

ACUTABOVE

GREEN INDUSTRY MAINTENANCE LEADERS » BY DAN JACOBS

It's a matter of accountability. "Our people have a clear understanding of what they are supposed to deliver and are measured on that," says **Martin Cleary**, owner along with his brother Mike, of Cleary Brothers Landscape, Danville, CA. The Clearys have built a successful enterprise by rewarding decision makers and letting them make decisions that affect their rewards. "They are given power to make decisions and also make mistakes," Martin Cleary says. "As an owner, I am always available for council but I expect my people to take action. I have high expectations, but I don't expect absolute perfection."



Martin Cleary runs one of the largest landscaping companies in California.

TOP TRENDS

- » **Sustainability.** There is a real movement toward sustainable and responsible landscaping. Our industry has matured and so have our customers. Commercial customers expect to deal with professional firms.
- » **Mutual Growth.** Property owners expect more from their landscaper than just horticultural care. They expect a partner, a company that will give them support and input that helps to meet their goals.
- » **Accountability.** We don't micromanage our managers. They are given power to make decisions and also make mistakes. When mistakes are made I only expect action to fix the mistake.

TOP OBSTACLES

- » **A Down Economy.** Most landscape companies are small and are going to have a hard time competing with the larger firms. If a company has sales under \$5 million overhead is going to be very difficult to dilute. To thrive in this economy, the landscaper has to have people focused on sales, marketing, production, customer service, and accounting.
- » **Expertise.** To be on top, the landscaper has to be expert in a variety of topics: advanced irriga-

INSIDE INFO

Company: Cleary Brothers Landscape
Headquarters: Danville, CA
Year founded: 1987
Employees: 165 full-time
Annual revenue: \$10 million
Services offered: Landscape construction, landscape maintenance, arborist services
Key to being a maintenance leader: Our key has been the same since day one. Do great work and love our customer. We make every effort to provide a top-level experience for our customers. We don't accept shoddy work. Every person in our company is trained to respect our customers in every action that we take. This is a primary part of our culture. All of our employees consider themselves as professionals and take pride in the work that they do. We have great people on staff. Great people attract great people. Great people also attract great customers.

tion systems, pest control choices, sustainable landscaping processes, management information systems, and compliance. Without a strong staff, this is a huge challenge to the landscape contractor.

- » **Downward Push.** Pricing pressure is going to continue to get worse for the next two years.

TOP OPPORTUNITIES

- » **Water Management.** In many parts of the country water is in short supply. Being expert in managing that resource is a huge opportunity for the landscape contractor. Getting educated through trade groups and vendors on technology and techniques is a key to success.
- » **Renovation Work.** In order to keep property values up in a tough market, the property has to look better than the competition. Renovation will always be an opportunity, particularly in the smaller commercial arena.
- » **The Proper Attitude.** Being positive in a negative world. People, it's a buyers market right now for top talent. While others are putting the brakes on, this is the time to recruit.

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