ wasn’t there to harness — not then, not for us.”

On the people side of the green busi-

ness, little stays the same, Kluznik says.

“One of our branch managers was a real all-star, but fell far and hard,” he adds. “The guy was a solid hire and a well-liked manager for years. But, as it turns out, part of why he was so well liked was he would let his people take shortcuts and would clean up after them. It got to the point where even our best guys were taking advantage of him. He learned a hard lesson on the difference between being liked and being respected. A good manager earns both.”

A smart manager also knows how one individual, no matter his or her position, can sway the energy of an entire organization, Hoopes adds.

“I recently witnessed a CSR (customer service representative) take down an entire office with her infectious bad attitude,” Hoopes shares. “I wish I could say that ugly scenario is the exception, but I’d be lying through my teeth.” LM

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## THE BENCHMARK

KEVIN KEHOE

The author is the owner-manager of 3PG Consulting. Contact him at kkehoe@earthlink.net.

# The first two rules of selling

**T**he phone doesn't ring as much anymore. Does this mean there's no demand for your services? No, of course not. But it does mean that the days of simply answering the phone to sell work are over.

There's no way around it: You need to invest in a *sales organization*. A sales organization is built around an investment in *staffing* and *systems*. The question is, "What is the best way to make this investment?"

### Spend enough money

The cost of making a sale is spread all over your profit and loss (P&L) statement, and therefore hard to see. There are salaries for staff (salespeople, designers and estimators), plus perks (benefits, vehicles, computers and phones), advertising expenses (phone books, direct mail, brochures, Web site and fliers), and promotional spending (events, gifts and entertainment).

Let's look at the cost of making a sale by segment using three \$2 million companies as a comparable baseline. Maintenance contractors spend 8% of revenues; design/build contractors spend about 10%, while bid/build contractors invest the least at 4% of revenues. While the relative mix of these costs varies, the total level of investment is consistent within each segment.

**The first rule of selling is to invest enough money to create revenue.**

### Get more productive

The cost of making a sale is primarily staffing-related. This is because the most effective customer channel is what marketers call the *direct channel*. The primary tool in this channel is the sales representative.

Because sales reps are expensive, the key to your sales force return on investment (ROI) is to increase efficiency and monitor velocity. Efficiency is measured as dollars sold per dollars bid, and velocity as the total dollar volume bid per month. In

other words, staffing and systems must be designed to bid more — and do it faster.

A *pipeline report* is the primary management system essential to achieving this objective. Many contractors use a simple Excel database as the backbone of their system. The report is used weekly (and at times daily) to prioritize the four basic sales activities:

1. Lead generation
2. Appointment setting
3. Estimating/design, and
4. Presentation/closing.

Pipeline management addresses a problem that plagues many sales reps: ineffective prioritization and use of time.

In addition to the system, staffing specialization is required. Too often, sales reps burn too much time on activities where they are less effective. It makes little sense for a sales rep to measure, design, draw, estimate and wordsmith a proposal, for example. It is far more efficient to instead offload 70% to 80% of these activities onto administrative and production functions. Offloading can increase velocity 50% or more.

Many good sales people are inefficient at prospecting new leads, but very good at closing. Investing in a prospecting function that does little else but cold calling and appointment management can increase efficiency (close rates) 5 to 10 percentage points.

**The second rule of selling is to divide and conquer the channel.**

The payback for these strategies, of course, must be increased sales per sales rep. I have observed that deployment of these strategies can increase the production of sales staff 40% to 50%, making it possible for a grounds maintenance sales rep to sell more than \$1 million in new contracts, and design/build sales reps to close in excess of \$2.7 million in design/installations.

Because the customer is less likely to come to us, we have to go to them.





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## AT A GLANCE

**COMPANY:** Competitive Lawn Service, Downers Grove, IL

**FOUNDED:** 1982

**TITLE:** Owner/president

**NUMBER OF LOCATIONS:** One

**MARKET AREA:** Downers Grove, IL

**EMPLOYEES:** 45

**SERVICES OFFERED:** Lawn care, lawn maintenance, bed maintenance, landscaping/landscape renovation, spring/fall cleanups

**WEBSITE:** CompetitiveLawn.com

This past December, **Eric Hansen** drove to Livonia, MI, to receive the keys to a new, propane-fueled Ford F-350 from Jack Roush of Roush Performance. Over the past several years, Hansen has been converting his fleet of landscape maintenance equipment to propane power, which he believes offers better value for his energy dollars — while delivering more environmentally responsible service to his clients.

### What made you decide to become a lawn service business owner?

“I started cutting lawns and shoveling snow for neighbors when I was 10 years old. When I was 14, I worked with the next-door neighbor and his brother to start Suburban Lawn Service. We cut 50 lawns per week. When they went to college in 1982, I bought a trailer and some new mowers and started Competitive Lawn Service. I was 16. It was the easiest way for a high school boy to make money. I hired three employees in the first few years, and it paid my way through college.”

### After nearly three decades as an owner, what's the most important lesson you've learned about running a lawn service business?

“You can always train skills; you can never train attitude. Hire for attitude. Throughout our 28 years in business, we have hired hundreds — maybe even 1,000 — employees. Our best employees might not have the most impressive resume, but where they

shine is on attitude. Our people define who we are, what we do, and how we do it. We want to be a great attitude company defined by our employees.”

**What would you have done differently in building your company?** “I used to think no one could ever do a better job than me. I would sell myself, my work, my effort, my ultimate stamp of approval, and me at every job, estimate and task. Ten years ago, I realized what we need to sell is the company. We need to sell services that we could systematically supply to the client.”

**You offer services in basically one Chicago suburb, Downers Grove. Why work in such a small area, at least geographically?** “What we work to achieve is market share in this location. This reduces our fuel expense and employee travel time.

When we maintain a property 32 times per season, the drive time associated with that contract must be accounted for. All of our routes are literally minutes between jobs, and with GPS tracking and routing, we create efficiencies and cost savings to pass on to our clients. Expansion within our service area will be based on increased market share.”

### Why does your company use propane to fuel equipment and service vehicles?

“We experimented with propane for two years and studied the costs/benefits first. We started running lawn equipment on propane about two years ago. We initially wanted to see whether it was possible to run from early spring until late fall and what the costs were associated with it. We found there was less maintenance, reduced oil changes, and significantly

less fuel cost — especially when gasoline was \$4.50 a gallon. With 60% less emissions, we also were reducing our total annual output of carbon dioxide.

“We currently use about 35,000 gallons per year of unleaded gasoline and diesel. In 2009, we were able to use 1,500 gallons of that as propane. For 2010, our goal is to use between 5,000 and 10,000 gallons of propane and cut our usage of unleaded and diesel fuel to about 25,000 to 30,000 gallons. The heavy initial cost should pay for itself over the next few years.”

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## WHITE CLOVER

*Trifolium repens*

### IDENTIFICATION TIPS

- › Low growing, creeping winter perennial with stems that root at nodes.
- › Elliptical leaves in groups of three that usually have a light-green or white band like a watermark, plus some toothing on edges.
- › White to pink-tinged flower clusters grow from long stems that usually rise above the leaves.
- › Active growth from seeds or plants begins with cooler temperatures and increased moisture.

### CONTROL TIPS

- › Apply a herbicide in late winter or early fall — before the white clover seeds germinate.
- › Clean up any clover that may have survived the winter frosts with a spring application of a two-, three- or four-way post-emergent herbicide product that contains an active ingredient such as fluroxypyr, triclopyr or clopyralid.

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## LARGE CRABGRASS

*Digitaria sanguinalis*

### IDENTIFICATION TIPS

- › Crabgrass is a bunch-type grass, light green in color, with seedhead spikelets in two to nine finger-like branches along the stalk.
- › Summer annual germinates when soil temperatures reach a consistent 55° F.
- › Tall, membranous ligule has jagged edges and no auricles.
- › Leaves are rolled in the bud, and the collar is broad with long hairs.
- › It grows under close mowing and prefers open areas with thin turfgrass.

### CONTROL TIPS

- › When soil temperatures reach 55° F in the spring, apply a pre-emergent grass herbicide.
- › Choose the formulation that works best for your operation. There are several liquid, granular and fertilizer granule options.
- › Consult the appropriate product label for recommended rates for your area, reseeding and overseeding recommendations.

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## LAWN CARE: FERTILIZERS



### Scotts Professional

New Osmocote with Fusion Technology securely binds the fertilizer to growing media for a “no-spill prill.” After the fertilizer is surface applied and watered in, an innovative polymer compound forms a web-like adhesive matrix that does not interfere with the release of nutrients to the plant. This matrix bonds the fertilizer prills to each other, and to the surface of the growing media. Re-wetting the growing media through subsequent irrigation maintains the Fusion activity, ensuring the fertilizer will stay in place for an extended period of time. *Scotts.com*

### Agrium Advanced Technologies

Spread it & Forget it, driven by Duration CR, is a new controlled-release fertilizer that feeds lawns and professional turf for six months or more with just one application — saving turf professionals time and money. According to the manufacturer, a single application of Spread it & Forget it delivers green, healthy turf for an entire growing season. *SpreadItAndForgetIt.com*



## IRRIGATION: CONTROLLERS

### Rain Bird

After installation and programming, the new WR2 Wireless Rain and Rain/Freeze Sensors automatically sense and measure both rain and cold temperatures to prevent unnecessary irrigation, saving water and reducing wear on irrigation system components. The WR2 interrupts an irrigation controller's pre-scheduled cycle if one of six programmable rainfall set points (ranging from 1/8 to 1/2 in.) or one of three temperature set points (41°, 37° or 33° F) is satisfied. It also features a Quick Shut-Off feature that suspends irrigation immediately during any rain event without requiring significant rainfall accumulation. *RainBird.com*

peratures to prevent unnecessary irrigation, saving water and reducing wear on irrigation system components. The WR2 interrupts an irrigation controller's pre-scheduled cycle if one of six programmable rainfall set points (ranging from 1/8 to 1/2 in.) or one of three temperature set points (41°, 37° or 33° F) is satisfied. It also features a Quick Shut-Off feature that suspends irrigation immediately during any rain event without requiring significant rainfall accumulation. *RainBird.com*

### Airigation Solutions

The AIR-igator is a complete collection, storage, and distribution system, consisting of reservoir, pump and controller. It collects condensate from central air conditioners, and stores it until there is an adequate amount to run a drip irrigation cycle. The hotter it gets, the faster water is collected. The collected water is then distributed through standard low-flow tubing and drip emitters. A float inside the reservoir will start the pump, and shut it off when the tank is empty. Dealer opportunities are available. *Airigator.com*

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LT Rich Z-Sprayer, 1/3 gal spray tips

### TIMING:

July 13, 2009

### SUMMARY:

“This was not ideal herbicide application timing for ground ivy control, but we still had great results on it and all the other weeds on the 4-Speed XT label. As a result, we saved several contracts. We'll be using a lot more 4-Speed XT and other Nufarm products in the future.”

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## ET Water Systems

New Quickdraw software turns any mobile phone with Web access into an easy-to-use remote control for the newest generation of ETwater smart controllers. Quickdraw allows landscape managers to remotely access a series of key commands for real-time control of their ETwater irrigation system, including Water Now, Instant Suspend and Real-Time Connect. It not only eliminates the cost and hassle associated with a dedicated remote control; it lays the technical foundation for additional mobile communication capabilities in the future. *ETWater.com*



## DIG Corp.

The new LEIT-2ET is an ambient light (solar) powered, wire-

less irrigation control system that adjusts daily irrigation programs according to site and real-time weather information provided locally by the system's wireless weather stations. The LEIT-2ET system is programmed to monitor, control and adjust irrigation schedules for each zone through the weather information received from the solar powered, wireless weather stations, along with programmed site information received from the LEIT RC2ET handset. *Digcorp.com*

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## DESIGN BUILD:

# TRACTORS AND ACCESSORIES



## Bobcat

Bobcat will soon launch a semi-synchronized gear transmission (SST) option that will be available on the CT335, CT445, and CT450 models. This transmission will feature 12 forward gears and 12 reverse gears with shuttle shift capabilities for ease of use, which will complement the hydrostatic transmission (HST) models offered today. The SST transmission will provide optimal Power Take-Off (PTO) output and efficiencies for use in applications such as mowing, tilling, spraying and seeding — where a specific speed needs to be maintained. In addition, the company is offering front-mounted implements that attach directly to the tractor frame and can utilize the mid-PTO for power. *Bobcat.com/utility\_machines/tractors*

*continued on page 30*



# HELLO HUSTLER

---

# GOODBYE REGRET

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**HUSTLER** 



continued from page 28

## Caterpillar

The D7E Track-Type Tractor uses an electric drive system that delivers 10% to 30% greater fuel economy, greater productivity and lower lifetime service costs, compared with conventionally designed crawler tractors of equal weight and horsepower. In addition, the engine runs in a narrow speed range (1,500-1,800 rpm) to further reduce fuel consumption and extend engine life. Interior sound level is a quiet 73 dB(A), and an integrated display screen provides a range of machine status information. The tilting cab allows wide-open access to major components. [Cat.com/D7E](http://Cat.com/D7E)



## MAINTENANCE:

# OUTFRONT MOWERS & ATTACHMENTS

## Grasshopper

The new Model 725DT is a FrontMount commercial mower that combines the power of a 25-hp MaxTorque diesel engine with zero-turn radius maneuverability. The direct-port, fuel-injected engine is Tier 4-compliant and B5-ready. Front-mounted DuraMax decks in 52-, 61- or 72-in. widths let you trim while you mow under and around obstacles. 725DT offers airflow with even dispersal of clippings and easy conversion from side-discharge to optional mulching or PowerVac collection. [GrasshopperMower.com](http://GrasshopperMower.com)



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The Danuser EP Heavy Duty Auger Series offers a lifetime warranty, covering output pull-out. Its design features fewer internal components completely sealed and running in oil. The compact, utility-style housing features hoses routed out the top, to allow users to dig deep, even in tight locations. It offers a 2-in. hex output shaft and a three-year warranty on the drive unit. [Danuser.com](http://Danuser.com)

completely sealed and running in oil. The compact, utility-style housing features hoses routed out the top, to allow users to dig deep, even in tight locations. It offers a 2-in. hex output shaft and a three-year warranty on the drive unit. [Danuser.com](http://Danuser.com)

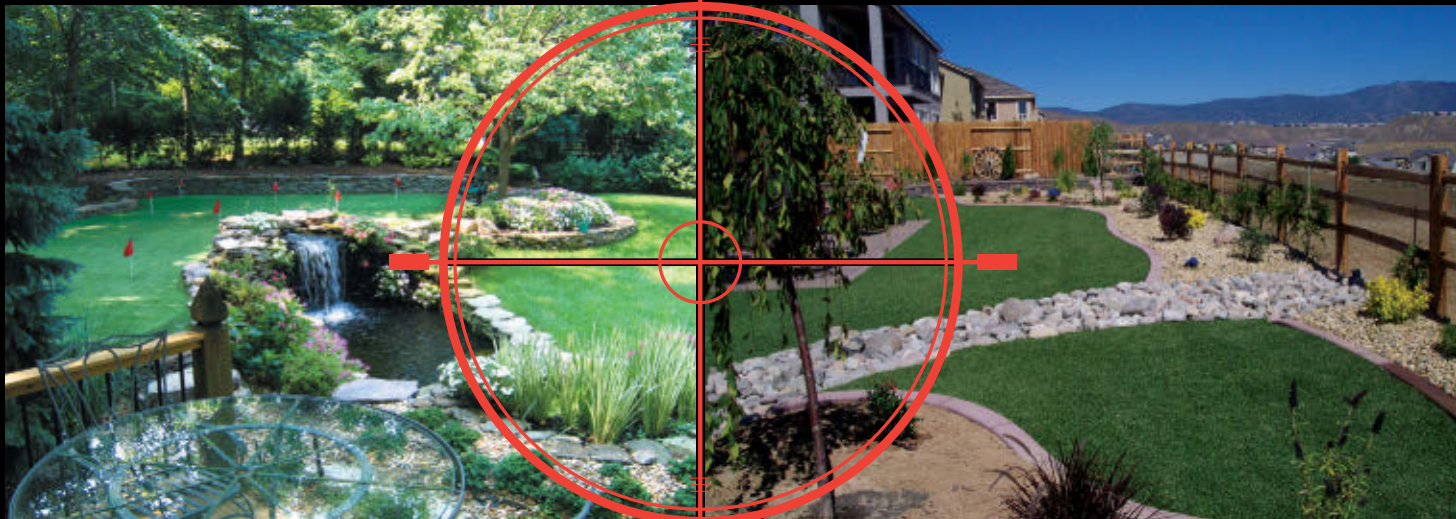
## Ariens Co.

The Gravely Pro-Master Rapid XZ out-front mower features a 30-hp, air-cooled engine, an ergonomic seat with adjustable suspension and lumbar support, and an exclusive Hydraulic Transfer System that automatically transfers weight for greater stability. It offers a front-mount, steel X-FACTOR cutting deck to speed trimming around obstacles.

Other features include 24-in. tires, a hydraulic lift to raise the deck for easy maintenance, and all-season attachments. [Ariens.com](http://Ariens.com)



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## BEST PRACTICES

BRUCE WILSON

The author is a partner with the Wilson-Oyler Group consultancy. Visit [www.wilson-oyler.com](http://www.wilson-oyler.com).

# Load up on cost-savings in 2010

In current market conditions, where low prices dominate the landscape, contractors must look for more meaningful ways to cut costs — often just so they can profit at lower price points.

The most-common way to accomplish this involves saving labor by cutting hours. While this *can* help in many cases, how much can you cut before you jeopardize the quality of your work and lose customer trust? It all depends on what you cut and how.

You must look closely at every aspect of your organization to load up on smart cost-saving strategies in 2010. Here are four money-saving suggestions:

**1. Re-examine your pay rates.** Prior to the recession, labor was in short supply and some felt forced to overpay to get good people (and even then, some of their hires were not that good). Are you paying too much, given today's vast labor pool, and your likely recent loss of revenues and margins?

**2. Closely weigh the cost of personal use of company vehicles.** This has long been a perk in the Green Industry. But that is rapidly changing. Many employers are cutting back on this practice not only because of added fuel costs and vehicle wear-and-tear, but also because of related liability exposure. Some now limit the taking home of company vehicles to employees on-call. Others place mileage limits — a fixed number of allowable commute miles, with employees paying for excess miles driven. And some have eliminated the perk entirely.

**3. Look at your "sacred cows."** Most organizations employ people who have not grown with the business. Nevertheless, somehow they have long been "protected" as loyal employees. These individuals typically are overpaid, yet under perform and erode the morale of your highly productive employees. Now is a good time to conduct a systemic purge.

**4. Review your administrative processes.** First identify processes essential to your business, such as billing and paying invoices and payroll. Then identify and scrutinize all processes (and steps within each process) that are *not* essential. Separate the wheat from the chaff and reduce administrative staff without hurting your business. In some companies, for example, a great deal of time is spent chasing down and verifying paperwork from field employees lax in turning in accurate, timely information. If you clamp down on these field employees, you can eliminate several hours of weekly administrative work.

There are potentially endless opportunities to reduce costs in most companies. It just takes discipline and a willingness to make some difficult decisions. These are tough times that require you re-examine and tighten all aspects of your operation.

Most employees understand the need to embrace change to grow. Doing so helps firms not only survive today's turbulent business climate, but also will lead to higher profits, and added job security and career opportunities, in the better times waiting just around the corner.



Allowing personal use of company vehicles is a perk on the decline.

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# PROJECT PORTFOLIO

A SCRAPBOOK OF DESIGN/BUILD OVERHAULS

*Tranquil terraces*

## THE MISSION

Create a property-wide oasis, from top to bottom, for an upscale residential development in the Arizona desert.

ISS Grounds Control acquired the multi-million dollar contract for the then-newly constructed Optima at Camelview in November 2005, and started working with developer David Hovey and landscape architecture designer, Floor Associates, to create a distinctive, soothing outdoor atmosphere for the 14-acre sanctuary — including more than 700 individually designed private terraces and a green roof that spans a majority of the 11-building community.

The project is considered to be the “first multi-level, mixed-use oasis of green roof terraces in Arizona,” notes Dan Scholl, who with Thom Landauer led the design for ISS Grounds Control’s Phoenix branch.

The ISS Grounds Control team truly had to think outside the box when designing and installing landscape for the green roof — all while considering and including the intertwining positions of each building.

“This is the most challenging landscape project we’ve ever done,” admits Todd Huston, general manager of the Phoenix branch.

By adapting to the challenges and design changes, however, ISS Grounds Control was able to tackle each individual assignment openly, while maintaining ingenuity, sustainability and overall residential privacy.



## THE WORK

### 1 | THE THEORY IN PRACTICE.

The overall project is based on line of sight, leaping from unit to unit, utilizing tens of thousands of native and semi-native plant and tree materials.

**2 | STEADY FLOW.** “On the ground level, the flow of vibrant green, colorful shrubs and groundcover steer the eye up through native trees, which then lead to a multitude of color of each terrace to the roof,” says Dan Scholl of ISS Grounds Control.



*continued on page 36 >>*



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**P R O V E N   S O L U T I O N S**

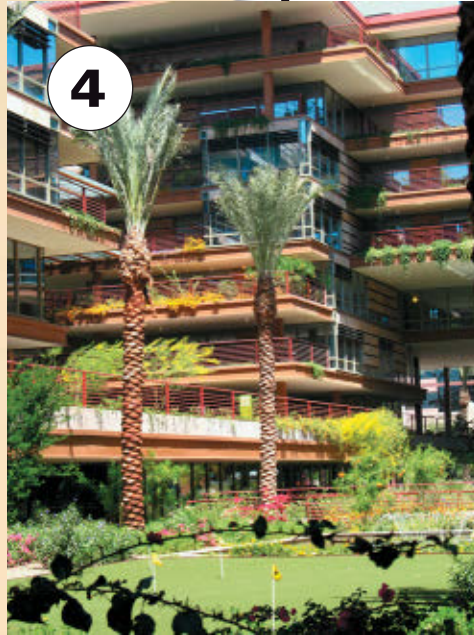


« continued from page 34

## THE WORK

**3 | IT ALL STACKS UP ...** Or down, as this view from the top of Building 10 can attest.

**4 | DESERT? WHAT DESERT?** The main courtyard features both a miniature golf course and cascading residential terraces.



**5 | ONE SYSTEM DOES IT ALL.** The entire grounds are watered by a computer-generated, two-wire irrigation controller, including a fertigation system carefully supplying calculated amounts of water and nutrients to the abundant amounts of plant material.

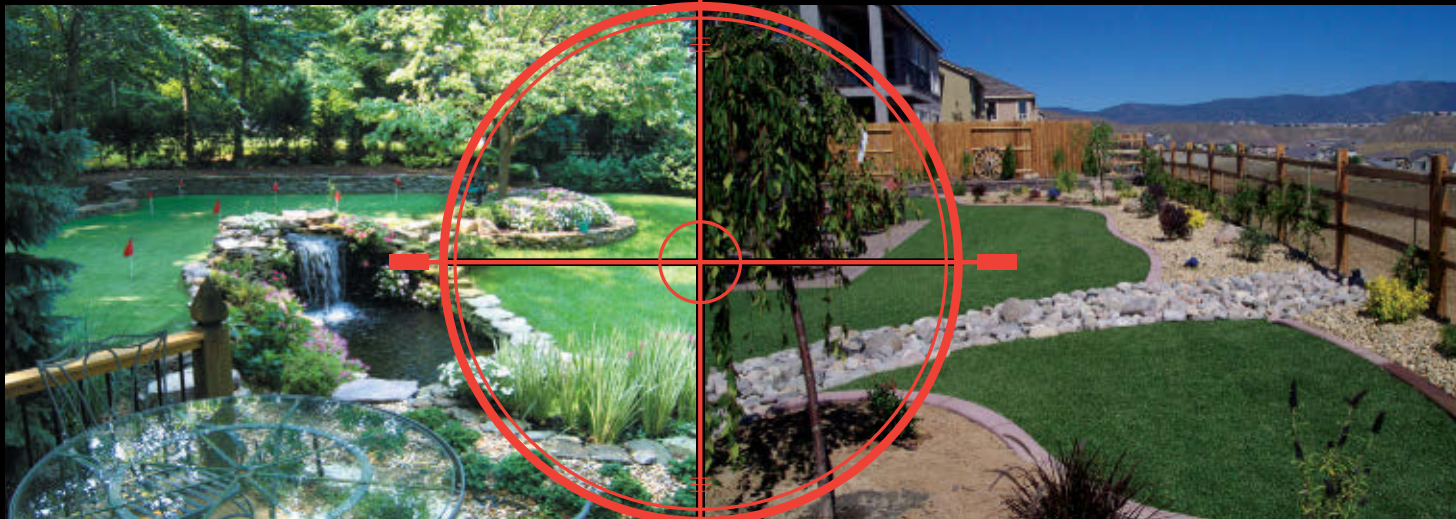
**6 | RIGHT, FROM THE START.** This view showcases where the development's main sales office is located. Palm trees and colorful plantings give potential clients a preview of the lush landscape throughout the property.



*ISS Grounds Control was established in 1974 as a commercial landscape maintenance firm in San Antonio, TX. It has grown throughout the Southwest to include operations in California and Arizona. The company is a subsidiary of ISS Facility Services, which provides janitorial, landscaping, support, security and integrated facility services. ISS Facility Services recently was named the fifth-largest private employer in the world by Dun & Bradstreet. This particular installation garnered a recent Environmental Improvement Grand Award from the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET). For more information, visit [GroundsControl.com](http://GroundsControl.com).*



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# PROBLEMSOLVER

LANDSCAPE TROUBLESHOOTING TIPS » BY H. BRUCE HELLERICK



## PROBLEM

I passed these trees on a residential lawn awhile back. I parked my car and took a closer look. The homeowner said he had the offending trees pruned because they were growing too tall and he did not want them to “fall over.” I asked,

“Are you happy with the result? Would you do it again?” He replied they seemed thin. He also said he would wait and see how much they grew before possibly pruning them again.



## SOLUTION

“Tree topping” — is a common practice in some parts of the country. It’s usually performed by those uneducated about proper arborist or pruning practices.

Education is the best way to stop tree topping. Explain your stance in letters to the editor. Talk to homeowners who have had their trees topped to find out who did the work. Provide that company with pruning tips.

Here are links to three groups that can provide more information on tree care-related questions:

- › National Arbor Day Foundation: [ArborDay.org](http://ArborDay.org)
- › Plant Amnesty: [PlantAmnesty.org](http://PlantAmnesty.org)
- › International Society of Arboriculture: [ISA-Arbor.com](http://ISA-Arbor.com)

Every day you see horticultural problems. Sometimes the solution is obvious, but others are much more difficult to solve. Brickman Group Senior Horticulture Specialist H. Bruce Hellerick tackles these issues in Problem Solver. He can be reached at [Hellerick@BrickmanGroup.com](mailto:Hellerick@BrickmanGroup.com).

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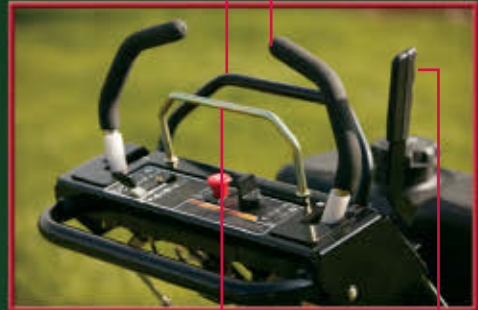
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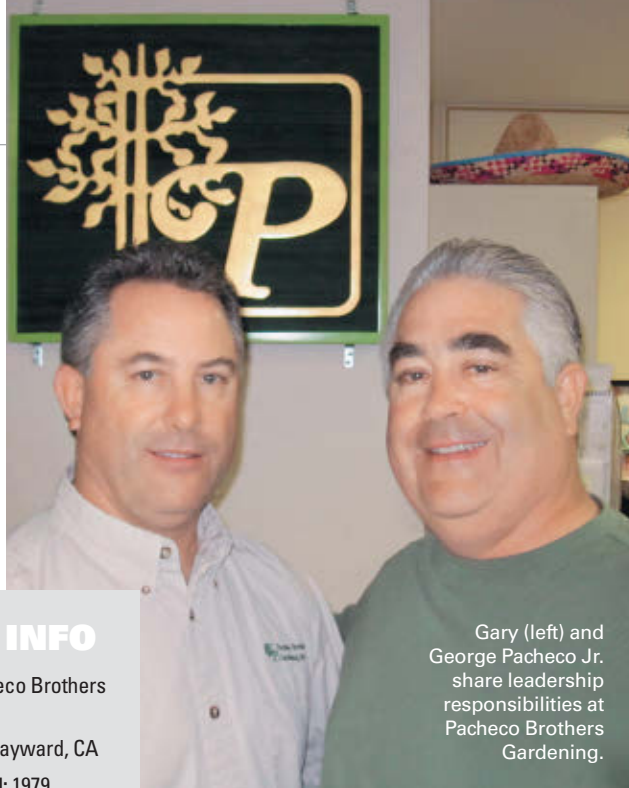
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# ACUTABOVE

GREEN INDUSTRY MAINTENANCE LEADERS » BY DAN JACOBS

George and Gary Pacheco are celebrating their 30th and most challenging year in business. Based in Hayward, CA, **Pacheco Brothers Gardening** has been adjusting to extreme changes in the weather — and the economy. President and CEO **George Pacheco Jr.** shares how their organization is dealing with these troubled times.



Gary (left) and George Pacheco Jr. share leadership responsibilities at Pacheco Brothers Gardening.

## TOP TRENDS

» **The move to maintenance.** Everybody in landscape construction is headed toward maintenance. Companies that have 20, 30 years in business and did more construction are moving into maintenance, or they're closing their doors. They find it hard to compete against the big guys. Some have had it. They've saved money, and they're starting to get out of the business.

» **Decreased spending.** Cities aren't spending money because they don't have it to spend. They had to cut back somewhere. They've reduced services or they're not doing extras. More cities are going out to bid. I've re-earned their business, but at a lower rate, so our margin isn't nearly as good. We've had to take 10% to 20% off our pricing just to keep the business. Bottom line, it hurts. You've got to do more volume, and most people don't like to do volume work. It's not worth it. I've never seen it be as bad as it is.

## TOP OBSTACLES

» **The local economy.** In California, we were hit with two things: drought and, like everybody in the nation, the economic conditions. The housing market in California has seen a major crunch.

» **Increased competition.** We usually see bids from companies within a 15- to 20-mile radius. Now we're seeing companies from 50 to 100 miles out. If they get a big enough job, they'll put a sub-yard in. There's double, triple the competition now.

## TOP OPPORTUNITIES

» **Increase marketing.** We've been very proactive on the marketing end — everything from ads in the local newspaper to updat-

## INSIDE INFO

**Company:** Pacheco Brothers Gardening

**Headquarters:** Hayward, CA

**Year established:** 1979

**Employees:** 125 (approximate)

**Annual revenue:** \$9 million

**Keys to being a Maintenance Leader:** Be a leader in the community you reside in. I'm very active in our city government. I'm very active in the local hospital and the chamber of commerce. Be there to help out; back up your community. Do anything they need. We've coached our staff to think and act like community ambassadors.

ing our Web site to investing in search engine optimization to raise our company's online ranking and recognition.

» **Use downtime to improve education.** You have to be up on the certifications — not be just an arborist, but also become water-audit certified and green-certified. We try to emphasize our irrigation certification and what our techs offer — having them conduct water audits and be very proactive with client irrigation systems, for example.

» **Offer flexibility.** When a city's mower goes down, instead of going to the local dealer to fix the mower, we make sure they know they can

call us. At a moment's notice, we can serve as their backup. Most of the cities in the Bay Area know we have extra mowers. They call us and we finish their half-done jobs. It's really worked well for us.

» **Take advantage of changes.** We recently branched out into synthetic sports field cleaning after studying the segment. A lot of cities and schools have three or four synthetic fields. Typically, no one is cleaning those. We believe new regulations are coming that will make it mandatory to clean synthetic sports fields once or twice annually and apply solutions that will protect the artificial turf and players against bacteria. The NCAA and the NFL require it, but it has not hit the high school market yet. It's like deep-cleaning a carpet. We provide synthetic turf cleaning and a bacterial spray that protects against staph infections.

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Check out what cutters and dealers had to say after they took their turn on the Pro-Turn™ 200 at the 2009 GIE+EXPO.

# SINK OR SWIM TIME

Sandra Postel and other Irrigation Show speakers say our water-use policies and practices must change rapidly and drastically to support our blue planet's projected population boom to 9 billion people by 2050.

BY **MARTY WHITFORD** EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

SOMETHING'S GOTTA GIVE. We can't keep using water at the rate we are — especially when “we” are rapidly expanding while our fresh-water reservoirs are evaporating.

“Water is finite and there is no substitute for it,” said Sandra Postel, who delivered the keynote address at the Irrigation Association's 2009 Irrigation Show. Held in December in San Antonio, TX, the Irrigation Show drew about 4,500 attendees and 290 exhibitors.

“Every year, 2010 through 2025, the world's population is projected to grow by more than 75 million people. That's the equivalent of adding two Californias annually,” said Postel, who directs the Global Water Policy Project and authored “Last Oasis: Water Scarcity” and “Pillar of Sand: Can the Irrigation Miracle Last?”

Eight hundred gallons. Sound like a boatload of water? Actually, Postel said it's just the average American's daily “water footprint” — which includes not only the water each of us drinks and uses for landscape irrigation, bathing, cooking, etc., but also all of the water required for the products we use, food we eat and other beverages we drink. Fortunately, the rest of the planet's water footprint, on average, is half ours.

From 1950 to 2000, the United States' population doubled, but our nation's water use tripled, noted Beth Koprowski, a senior environmental communications specialist with ERG in Arlington, Va. Part of panel delivering a briefing on the U.S. EPA's WaterSense program, Koprowski said 36 states predict water shortages by 2013.



“**LANDSCAPE IRRIGATION USES AN ESTIMATED 7.8 BILLION GALLONS OF WATER PER DAY. THE BOTTOM LINE IS 'BUSINESS AS USUAL' CANNOT CONTINUE.**”

— IA'S ANDY SMITH

“Outdoor uses account for an estimated 30% of residential water consumption — and this figure is as high as 70% in some areas of the West and Southwest,” Koprowski said. “Further compounding matters, many of the states with the highest per capita water consumption are projected to experience the greatest population booms over the next two decades.”

Changing unintelligent water-use practices and shortsighted water policies — such as subsidies in Las Vegas



Water-use expert Sandra Postel says the marriage of IT and ET holds great promise.

that have resulted in water costing nearly one-third what it does in Cleveland, which

sits on the shores of Lake Erie — won't come easy. Nevertheless, these changes must come — and they must be rapid and sweeping, Irrigation Show speakers concurred.

“Part of the problem is we can't manage very well what we don't measure and monitor,” Postel adds. “But a lengthy pipeline of wonderful irrigation innovations, many of which are showcased here, hold great potential. This developing marriage of IT (information technology) and ET (evapotranspiration) — namely smart controllers tied to sensors monitoring real-time weather, soil and other conditions — will help us make wiser, more cost-efficient irrigation decisions.”

Landscape managers can expect to see more turf and plant restrictions, irrigation bans and more-limited access to potable water, as our nation's population continues to grow by more than 3 million people per year, said Andy Smith, IA's external affairs director.

“Landscape irrigation uses an estimated 7.8 billion gallons of water per day, according to the U.S. EPA,” Smith noted. “The bottom line is ‘business as usual’ cannot continue.” **LM**

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# BACK TO

BY DANIEL G. JACOBS MANAGING EDITOR

# SCHOOL

Agrium Advanced Technologies offers lawn care professionals education along with relaxation.

WHEN EDWARD BULWER-LYTTON wrote, “The pen is mightier than the sword,” it’s clear he’d never seen a shotgun in the hands of journalists. But attendees of Agrium Advanced Technologies’ Green Industry Grad School witnessed just that. Held in December at Farmlinks in Sylacauga, AL, the about 40 “students” at this three-day “master’s-level school” — mostly lawn care professionals (LCPs), with a couple of rifle-toting journalists thrown in — learned about Agrium’s latest solutions to help LCPs save money, lead people and grow their businesses in this soft economy. They also got the chance to do a little fishing or boating, play a round of golf or grab a 12-gauge shotgun and take aim at flying sporting clays.

The Farmlinks facility, which encompasses 3,500 acres in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, was the majestic setting for Agrium’s educational program. Business owner, speaker and consultant Marty Grunder offered tips to leading in lean times and Dr. John L. Cisar, from the University of Florida, Gainesville, provided insight into the Sunshine State’s lawn care industry, presenting “Fertilizer & Environmental Fate.”

“We are fighting the battle, and we are losing,” Cisar proclaimed, explaining laws passed in Florida (and elsewhere) have little to do with sound agronomic practices and everything to do with politics.

We need facts. Fortunately, Cisar’s research is investigating how much nitrogen is absorbed in plant uptake, released into the atmosphere, stored in soil, and lost to runoff and/or leaching.

“As fertilizer managers, to have environmentally healthy turf we need to fertilize that turf,” he said. “It’s hard to figure out (the source of the nitrogen); it’s very easy to point



fingers,” said Cisar, adding legislators are pointing directly at the Green Industry.

During the Green Industry Grad School, Agrium’s experts explained how the company’s slate of slow- and

controlled-release fertilizers, such as Polyon, XCU and Duration, benefit LCPs, allowing them to do more with less — leveraging technologies that keep customers’ lawns greener longer.

When attendees weren’t learning about fertilizer or relaxing, attendees got a welcomed earful of education from Grunder and Jeff Korhan, an industry veteran turned consultant.

Korhan’s talk, “Green Industry Trends You Can Capitalize On,” honed in on three key points:

➤ **Human-centric business.** It’s no longer about companies; it’s about people.

➤ **Collaborative markets.** It’s not only about selling to buyers, but also about collaborating with them to develop better, more meaningful solutions.

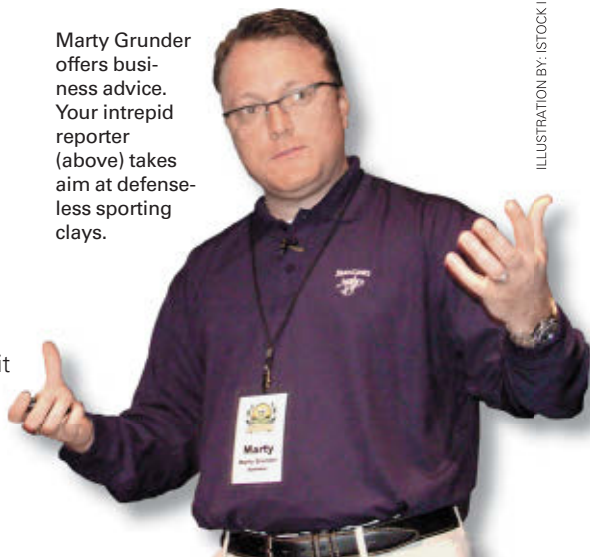
➤ **Sustainable communities.** It’s not about exclusive organizations; it’s about accessible communities where members place their trust in one another. **LM**

## 11 WAYS TO ONE-UP THE COMPETITION

Consultant and business owner Marty Grunder offered attendees of Agrium’s Green Industry Grad School the following tips on gaining an advantage over the competition:

1. Offer great customer service
2. Be different
3. Make work fun
4. Have a team atmosphere
5. Survey clients and team members
6. Be clean and organized
7. Set objectives
8. Constantly communicate your mission and vision
9. Learn — be committed to it
10. Have your antennae up
11. Have a plan

Marty Grunder offers business advice. Your intrepid reporter (above) takes aim at defenseless sporting clays.







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# JOINT SUCCESS

# SPROUTS

1st joint Lawn Care Summit helps PLANET and NPMA educate professionals and explore myriad shared growth opportunities.

BY **DANIEL G. JACOBS**  
MANAGING EDITOR

IN DECEMBER, THE Professional Land-care Network (PLANET) and National Pest Management Association (NPMA) joined forces to host the first-ever joint Lawn Care Summit in Orlando, FL.

When the two groups initially discussed the possibility of co-organizing such an event, they hoped to attract 100 attendees. Triple-digit attendance was a somewhat ambitious goal for a first-time event being launched during this economic slowdown, but it proved to be an entirely achievable one with this dynamic duo of industry associations — the Lawn Care Summit drew more

than 200 lawn care and pest management professionals.

Rob Lederer, NPMA executive vice president, said many pest management professionals are exploring ways to expand their services, diversify and bolster revenues. They're thinking outside the box (structural pest control) and are looking at the greener side (lawn care).

Additional education and networking is needed to realize these goals. That's where the Summit came in, said PLANET CEO Sabeena Hickman.

"Attendees of our joint Lawn Care Summit will walk away with fresh thinking ... insight for business plans and lessons learned from those who have 'been there, done that,'" Hickman said.

## Uphill battle

Tom Delaney, PLANET's Legislative Affairs Director, discussed shared regulatory issues with attendees of the two-day event.

"Managed turfgrass and landscapes are being targeted as so-called non-

essential, cosmetic uses of chemicals," Delaney added. "There's a broad underestimation of the benefits of a managed ecosystem."

One of the problems is there's little timely, scientific information — and even less publicity — on the positive impact properly managed green spaces have on the environment. The arguments the Green Industry uses today basically are the same it offered 20 years ago, Delaney said.

"As we talk about carbon sequestration, and those types of things, it's still evolving," Delaney said. "We don't have good research to show out there. The political climate is fast-changing, and failure to act could minimize or negate the future opportunities we have."

During Delaney's talk, one attendee asked another how legislation could target the lawn care industry when professionals are responsible for only about 20% of residential lawns and landscapes.


"I posed that same question to a regulator in New Hampshire once," replied the second contractor. "His response was, 'My friend, you're confusing science with politics.'"

## Obstacles & Opportunities

Delaney's talk was one of a number of dual-track sessions that covered both technical and managerial topics.

During the general session on the second day of the program, "Trends in Lawn Care — The Future of the Industry," attendees also got to hear from representatives of some of the biggest players in the Green Industry, including: Russ Frith, president and CEO of Lawn Doctor; Tom Hofer, CEO of

*continued on page 48*



Lawn care and pest pros learn about the future of lawn care during the Lawn Care Summit.

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## LAWN CARE SUMMIT

*continued from page 46*

Spring-Green Lawn Care Corp.; Philip Dobbs, chief marketing officer of The TruGreen Cos.; and Harvey Massey, chairman and CEO of Massey Services.

Frith discussed many of the factors that led to the current economic condition, including an “entitlement mentality” that drove far too many Americans to buy houses with no money down. This, among other factors, created a perfect storm.

“These things are out of our control,” Frith said. “But we *can* understand the effect on our businesses and manage around them.”

Harvey Massey said the nation faces record unemployment, home foreclosures and bankruptcies — all of which contribute to resistance to price increases.

Massey did share one silver lining.

“It’s at times like these we must have a love affair with our people,” said Massey, adding, “I don’t believe there is

a bad economy as long as there is one; some (economies) are better than others. But there is an economy — people are spending money.”

Hofner spoke about the pressures the industry faces from environmentalists.

“The last thing we want to do is harm the environment,” Hofner said. “Today, organic and sustainable lawn care are niche markets. That could change and grow in the years ahead.”

New economic realities force people to do more with less money, said Dobbs, noting many are worried about their future employment and how to juggle their household budgets.

“People have less time and money, and more choices and information on companies and the products they use. If you offer clarity, you can improve your market share,” Dobbs added.



(Top) Harvey Massey (left) talks with Nick Dennis. (At left) Davey Tree's Paul McDonough leads a discussion with ValleyCrest's Dr. Barry Troutman.

PLANET and NPMA executives said they haven't decided whether the 2009 Lawn Care Summit was a stand-alone event or the start of an annual program. Any doubt about what attendees thought, however, was put to rest during the closing session — when an attendee stood up and said, “You said ‘if’ we do this again next year. It should be ‘when’ we do this again next year.” **LMI**

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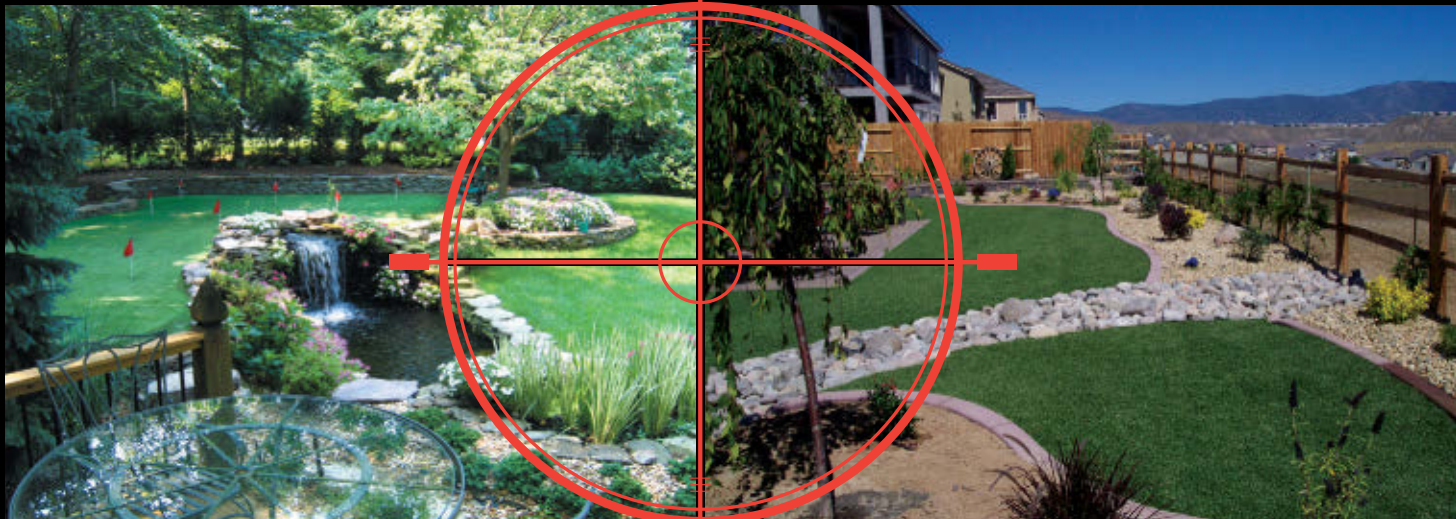
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## Let's *not* re-enact 'Lord of the Flies'

**E**ver read "Lord of the Flies," or seen one of the two flicks based on the novel? I only ask because some within the Green Industry have forgotten the book's golden message.

In the allegorical novel by Nobel Prize-winning author William Golding, a group of British schoolboys descend into savagery after being marooned on a deserted island. It's a lesson on the scary de-evolution that occurs when we allow our God-given basic survival instincts to go awry.

It appears some among us are re-enacting "Lord of the Flies." In a recent online survey conducted by *Landscape Management*, "lowball bids" tied "the recession" as contractors' top threats. One of these threats we can do something about. I'll give you a hint: It's *not* the economy.

We must band together and refuse to participate in the markdown madness infecting lawn care, landscape maintenance, design/build and irrigation contractors. Margins are tight enough. After paying direct costs, and general and administrative expenses, 10% profit actually is considered a good

margin for many in our business.

Whether you're a national company, a regional player or a one-man mowing operation started last summer after you were laid off, there's zero margin for mindless markdowns.

When working on bids, remember: Price is important, but it's not *everything*. In fact, several studies have shown price isn't even the No. 1 thing on most consumers' minds when selecting landscape contractors.

A lot has changed, but world-class service still rules in 2010. Ensure all of your proposals look professional: Include rock-solid testimonials with captivating before-and-after site photographs, and tailor each pitch to the prospect's stated and observed service needs.

Of course, we can't honestly blame all of our pricing problems on lowballing competitors. Some of us do a fine job undermining ourselves. Whether it's out of fear, greed, inexperience and/or ignorance, too many in our industry are undervaluing and underselling themselves — and it could haunt us for years.

There's more than enough business out there for the taking. We need to give consumers 101 reasons to *not* do it themselves when it comes to maintaining their lawns and landscapes. We also need to sell and deliver true value, and start charging appropriately for it, on every job — for everyone's sake.

There's margin for markup, even in this economy. Think about it: Some coffee shops pay less than 5 cents for the beans they use to make one cup of java, but they charge consumers up to 100 times that, and most of us don't blink an eye. It's time for us to wake up, get off the island and *sell* the coffee.

The alternative, "Lord of the Flies — Landscape Edition," is no way to live. Any business we win today based solely, or even primarily, on price can be lost just as quickly tomorrow to another lowballer. As famous writer Stanislaw Lem once said, "Cannibals prefer those who have no spines."

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To win in the long term, our industry must **think outside the 'low price' box.**





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