

BEYOND THE E-MYTH

The *Landscape Management* interview with the author of the legendary book.



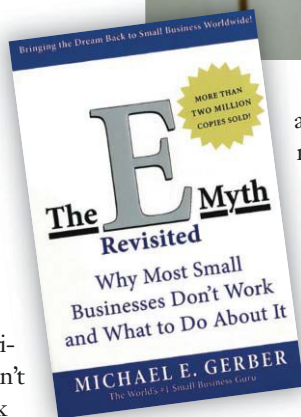
The E-Myth author
Michael Gerber

When I started writing about and for small business owners nine years ago, one phrase I heard pop up time after time was the importance of “working on your business not in your business.” When I finally discovered where it originated—*The E-Myth*—I shouldn’t have been surprised. That book and its descendants often are cited as revelatory by many landscape professionals I’ve spoken with over the years.

So, rather than profiling one landscape professional who’s been influenced by the tenets of *The E-Myth*, we sought and landed an exclusive interview with the author, Michael Gerber, to get his take on why his iconic small business tome is a staple for Green Industry company owners. —*Marisa Palmieri*

LM: You’ve said, “Most small businesses fail because people start them for the wrong reasons...” Remind us: What are the right reasons to start a business?

MG: *The E-Myth*, which has been my mainstay for 40 years, says that people who go into business aren’t entrepreneurs but what I’ve come to call “technicians suffering from an entrepreneurial seizure.” They’re working for someone else



and say, “I want to become my own boss. I can do this for myself,” and they go off to start their own business being the technician, the producer, the guy who does the work. The problem is they don’t understand all of the other parts that

have to work in a business if it’s going to be successful.

So they’re out there doing it, doing it, as I say, but they’re ignoring some of the work they have to do: client acquisition, finance, management, development of people and so forth. Because they don’t know how to do it or they do it sloppily.

The right way to do it is to start it all over again as an entrepreneur and to understand there are three critical roles for any business owner: the entrepreneur, the manager and the technician. The technician is the doer who gets stuff done. If there is no system through which to get stuff done, we just get it done in whatever way we’ve done it. That fails to become a system; it’s my particular way. I rarely know how to teach someone my particular way.

The owner who’s doing it, doing it, doing it ends up having to be there all

the time to make sure it’s being done right. When you have to be there all the time, your business isn’t scalable. It only can grow to the level in which you can be there all the time.

LM: *The E-Myth* was first published in 1986, before the Internet, smartphones and social media. There’s so much information at one’s fingertips today. Do you think these tools make it easier for small business owners today vs. when you first wrote the book?

MG: The reality is it’s neither, simply because the greatest single problem every small business owner has is lack of time. They’re consumed with work. The guy out in the field hasn’t the time to go to the Internet to look something up and he hasn’t the ability to parse down all of the information available on the Internet.

Even before the Internet, I could read everything I wanted to read about management or recruitment or hiring or training, but most of the people in your industry or any industry don’t read anything. Even, in fact, if they were able to read all of the books on every subject, they wouldn’t understand how to apply it.

Social media? So what. The Internet? No way. Well, yes, it’s something where if you were absolutely determined to study and to learn, you have access to every-

thing to study. But how do you discriminate? Access is insufficient without a clear understanding of what I'm looking for. Most of the owners of most of these businesses don't have an understanding of what they're looking for.

LM: What's surprised you most about entrepreneurs after all these years?

MG: I can tell you what surprised me in the beginning. I had the assumption that because they owned a business, they knew how to run a business. They didn't. They didn't understand that business is ultimately a system of work—financial work, technical work. It's a system of management work, marketing work, sales work. But, in fact, many don't understand a system that works is independent of the people who are doing it.

LM: But owners in this industry and many others often say what sets them apart is their people. How do you respond to that?

MG: It's a dumb idea. If everybody says our company is different because of our people, then everybody is saying the same thing, then everybody is wrong. Well, somebody's wrong. You can prove it's wrong by quantifying the impact of what they do. Measure it. It's just an anecdotal statement. Every single technician thinks of themselves as the reason why people come buy their service. They all believe people dependent is the key because they don't know how to do it any other way.

In the case of *The E-Myth*, there's no one who can read that book that can say it isn't true. Every reader who finishes the book knows they just read the book. That's not because Michael Gerber is so damn smart. It's because Ray Kroc, the founder of McDonalds, is so damn smart. It's because the founder of Starbucks is. The founder of IBM is. What made them successful and others fail? That's what I communicated in *The E-Myth*. Before that, nobody said

it to independent business owners. Ray Kroc said it to his franchisees. But until he approached the business as a turnkey prototype for scalable growth, the company itself would be incapable of growing. It would come to that ceiling imposed on it by the limitations of the owner. Ultimately, a company can only grow as large as the owner is competent to grow it.

Most guys in your industry work themselves to death. What started as a dream—"I'll become my own boss"—ends as a nightmare. I became my own boss and I'm working for a lunatic. **LM**

» WEB EXTRA

Visit the Web Extras section of LandscapeManagement.net for Gerber's take on "working on the business, not in the business," plus, an excerpt from *The E-Myth Landscape Contractor*, coauthored by landscape industry veteran Tony Bass.



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