

HOW-TO

# Prepare Latinos for leadership

BY SONIA DIAZ

It's no secret the Hispanic workforce has become an integral part of success for many lawn care and landscape companies. A recent study published by the U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce declared the lawn care and landscape industry as key to the economic and entrepreneurial development of the Hispanic community in the U.S., and the numbers are staggering. Latinos represent 35.2 percent of the industry's workforce—more than twice the national average for Latinos in all other industries combined.

While it's clear that Latinos are a vital part of the industry, it's not as clear how we can best prepare them today so that they will be ready to fearlessly lead into tomorrow. Many companies and organizations in the industry have already begun to teach, train and invest in their Hispanic staff with the goal of preparing them for senior level positions.

CoCal Landscape in Denver, owned by Jesus "Chuy" Medrano, president of the National Hispanic Landscape Alliance, is one of those companies. Let's look at some of its best practices when cultivating Hispanic talent.

## Mentoring programs

*"Cross-train the best guys. Have the irrigation techs show the new guys the way to run the controllers. Have the supervisors ride with the foreman. Show them the way little by little and you will soon have an efficient and well-organized workforce."*

—MARK YAW, LANDSCAPE PROJECT MANAGER, COCAL LANDSCAPE

The one factor that keeps most of us motivated at our own jobs is the possibility of being able to expand and grow in our roles. These expectations and hopes are no different for your site crews, regardless of their ethnicity. For companies with a particularly high number of Hispanic



CoCal Landscape owner "Chuy" Medrano networks at a National Hispanic Landscape Alliance reception.

employees, their future success, and maybe even their survival, depends on being able to move some of these employees into leadership roles. While some leaders will emerge naturally, it's important to realize that making a conscious effort to educate and promote Latino talent is crucial. Mentoring programs allow workers to get a broader perspective of what it takes to run the business while providing employees with

the feeling that the company has taken a vested interest in their growth.

When mentoring, employers should pick those employees who have shown the most potential and highest level of performance, as not all employees are cut out to be leaders.

If incorporating a mentoring program is not possible, simply allowing your best talent to cross-train with others on the job can really make a difference.

## Attitude reflects leadership

*"I get by with little Spanish and I think it's because the guys know I am trying to help them do their job and they want to help me."* —STACY PARCELL, LEAD DESIGNER, COCAL LANDSCAPE

While Hispanics are increasingly playing a vital role in our economy, the language barrier continues to be a big challenge for many employers. Learning English is one of the most overwhelming challenges for this workforce.

Instead of seeing the language barrier as an obstacle, employers should consider it an opportunity to build a closer relationship with their crews. Simple interactions such as asking them to teach you key Spanish words and phrases will not only help you communicate with them better, it also will make learning English words less intimidating for them.

When possible, employers should have their most important employee documents translated into Spanish, such as health benefits and employee handbooks. Some



**QUICK TIP** Create an environment where Hispanic employees feel their ideas and initiatives are valued, whether it's through brainstorming sessions, providing personal and professional growth opportunities or simply asking for their feedback.

companies also provide in-house English as a Second Language classes for their employees. By making these efforts, employers will find that two-way communication works to their advantage.

### Cultural awareness

*“Company owners need to demonstrate an interest in Hispanic workers’ capacity, listen and maybe implement their suggestions and opinions. I believe if you let someone know what’s expected of them, but also give them the space to fulfill those expectations, it’s a great way of growing the company because they become an integral part of its operations.”* —MARI MEDRANO, HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGER, COCAL LANDSCAPE

One of the biggest challenges employers face when dealing with Hispanic employees for higher-level positions is the lack of cultural understanding. Adding to the complexity of the relationship are the cultural nuances among Latinos themselves. Rather than focusing on what makes them different, it’s important to understand what brings them together. As we already

know, one thing they all share is that they are dedicated, loyal and extremely hard working. Hispanics feel their jobs are a reflection of themselves. They pay close attention to detail, as if the client’s property were their own.

Yet, what we don’t realize is the workforce in Latin American countries tends to be much more hierarchical and cultivates a belief that a worker cannot grow within the company, despite showing leadership abilities and improving his skills. Additionally, Hispanic culture carries a deeply rooted respect for authority, and as a result many Hispanic workers will not voluntarily offer feedback or ideas for fear of “challenging” their superiors. By creating an environment where Hispanic employees feel their ideas and initiatives are valued, whether it’s through brainstorming sessions, providing personal and professional growth opportunities or simply asking for their feedback, they will feel as if they are part of the team and will be more likely to excel. **LM**

*Diaz is a senior account executive at Balsera Communications, where she works with the National Hispanic Landscape Alliance. Reach her at [sonia@balseracommunications.com](mailto:sonia@balseracommunications.com).*

## Professional Plant Protection



**Plantskydd®**  
**REPELLENT**  
DEER • RABBITS • VOLES



Ready-to-Use Liquid



Soluble Powder Concentrate

### MOST EFFECTIVE — LONGEST LASTING

Proven to out-perform and out-last all other repellents!

**Non-toxic, safe for pets and the environment**

Visit our **DEALER LOCATOR:** [www.plantskydd.com](http://www.plantskydd.com)

or purchase direct from  
**Tree World Plant Care Products Inc.**  
Call today—toll FREE! 1-800-252-6051

**#1 Choice of Professional Landscapers**

**E-750**  
**Electric Wheelbarrow**  
**By PowerPusher**

**Move more.**  
**Move it faster!**

**Improve productivity and profits.**

- Work earlier and later without noisy gas engines
- Reduce damage from heavy equipment
- Move up to 750 lbs at 3 mph
- Rugged, high torque, easily recharged
- 5 cu ft capacity with power dump
- Improve safety, reduce injuries

**MORE INFO AT**  
[www.electric-dumper.com](http://www.electric-dumper.com)

**PowerPusher**  
A Division of NuStar Inc.

©2012 NuStar, Inc.