



## BEST PRACTICES

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# Don't unravel under spring pressure

**S**pring comes every year, and with it a seasonal surge that brings stress to landscape contracting businesses. No matter how much companies prepare for the inevitable, operations may unravel under pressure. Work teams and managers become overwhelmed.

In less disciplined organizations, spring makes everyone a firefighter. Some companies never escape the spiral. Overtime gets out of control, but employees love it, get used to it and don't want to give it up.

The worst part is it happens so fast. By the time you see the financial impact of reactive behaviors, it's too late to do anything about it. It's like getting blown out in the first half of a football game. It's often difficult, if not impossible, to reverse course.

If spring has your company stressed and reducing operational effectiveness, here are 10 best practices to move your organization permanently away from firefighting mode.

**1.** Understand the difference between routine and nonroutine work. Routine is weekly maintenance, while nonroutine includes things like post-winter cleanups, mulching, color plantings, etc. Nonroutine things, if allowed to pile up, lead to overtime problems. Therefore they should be scheduled so they don't overlap. Try to avoid pulling nonroutine work from teams assigned

to routine maintenance. It may cause them to get behind.

**2.** With routine maintenance, be careful not to let the routine get broken.

**3.** Supervisors should observe work crews and make sure they are sequencing jobs properly, not performing work that does not need to be done and/or wasting hours. Work crews are habit based and often do tasks out of custom, such as edging when it's not needed.

**4.** String trimmers are time wasters. Workers tend to over-detail jobs. Crews shouldn't trim an area until they mow it. That way they only have to trim what the mowers do not reach. If they trim first, they over compensate to make sure they've trimmed enough.

**5.** If your crews are scheduled to work in inclement weather make sure scheduled tasks can be done effectively in the rain.

**6.** Delegate. Look at your to-do list and look for tasks that can be done by others.

**7.** Slower can be faster. Sometimes you go so fast trying to keep up that you lose sight of the big picture. Prioritize so you don't miss what's important.

**8.** Important, not urgent, things usually have the most impact on your company. Look at a problem to understand why it occurred and what you can do to prevent it from happening again. If you discover a disproportionate amount of urgent tasks, it could require a process change or training to regain equilibrium.

**9.** Rely on your team. When you start falling behind, don't be afraid to ask for help. Senior managers are there to help you be successful.

**10.** Monitor your progress and benchmark it. This will help you look for signs of trouble and avoid a downward spiral.

The key is to take action to improve the situation. If you follow some of these best practices, you will be better able to manage what's always an intense time of year. Start spring right and the rest of the year will be more rewarding.

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