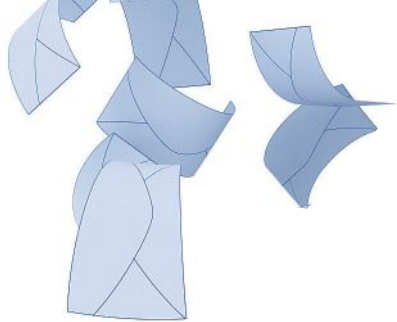




YOUR EMPLOYEE PROBLEMS



\$30
\$25
\$20
\$15



SOLVED!

*Got an employee problem you can't fix?
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PROBLEM

1

Texting. "No employee in the 18 to 24 age range will leave their phones alone during work," says Chad Combs, owner of Landmark Lawn & Landscaping LLM in Janesville, WI.

Sure, one text message is no big deal, explains Tony Brown, Tony Brown MBA Consulting. "You lose a minute or so of productivity per text message," he says. It's when those minutes add up "when someone receives and sends 30 text messages an hour as they carry on at least three conversations."

SOLUTION

Linda Gravett, owner of Ohio-based HR consulting firm Gravett & Associates, advises companies to set up a code of conduct about text messaging and communications on the job.

The reason? Employees presume they have a reasonable expectation of privacy in their personal communications (even on employer-issued devices). Thus, employers must draft policies that effectively limit their employees'



expectations of privacy, advises David B. Ritter, who chairs Chicago's Neal Gerber Eisenberg's Labor & Employment Practice Group where he represents management in all areas of labor and employment law.

"But employment communications policies are only effective if they are clearly communicated and consistently implemented," Ritter says. "And any review of employee communications should be limited, reasonable and conducted in accordance with existing and up-to-date policies to avoid employer actions getting them into litigation trouble with employees."

PROBLEM

2

Employees who regularly **arrive to work late and call in sick** on a more than usual basis.

SOLUTION

Today, employees call in sick or show up late at a disturbing percentage. A study by HR and employment law firm CCH, part of Wolters Kluwer/Croner, found personal illness accounted for only one-third of unscheduled absences by U.S. workers. The remaining two-thirds were a result of employees calling in sick last minute because they feel entitled to a day off, were stressed or burnt out, didn't want to use up precious vacation time or had a family or personal commitment to which they didn't want to admit.

More than two-thirds of employers also reported a discernible pattern in unscheduled absences with the most noticeable being workers calling in sick on Mondays and Fridays, followed by holidays and during flu and hay fever seasons.

One way to manage this problem, advises CCH, is offering an appropriate range of work-life and absence control programs, including compressed workweeks (ex. four-day workweek), telecommuting, flu shot and other wellness programs and alternative working arrangements.

Regardless of current policies or programs, make sure rules about tardiness and sick days are clear and up-to-date in employee manuals and communicated regularly.

When employees break rules, be firm but reasonable. If a worker shows up 4 to 5 minutes late occasionally, do not make a big issue of it. However, be careful not to let this become a habit by any individual or it will become an office wide problem, says **FireHow.com**.

Incentives may also work. One landscape company responding to *Landscape Management's Wage & Benefits Report* survey pays a \$1 bonus for employees who are on time every day and don't call in sick for each entire two-week pay period.



PROBLEM

3

"We still have problems with people **passing drug tests and having valid and trouble-free driver's licenses**," shares Bruce Bachand, vice president of Orlando's Carol King Landscape Maintenance.

SOLUTION

Drug testing is an important safety practice in the workplace. The U.S. Department of Labor estimates drug use at work costs employers \$75 to \$100 billion dollars annually in lost time, accidents, health care and workers' compensation costs. Sixty-five percent of all accidents on the job are related to drug or alcohol, and substance abusers utilize 16 times as many health care benefits and are six times more likely to file workers' compensation claims than non-abusers.

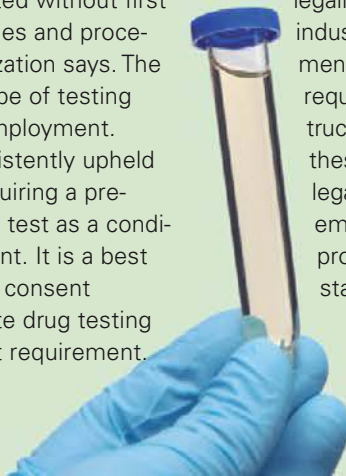
As a result, the best thing to do in

this case is to keep testing to avoid these additional costs, says Pre-Employment Drug Screening (PDS).

A drug-testing program should not be implemented without first establishing policies and procedures, the organization says. The most common type of testing program is pre-employment. Courts have consistently upheld the legality of requiring a pre-employment drug test as a condition of employment. It is a best practice to obtain consent and clearly indicate drug testing is an employment requirement.

For landscape contractors planning to conduct post-hiring testing for current employees, they should include training and education for supervisors and employees, as well as guidelines for discipline in the event of a positive test. Post-employment testing includes random testing for safety sensitive positions, post-accident testing, individualized suspicion testing and testing that is legally required in certain industries (ex. Department of Transportation requirements concerning truck drivers). Each of these types of testing is legally sensitive, and an employer should have a program in place before starting.

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PROBLEM 4

Finding people who want careers over jobs. "Our greatest challenge is getting competent and caring workers who are looking for career positions in one of the green industries and not just short-term employment," Bachand says.

"It's not so hard to find a laborer but it's hard to find someone who really wants to do the best they can and are committed," agrees Jason Raney, president, Raney Landscape, Little Rock, AR.

Ron Skover, owner of \$570,000 Greenlawn in North Street, MI, says workers in his region have "a factory mentality. They want to come in, put in their eight hours and then clock out for the day."

But Skover is in a unique position — he wants an employee who can recognize a long-term career opportunity. "I'm at an age where I'm looking to scale back," he says. "I need to find someone who wants a career and can care about this business like I do."



SOLUTION

Raney tries to alleviate this problem during the hiring stage. He has noticed a pattern. "Most of the time, a single guy in his 20s isn't as committed," he says. "But a family guy has people to support and is more likely to be long-term."

When it comes to managing and motivating Generation Y employees, *Fortune's* management and career expert Annie Fisher says they may need more direction on tasks that require face-to-face contact. For instance, if they are going to greet customers, be specific and explain you want them to make eye contact, etc. Then demonstrate how you want it done.

For Generation X employees, provide them with job descriptions so they feel like valued co-workers and additions to the team.

Incentives that enhance or grow employee careers in the landscape field may also help. Skover is offering students the opportunity to win a \$2,000 scholarship per year to Michigan State University if they pursue the turfgrass/landscape management field. "I'm hoping it will draw someone to work here and consider my business for a future career," he says.

"Even if it turned into an internship initially, I want to help someone who is interested in the field, and who's really going to try and do a good job and enjoy what they do." LJM

WEB EXTRA For PLANET's analysis of 2009 compensation practices, check out the 2010 *Employee Compensation Report for the Green Industry* in the LM Bookstore at shop.landscapemanagement.net

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