

DESIGN/BUILD



PG 30

IRRIGATION



PG 34

MAINTENANCE



PG 36

LAWN CARE



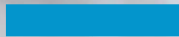
PG 38

MARKETWATCH

SERVICE SEGMENT SNAPSHOTS

One firm improved service by recruiting staff from luxury retailer Nordstrom.

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As seen on TV

Georgia-based company works against the clock to deliver a dream backyard on 'Yard Crashers.'

By EMILY SCHAPPACHER

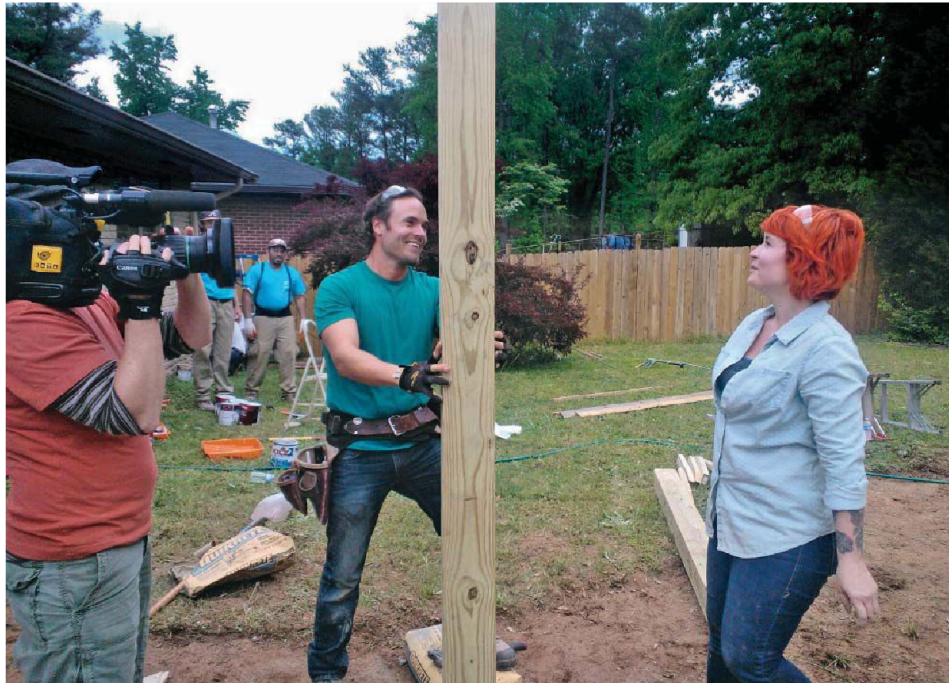
Providing clients the backyard of their dreams is what Oasis Landscapes & Irrigation does best—but doing it in less than 48 hours is a challenge crazy enough only for television. Featured on an episode of the DIY Network's "Yard Crashers," the Oasis crew completed a job that should have taken two to three weeks in less than two days, working against the clock to provide one lucky Atlanta-based couple a customized backyard sanctuary.

"We had no time left over and were all scrambling in the last hour," says Kevin Paulen, president of the Doraville, Ga.-based company. "I think it was a little harder than we expected it to be, but it was every bit as much fun as we thought it would be."

"Yard Crashers" is a landscape renovation show that offers unsuspecting shoppers at home improvement stores the opportunity for professional landscape contractors to renovate their backyards in less than two days. The show's producers contacted Paulen to see if his company was interested in appearing on an episode being filmed in Atlanta last April.

About a month after the initial contact, the producers traveled to Atlanta to interview Paulen and the owners of six other companies to determine which was most qualified for the job. Paulen was notified later the same day that his \$3-million company—which is 80 percent design/build, 20 percent maintenance and serves 90 percent residential clients—had been selected.

"They wanted to make sure we were qualified and capable of pulling off a project in a short period of time and



that we had the skills to do something unique," Paulen says.

Oasis had three months to plan and a \$25,000 budget provided by "Yard Crashers" to work with. Planning ahead, Paulen says, was key to completing the project on time. He and his project manager created a timeline to estimate how long each component of the project would take and worked ahead as much as possible, such as by shaping each piece of stone for the patio and the retaining wall and constructing the water and grill features.

Paulen's team also utilized the time to up the ante on creativity. The homeowner restores classic cars for a living, so Oasis made the water feature and grill out of parts from a 1948 Ford pickup and a 1934 Chevy sedan. The project also included

a decorative redwood sanctuary, privacy plantings, mature trees and blooming annuals.

"The network goes over your plan and lets you know if you bit off more than you can chew," Paulen says. "But if you're going to do something like this, make sure it's planned well and do as much in advance as you can. Also, don't get too overzealous—keep your goals realistic."

CHALLENGES, COSTS ARISE

Despite being organized, unexpected challenges still arose. One of the most difficult parts was working around the film crew, Paulen says. His staff members repeatedly had to stop what

continued on page 32

TUNE IN

"Backyard Hot Rods" is slated to air on DIY Network March 12 at 10:30 a.m. EST and March 29 at 5 p.m. EST.





Kevin Paulen estimates his team's participation in the show cost the company \$20,000 to \$30,000 in lost time and labor. Oasis had three months to prep for the two-day project.



continued from page 30

they were doing for the film crew to capture structured footage, such as the program's host showing the homeowners how to build a retaining wall. They also had to work until almost midnight on the first day, so part of the job was done under spotlights.

Another downfall for Paulen was the revenue lost as a result of the time and manpower dedicated to the show.

He estimates the time spent planning the project, preparing structures and materials in advance as well as having all 25 of his guys working on the show for two days during peak season cost him \$20,000 to \$30,000 in lost time and labor. While he's glad he had the opportunity

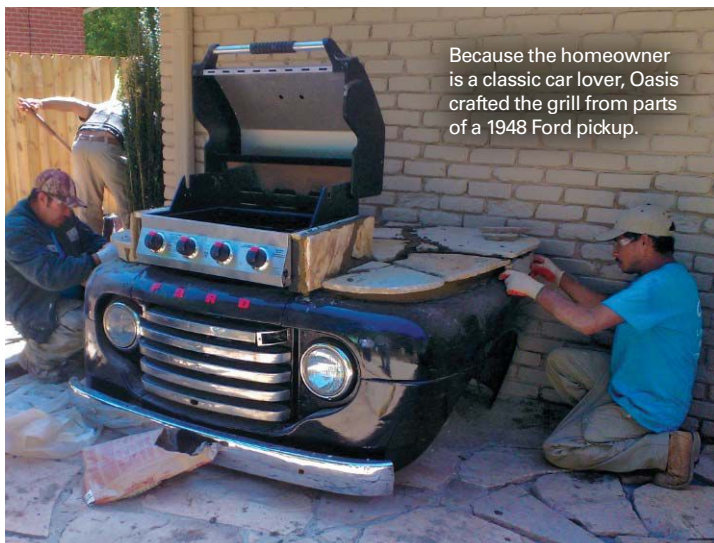
to be part of the project, Paulen says he doesn't imagine he would do it again.

"The highlight was seeing how excited the homeowners were when we were done—they were absolutely blown away," Paulen says. "It was fun to do, but I don't see a benefit to doing a second one."

The episode, "Backyard Hot Rods," aired twice on Sept. 2 on the DIY Network. It's slated to air again this spring, but Paulen says it will take at least a year for the episode to start syndicating. So far, he hasn't seen many tangible benefits from the experience, but the company utilizes an "As Seen on 'Yard Crashers'" logo on its website, marketing materials and client newsletters, and has the full-length episode posted on its website. Paulen hopes it soon will pay off as a marketing tool. For now, he says, it's an addition to Oasis's long list of accomplishments and accolades.

"I think it gives us more credibility," Paulen says. "People love to hear you were on TV. You're seen as the expert. And after 25 years in business, it was something we hadn't done."

Schappacher is a freelance writer based in Charlotte, N.C.



Because the homeowner is a classic car lover, Oasis crafted the grill from parts of a 1948 Ford pickup.

The Ticker:

DESIGN/BUILD

DAP Products rolled out a new construction adhesive: DAP Smart-Bond, which may be applied to dimensional and treated lumber, natural and synthetic stone, painted surfaces and more.

JCB expanded its North American dealer network with the addition of **JCB of Miami**, formerly **E.R. Truck Equipment Corp.**

The dealership offers wheel loaders, backhoes and more, plus a parts department and full-service maintenance team.



For its work at a private residence in Newport Beach, Calif., **Richard Cohen Landscape & Construction** was deemed best of show at the **California Landscape Contractors Association Trophy Awards**.

Recruiting from retail

Cougar Irrigation staffs up with former Nordstrom employees to deliver excellent customer service.

By SARAH PFLEDDERER

Matthew Stamm is no farmer, but he sure knows how to cherry pick—employees, that is.

The president of Cougar Irrigation, Austin, Texas, has hired the bulk of his irrigation technicians from Nordstrom on the philosophy the customer service skills they derived from the luxury retailer are translatable to the Green Industry or any industry.

“Whatever it is, you’re providing a service to people,” Stamm says. “So you really want people to have good customer service skills, not necessarily technical skills.”



Matthew Stamm

Nordstrom is renowned for its customer service. The company’s processes have been assessed and reiterated by experts for years. (See, “The book on service,” at right.) That’s why Stamm boasts that three of his five irrigation techs deliver “Nordstrom-level customer service.”

“Anybody can go out and fix a sprinkler head,” Stamm says, and adds he taught his retail hires those technical skills. They, unexpectedly, taught him “everything” he knows about customer service.

Stamm says he also benefits from being able to teach former retail employees technical skills from scratch rather than having to break them of “bad habits” picked up from previous industry employers.

SERVICE SMARTS

For Stamm, recruiting his first Nordstrom employee was happenstance. In fact, he doesn’t even shop at Nordstrom. Stamm met Nick Linzenmeyer at a dinner party hosted by one of his neighbors who also worked at Nordstrom.

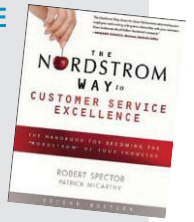
That was in 2008. Linzenmeyer now is a project manager at Cougar Irrigation. Recounting his first few years as a technician, Linzenmeyer’s telling confirms Stamm’s logic:

“My (performance) as an irrigation technician was terrible. But the thing that saved the customer from a terrible experience was my good communication and customer service,” Linzenmeyer says. He recalls the following customer service “protocol” from Nordstrom and how he’s applied it at Cougar Irrigation:

1. Greet the customer. In irrigation, the key is to make them feel comfortable because they’ll likely be spending a lot of

THE BOOK ON SERVICE

In step with this month’s cover story, we give a nod to the book *The Nordstrom Way to Customer Service Excellence: The Handbook for Becoming the ‘Nordstrom’ of your Industry* by Robert Spector. He has written four books on the retailer’s customer service.



money, Linzenmeyer says. “Respect that, and make them feel relaxed.”

2. Find out why they’re there. “The more information you have as a salesperson, the better you can service that customer,” Linzenmeyer says. He cautions to not be forceful in getting the details.

3. Make them realize you’re the expert. “Don’t be rude or abrasive, but establish there’s a better way to do things,” Linzenmeyer says.

4. Establish trust. For example, if a customer is wary of drip irrigation but it’s the best fit for the property, Linzenmeyer ensures he’ll replace the system if it’s insufficient. When it works satisfactorily after installation, you’ve established trust and the client is open to future suggestions.

5. The follow-up is key. Keeping the follow-up personal is crucial, Linzenmeyer says. At Nordstrom this meant calling the customer to see if his or her purchase worked for an occasion. At Cougar Irrigation, he follows up in person to explain to clients how the irrigation system operates and urges them to reach out with any concerns.

Due to bringing Linzenmeyer and other Nordstrom employees on board, Stamm says he’s looking to improve the sales on the recurring service options his company provides. It serviced 700 of the 2,500 clients in the company database last year and, this year, is introducing service agreements to customers to better track retention.



Nick Linzenmeyer

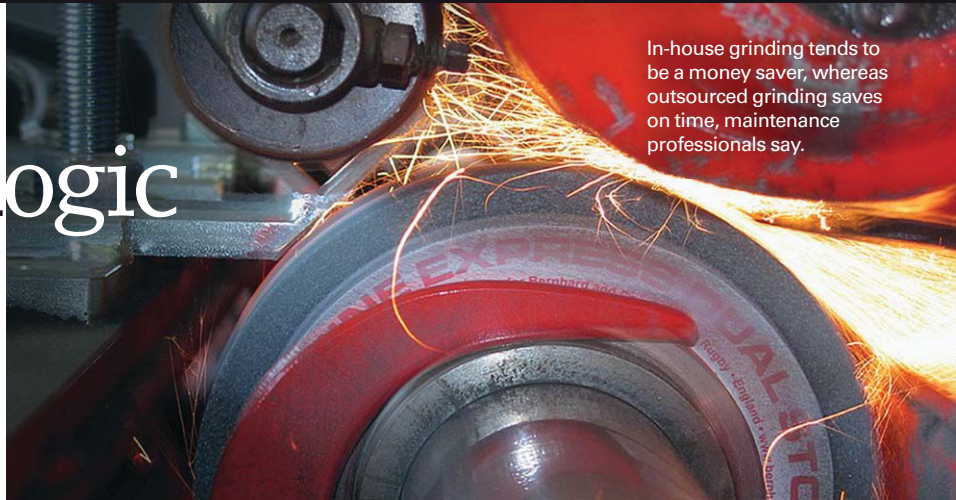
The Ticker: IRRIGATION



Hunter introduced a family of pressure-compensating drip emitters for its micro-irrigation line. Featuring flow options of up to 6 gph, they are available in three inlets: self-piercing barb, 10/32 thread and 1/2-in. female thread. The barb and 10/32 thread models are offered in .5, 1, 2, 4 and 6 gph models; the 1/2-in. female threaded model is available in 1 and 2 gph.

Grinding logic

Mowing professionals share why they sharpen mower blades in-house or outsource the task. *By SARAH PFLEDDERER*



In-house grinding tends to be a money saver, whereas outsourced grinding saves on time, maintenance professionals say.

Rood Landscape has sharpened its mower blades in-house for so long the brand marker on its grinder is no longer visible. Accordingly, Maintenance Department Manager Jaron Sickler can't conjure from memory what manufacturer's name once bedecked the machine.

None of that is important, though, he says. The grinder still operates to standard for the Hobe Sound, Fla.-based company. The shop mechanic uses it to sharpen 20 sets of blades two to three times per week, providing quick replacements of dull blades with freshly and correctly sharpened ones.



Jaron Sickler

That handiness is why Rood has done in-house grinding for so long instead of outsourced grinding, Sickler says.

"I like it in-house for the fact I have

more control over it," he says. "The biggest advantage is the turnaround time and we can make sure it's done right."

Contradictorily, Ben Bowen uses the same logic—ensuring blades are sharpened correctly—to reason why he outsources his grinding to Oregon Carbide Saw, a local sharpening service in Portland, Ore.



Ben Bowen

"To me, it's one less thing to worry about and I know it's being done properly," says the landscape manager of Ross NW Watergardens in Portland. "These people are professionals so I know they're getting the angle just right and they're balanced perfectly."

As part of outsourcing, Bowen has triple the amount of blades on-hand than necessary for his quantity of equipment so there's never a shortage of fresh blades for his team to rotate with. Employees

swap out blades as they see appropriate, putting dull blades in a box for Bowen to drop off at Oregon Carbide Saw every two to three weeks to be sharpened at \$7 a piece.

Although this process does eat into his financials, Bowen says the payoff is his team, which does not include a full-time mechanic, can work on more important tasks, rather than spend its time sharpening blades.

"Philosophy is part of it," he says. "We prefer to outsource stuff we don't enjoy or takes us away from the stuff we know we make money on."

While Bowen says he can't see a scenario where he'd purchase his own grinder, he understands why in-house grinding is suitable for some companies, due to volumes of mowing differing per location.

"If I was having to put new, sharp blades on a couple times per week that would probably change the math," he says. "(But) it's just about priorities for us."



Ben Talbert

Ben Talbert's philosophy aligns with Bowen's. The owner of Bay-Scapes Property Maintenance & Landscaping, based in Lusby, Md., has outsourced its grinding to a local dealer for the past three years.

And of the \$600 per month he spends on the grinding, Talbert says:

The Ticker: MAINTENANCE

In commemoration of its centennial, **The Toro Co.** documented its innovation and achievements over the past 100 years in the form of a timeline, viewable at toro.com/100. The company also recently introduced the American Hero Program which provides equipment discounts to former and current military members, firefighters and police officers.



"I eat it. It tears my wallet up to outsource, but it's a timesaver. I try to avoid spending time on business outside of work as much as I can."

He says he's humored the idea of purchasing his own grinder, but says it all boils down to personal preference.

"I base it on how much time it's going to take me versus how much time I want to spend on other stuff," Talbert says. "I can allocate a person or myself to work sales versus having to take an entire day to sharpen all of those correctly."

Mark Schifsky, owner of Association Maintenance in Shoreview, Minn., delegates the task of grinding to his company mechanic, who sharpens around 200 blades per week with a grinder Schifsky purchased nearly 20 years ago.

Schifsky has done in-house grinding since opening his company in 1988. It was in 1995, however, that he upgraded from a freestanding grinder to a more professional machine that better matched

his sharpening demand.

"That was a big step for me because that machine was \$5,000 to \$6,000," he says. "When I bought it, I didn't expect for it to last as long as it did with as little of care. Everything should last forever, it's just how much you put into to it."

The grinder, Schifsky says, has paid for itself due to the amount he's saved financially on in-house grinding versus paying someone else to do it.

Moreover, he says his blades have had longer life spans because he oversees whether they're sharpened at the correct angles, speeds and by qualified employees (per chance his mechanic is unavailable). For safety and performance reasons only about 10 of his 35 employees are allowed to use the grinder.

Another perk of in-house grinding, Schifsky adds, is the convenience of hav-

ing freshly sharpened blades at his facility versus having to travel to pick them up.

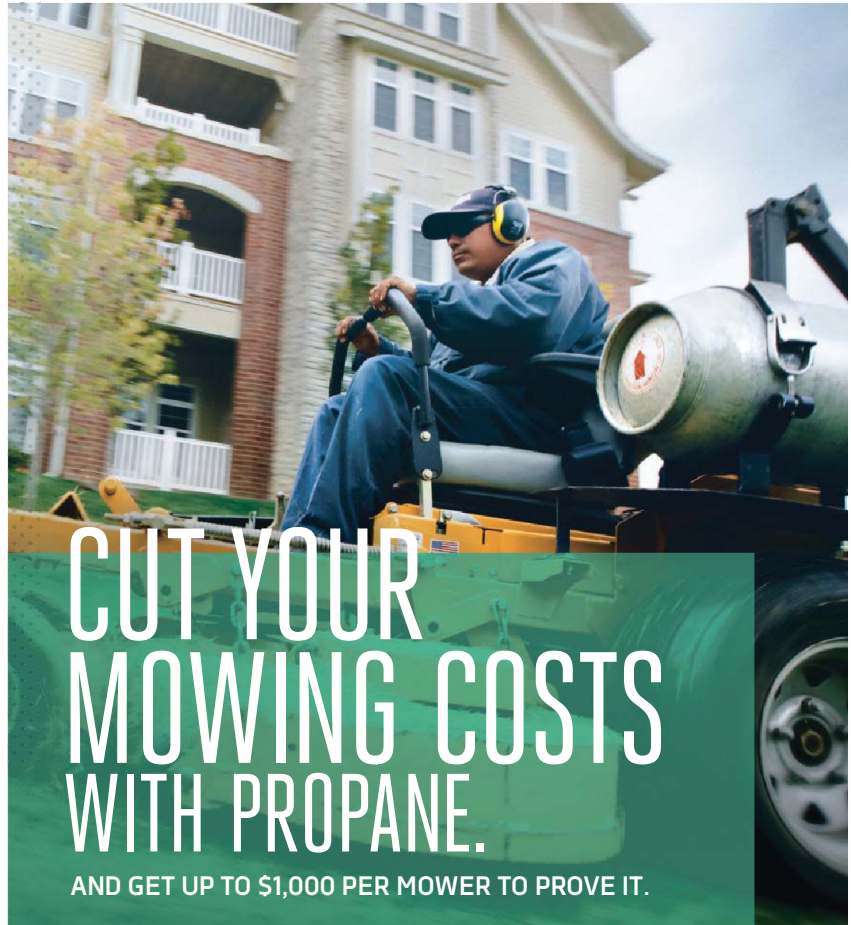
For those reasons, he says the notion of outsourced grinding is unfathomable to him—he jokes it's more likely he'd incorporate that as an add-on service for

his own company than resort to outsourcing himself.

"I've never heard of anybody outsourcing," he says. "Maybe that's something I need to be doing is sharpening everybody else's blades. ... I trim a nice blade."



Mark Schifsky



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**PROPANE
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INCENTIVE PROGRAM**

Help technicians sell

By AUSTIN FRISHMAN, PH.D.

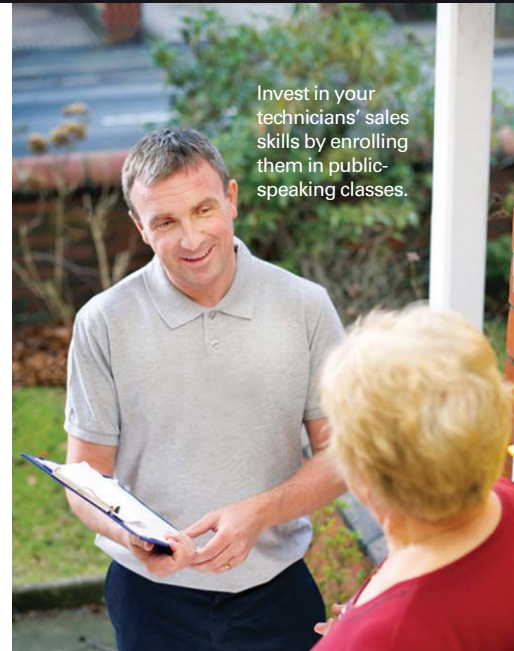
Make sure your employees understand the importance of the service your company provides.

They must feel comfortable and good about the items you sell, or else the initial motivation is lost. Ideas to ensure you're keeping that comfort level high are:

- › **Have a plan and goals.** Decide how and where you want to expand. Share this information with your technicians.
- › **Issue business cards for each technician.** They should carry at least five cards with them at all times.
- › **Role play in training sessions.** Select different types of services you're trying to sell and have them walk through their pitch with a manager or colleague.
- › **Bring in manufacturers for training meetings.** Reps can provide insights about how to sell, install and maintain add-on services like fire ant control, surface insect control or mosquito control.
- › **Sharpen technicians' communication skills.** Offer to enroll and pay for public-speaking classes.
- › **Hone technicians' time management**

skills. Training in this area can open their schedules so they can fit sales time into their routes.

- › **Recognize successful sales.** Dinner for two at a nice restaurant is a satisfactory reward, but this doesn't have to be only about cash. Post positive results on a visible bulletin board. Send letters to technicians' families explaining how important their dad or mom is at work.
- › **Give them a head start.** Help the technicians compose a list of potential prospects, so they know where to prospect.
- › **Give them support materials.** There are effective sales training videos, as well as leave-behind materials, online for technicians to use with their clients.
- › **Make sure they know it's OK to ask for help.** When it comes to a large national account, for example, you don't want a technician to inadvertently destroy a lead because of his sales inexperience. If a technician is reluctant to sell, encourage him to turn in leads at least.
- › **Hire the right person.** Screen for individuals who are likely to succeed at sales and service.



Invest in your technicians' sales skills by enrolling them in public-speaking classes.

- › **Set goals that are realistic, and reevaluate them over time.** LM

Frishman is technical consultant to LM's sister magazine Pest Management Professional, where this article was first published. He's president of AMF Pest Management Services.

The Ticker:

LAWN CARE

Valent U.S.A. Corp. and **Nufarm Americas** entered a distribution agreement that appoints Nufarm the exclusive distributor of Valent-branded products for professional turf, ornamental and aquatic uses in the U.S. The two companies will combine product portfolios into one broad portfolio that will be sold by Nufarm in the U.S.

FMC Corp. produced a video about liquid pesticide applications and added it to its YouTube page, [youtube.com/user/FMCTurf](https://www.youtube.com/user/FMCTurf). The video demonstrates how to prepare for an outdoor application, proper personal protective equipment, proper storage of pesticides and how to prepare for an accidental spill.

MY DOG ATE MY SALES LEAD

Most service technicians aren't comfortable selling. Some even believe selling is a step back and borders on being dishonest. They're locked into their own comfort zone. Here are 10 of the most common thoughts about why selling is so difficult for them:

1. I know my customers. I like them. I don't want to push something on them they may not need.
2. My day is too short as it is to get the work done. How can I possibly have time to sell?
3. Salespeople are sharpies who have no idea how to do the work. It's not what I want to be.
4. I once turned in a lead and never received the commission. Who needs that?
5. It takes 60 days or longer to get paid for what you sell.
6. Uncle Sam takes too much out of my commission.
7. What's the sales force for? Isn't it their job to sell?
8. If I wanted to sell, I would have interviewed to be a salesperson.
9. People don't like to be hounded to purchase things.
10. I'm afraid of rejection. (Few people admit this.)

Now, tackle each of the above challenges and turn your technicians into happy, successful, well-balanced service/sales professionals.