

“We believe that the spirit of our organization is our team, representing a variety of cultures from three continents and 10 countries,” says **John Gachina**, president of Gachina Landscape Management, Menlo Park, CA. “About half of our account management team has risen through the ranks, starting at entry-level positions.”

Gachina gives them important tools, including education and training. But employees must show initiative.

He tells *LM* what it means to be a good manager in landscaping today and shares his thoughts on where the industry is heading.

TOP TRENDS

› **Sustainability.** It runs the gamut from water conservation and reducing our carbon footprint to the use of alternative fuels and employing organic pesticides and fertilizers. We are located in the San Francisco Bay/Silicon Valley area. It's laden with creative, high-tech companies such as Apple, Google, Yahoo and Hewlett-Packard, many of which are our customers. Sustainability is very important to them. It's becoming a bigger and bigger deal every day.

› **Social media.** It's now the best way to reach professional young people, especially those in or just getting out of college. They are all steeped in Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, and it will continue to become more and more accepted, especially through the expansion of smart phones. Our HR department currently uses social media for recruiting, and we will be using it more and more to attract new and retain current customers.

TOP OBSTACLE

› **Lower margins due to a down-turned economy with increased competition.** Even though your customers like what you do for them, they have short memories when it comes to looking for the lowest bid. The best strategy is to keep them from going out to bid. But that means you may have to lower your margins to keep them. Since margins are getting tighter, we are evaluating every business process in our company to improve on efficiencies. We are looking at new ways to cut down on our waste stream and

John Gachina says if you have true passion for the job, that optimism is contagious.

INSIDE INFO

Company: Gachina Landscape Management

Headquarters: Menlo Park, CA

Employees: 300

2011 revenue: \$20 million

Key to being a maintenance leader:

Being genuinely passionate about what you do, and that's contagious. For example, we have always been passionate about doing the maintenance side of our business, and it shows.

Also, creating a clear career path for employees and taking good care of them. This builds loyalties and long-term commitments. I have provided growth opportunities for many employees who have stayed with me for the past 20 years. We encourage and support our employees who want to earn special landscape certifications through PLANET. They also see that I promote from within.

We found that all benefit when our employees started making healthy lifestyle choices both at work and at home, and these activities boosted morale and teamwork. A few years ago, to get our people active and promote teamwork, we decided to boost healthy living for all our employees and their families. We provide home-grown fitness classes, health awareness information and healthy eating. Our training room is turned over weekly to Pilates, yoga and stretching classes. All our crew members perform 10 minutes of stretching before starting any job.

more carefully manage our resources. We have a new contact management system in place. Lowering margins internally still means doing an excellent job for your customers externally — never compromising on quality.

TOP OPPORTUNITY

› **Educating your customers.** When you demonstrate to your customers that you are trying to save them money, their loyalties increase. For example, showing them smart irrigation practices to reduce water consumption and minimize erosion goes a long way in keeping them as loyal customers.

The author is a freelance journalist with more than 20 years' experience writing about the Green Industry. Contact him at tecrain@goinggreenguy.com.