



## Leveraging 2009's lessons

**W**e're over the shock of the seemingly unrelenting stream of bad news that dominated winter 2009. The daily reports of massive bank failures, record-breaking numbers of foreclosures and waves of job losses cast a smothering gray pall of uncertainty over almost everything. While our economy has a long way to go to recover what's been lost, we're confident the worst is behind us. We're now more certain of what to expect and what we must do as our 2010 season gets in full swing. That's the good news.

The bad news is that the strong rebound we had hoped for in our country's economic fortunes and a return to robust growth for our industry are still a ways off. This season will not be one of the better years for most of us. Even so, our industry is better positioned than most because we have firm control of our companies and the public appreciates our services. And now that spring is here we're blessedly busy.

We have sales calls to make, employees to train and clients requiring our services. We're in full hustle, with three goals topping our agendas:

**1.** Being as visible as possible within our markets;

**2.** Marketing and selling like we've never done before; and

**3.** Delivering the most personal and appreciated service possible.

Too busy to be discouraged about this season's prospects, we're guardedly optimistic about 2010 in spite of the general economy. We're convinced of the long-term success of our companies and a return to growth in the landscape industry, even if it is modest this year.

We remind ourselves that we have a lot going for us, which we would recognize if we reflect on it a little bit.

### Small business, big opportunities

We should also remind ourselves we're an industry comprised of tens of thousands of businesses guided by an aggressive, entrepreneurial spirit.

Most of our operations are small, even by accepted definitions of small business. The advantages of being small sometimes outweigh the disadvantages — especially during periods of rapid change, such as we're experiencing. Small companies can react quickly to shifts in the market or to changes in customers' situations and needs.

Small also means not being hamstrung by unions or haunted by underfunded pension plans.

Going into last season many of us cut costs, increased our marketing and sales efforts or realigned our mix of services. Some of us did all three.

We're now applying the lessons we learned from last season, and we're more confident of our ability to gauge and fully capitalize on our companies' prospects.

As humorist Tom Bodett said, "In school, you're taught a lesson and then given a test. In life, you're given a test that teaches you a lesson."

Every season brings its own lessons, many of them hard-earned. Granted, given the choice, we would rather not have another learning experience like last year.

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