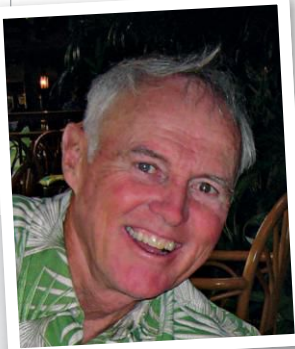


MY BIGGEST MISTAKE

LESSONS LEARNED THE HARD WAY » BY CASEY PAYTON



Balancing old and new is challenging for a longstanding Montana firm.



Jerry Cashman

COMPANY:

Cashman Nursery & Landscaping

HEADQUARTERS:

Bozeman, Mont.

SERVICES: 50% nursery/
garden center; 50% landscape
design/build

CLIENTELE: 65% residential;
35% residential

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES: 50

2011 REVENUE: \$3.4 million

PROJECTED REVENUE:
\$3.6 million

WITH A LONG-STANDING history in Bozeman, Mont., the family-owned Cashman Nursery & Landscaping is well known for its industry experience. Jerry and Jan Cashman built the present nursery building and landscaping business in 1976, but the original Cashman Nursery dates back to 1898 in Owatonna, Minn. Being a long-established business has many benefits, but owner Jerry Cashman points out it also can pose some challenges. Keeping the business looking and feeling up to date has been the biggest challenge of all, he says.

Cashman has on staff some longtime workers. Though veteran employees can be great assets, challenges arise with an aging workforce. Some employees have been with Cashman for two decades or more, and as they've aged, their productivity levels have declined.

"Obviously, an older employee might not be able to lift heavy items or work 50 hours a week in the spring, when we really need everyone to work overtime," says Cashman. "That can be a business problem. You come to accept less productivity from employees at the highest pay levels simply because of their seniority."

Cashman says it's a problem that a lot of businesses probably face—not

just in the Green Industry but in many other industries as well. It's just a fact of life that age can naturally decrease productivity, and Cashman admits he's gotten complacent with longtime employees who may not be producing what they used to. It can lead to some tough conversations.

"One of the biggest challenges is at our year-end review when I have to talk about salary with an employee that's been with me a long time," he says. "I may have to tell them they're not getting a raise or may even have to be paid less. It's just one of those tough parts about business."

One solution, says Cashman, is to bring in more young help to supplement the older, long-term employees. While he wants to remain loyal to longtime employees and won't replace them, he also is willing to bring in some new help.

"New people are always coming on board and bringing new ideas and more energy," he says. "Those are the types of new employees you want to seek out because it's important to have a good balance between senior, well-experienced employees and fresh, eager employees. A balance between the two will hopefully bring you a combination of both good productivity and quality."

Image upgrade

In keeping "fresh," Cashman says the longtime

business also has had to focus on keeping the image of the company "crisp and clean."

"In other words, 20 years ago our truck paint and logos might have looked brand new, but as time goes on everything stays the same and things start to look tired," Cashman says. "Then you see new businesses start up in the area and all of their stuff looks crisp, clean and fresh and it gives them an advantage."

Cashman hopes community members appreciate the fact that the business is well established. He also hopes they'll equate that to experience and knowledge.

"We hope that some people might understand we've been in the industry a long time and they won't expect us to look brand new," Cashman says. "We hope that they'll appreciate the fact we've been around for a while. But even if you don't look brand new, you still have to look crisp and clean. You have to keep your image up to date."

The business recently changed its logo and also produced new signage to help achieve that goal. Cashman adds: "We haven't changed the logos on all our vehicles yet—that's our next step—but we have changed a lot of our signage with a fresh new logo. We hope that making these kinds of changes will help us continue to compete with newer companies."

Casey Payton is a freelance writer with seven years' experience writing about landscaping.