

## What happened in Vegas?

PLANET's Green Industry Great Escape encourages new ways of thinking. BY MARISA PALMIERI

**W**hat happened in Las Vegas at the Professional Landcare Network's (PLANET's) Green Industry Great Escape? More than 150 contractors, suppliers and spouses convened at The Cosmopolitan Feb. 20-23 for education sessions geared toward executives, leadership meetings, networking and fun. Hopefully what they learned won't stay in Vegas.

### Coming alive

Green Industry consultant Jim Paluch welcomed Great Escape attendees with the "Come Alive Outside" message he founded, which is supported by PLANET and a handful of industry suppliers. The flagship website, [ComeAliveOutside.com](http://ComeAliveOutside.com), features free tips and resources for companies to promote the message, webinars and information about in-person education events.

There is no membership fee; it's a grass-roots effort, Paluch explained. The goal? "Capture the business opportunities of today while creating a better world for tomorrow. "We need to move our focus to helping people 'come alive outside,'" he said, referring to some of today's biggest problems, like childhood obesity. "We're dying a slow death inside. Do we want to be the industry



Above: Speaker and magician Jon Petz had some fun with John Deere's Segment Marketing Manager Ken Taylor. Right: Jim Paluch spread the "Come Alive Outside" message.



that cuts grass and installs landscapes or the profession that transforms the health of the nation?"

### Finding a cause

Roger Phelps, promotional communications manager for Stihl, led a roundtable discussion on cause marketing with Bill Brunelle of Independent We Stand, an online community of locally owned businesses that educate their communities about the benefits of buying local. Independent We Stand is sponsored by Stihl, which sells its products only through independent dealers.

Independent We Stand, with more than 100,000 members, has taken off. Finding such a "cause" could translate to success for landscape contractors,

too. Consider another cause marketing campaign: Small Business Saturday. Brunelle pointed out it was founded by American Express. More than 100 million consumers shopped local on this day in 2012 (the Saturday after Thanksgiving).

Phelps emphasized cause marketing campaigns must be authentic. "If the cause isn't part of your DNA, customers will sniff that out," he said.

The roundtable conversation turned to PLANET's annual Day of Service event and the "Come Alive Outside" movement, which attendees had learned about the day before, and how companies could leverage these things in promoting their own businesses.

### Show time!

It wouldn't be Vegas without seeing a show, and speaker and magician Jon Petz emphasized the importance

of creating "show time" moments for customers because, as he said, "No one remembers boring."

Body language expert Janine Driver presented "The New Executive Presence," which was anything but boring. A law enforcement trainer, she taught the audience what signs they may be sending with their body language, and how to read others' actions.

She also spoke about "inattentive blindness," which occurs when executives are hyperfocused on one thing, so they miss problems or crimes unfolding before them (think: embezzlement).

"Information can be right under our eyes and we miss it," she said. "You have to look at things with a different perspective. It could literally change your business."

### » WEB EXTRA



Visit the Web Extras section of [LandscapeManagement.net](http://LandscapeManagement.net) to see why attendees were awed by the Bellagio Conservatory & Botanical Gardens.

# MAILBOX



## Nice mix

Congratulations on a fantastic (February) issue! I love reading valuable articles and learning about improvement opportunities for our business and for me personally. An added value is seeing the faces of and reading about colleagues whom I have known for a long time, like Dan Eichenlaub, Drake Snodgrass and Maurice

Dowell. They are outstanding people who genuinely deserve recognition for the positive influence they have on our industry and the people with whom they associate.

This issue has a nice mix of high-quality content. Accept my sincere thanks for excellent journalism.

### Tom Shotzbarger

*General Manager, Shreiner Tree Care  
King of Prussia, Pa.*

## Bigger's not better

I've complained about this (*LM150*, forthcoming in June) before but to no avail. Volume does not a good company make. This is the continuation of the American ego myth about bigger is better. You and most of the media have never figured out that bigger doesn't mean better. How about companies that have the most satisfied employees and customers as a benchmark? I'll continue to complain about your folly and misguided criterion and you will continue to say this is what your readers want to see. This is very sad. There are thousands of good companies in our industry who don't want to be huge that do a wonderful job for their customers and are fair to their employees.

### Charles Bowers

*President, Garden Gate Landscaping  
Silver Spring, Md.*

Kudos? Complaints? Share your thoughts with the *Landscape Management* team by emailing [mpalmieri@northcoastmedia.net](mailto:mpalmieri@northcoastmedia.net).

## Hit the spot

"About us" (Editor's Note, February) hit the spot. We've perused the Radiant Plumbing page, and we're all quite impressed. Everything in life and business is all about marketing and relationships. Thanks again for everything that you do for our industry.

### Gary LaScalea

*Owner, GroGreen  
Plano, Texas*



## WHO'S IN CHARGE OF YOUR FLEET?

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# Profiting from Patel

Northwestern University professor Homi Patel shares 10 tips on how to ensure success.

BY BETH GERACI

**H**omi Patel, professor of marketing at Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management, was a featured speaker at the peer group gathering Next Level University last November. (For more on that event, see "Raising the Bar" in our January issue at [goo.gl/2bHb8](http://goo.gl/2bHb8).)

Speaking to leaders and staff from six notable landscaping companies Patel, retired chairman and CEO of Hartmarx Corp., shared his views on managing employees and pleasing customers. In the process, he gave those in attendance much to think about.

Patel emphasized there are 10 things a company in the service industry must get right. Here they are, in his own words. Companies that follow this advice, Patel says, will benefit.

**1 Define your service offering.** Every business needs to understand what they're going to do well—and what they're not going to do well.

This is not a casual choice. Instead, it is a choice that you perform badly at some things so that you can afford to excel at others. For example, if you are going to provide the very best service, you have to get comfortable with the fact that you cannot provide the best price.

**2 Delight your customer by doing unexpected and surprising things.** Everybody has good service, everybody has great service. But that's just not enough. What you've got to do is delight your customer. Take Disney, for example. You stand 40 minutes for a two-minute

ride and yet those kids come out *thrilled*. Try getting a kid that age to stand 40 minutes for anything. Disney figured out how to delight its customer.

**3 Be aware of your customers' pain points.** Don't ignore the uncontrolled pain points, because that's when you're going to lose one of your customers. Know about divorces, deaths or whatever it is. Your clients need you at that particular time. Keep in regular contact. Empathize. Deliver new information without being a pest.



Homi Patel

A lot of customers are lost, particularly in the service business, because businesspeople a). are not aware of the pain point that's going to hit them, which is uncontrollable, and b). haven't devised a plan to get close to the customer in that particular area.

**4 Hire for attitude; train for aptitude.** When it comes to recruiting and selecting talent, 100 percent of employers want the smartest, the best people. But the simple reality is, the people who have it all are expensive to employ. A competitive cost structure requires compromising on employees. Hire for attitude; train for aptitude. You need 100 percent of your employees to have a great attitude. You don't need 100 percent of your employees to be A+ students.

**5 Know that employee sacrifice is not sustainable.** You must recognize the difference between a stretched employee—which is good—and a stressed employee, which is not so good. Don't expect that you're going to do well in the long run by just constantly putting more and more pressure on your employees.

**6 Understand that training requires transforming the complex into the simple.** It's as simple as that. Make sure the training curve puts your to-do list on your employee's to-do list. A good training program enables employees to exceed their own expectations. Cut out the boilerplate stuff so training creates energy rather than saps it.

**7 Reward employees.** Remember, your employees are closest to the customer. Reward them for insights and information and use them in multiple ways. They know what kind of people really fit into the organization. Let them help you recruit talent, and reward them for it.

**8 Control personnel.** Your largest cost is personnel. I don't need to do a survey on that. We've already discussed hiring for attitude, training for aptitude, but there's another big issue in employee cost, and that's managers not making the tough call on personnel. An employee functioning below expectations is costing you money.

**9 Get rid of customer sludge.** Everyone has them: those customers you don't make money on. The customer who demands too much. Anybody who demands unprofitable levels of service, you have to have the guts to get rid of them, from a profitability point of view.

Next, make your customers do things for themselves to eliminate unnecessary costs. But give them a plus, as well. Take airport kiosks, for example. By creating these, airlines saved themselves money, but travelers benefit as well. You can check yourself in, you don't have to deal with a surly attendant and you can walk right in through security. They created a win-win.

**10 Finally, lead by example.** You built this business. You are the leaders of this business. If you don't have passion, energy, integrity and humility, you have no reason to expect your employees to have any.