



## EDITOR'S NOTE

MARISA PALMIERI EDITOR

Contact Marisa at 216/706-3764 or via email at mpalmieri@northcoastmedia.net.

# Difference makers

**W**hat makes the difference between you and your competitors? You may think you know, and you may have an answer you give to customers and prospects who ask, but do you really know?

Of course, this is a rhetorical question because no one could actually account for all the variances. It was interesting, though, to hear one firm's take on what will separate the weak from the strong in the landscape industry moving forward.

I'm not talking about just any company, I'm referring to ValleyCrest Landscape Cos., the nearly billion-dollar, Calabasas, Calif.-based national firm. CEO Roger Zino and Senior Vice President Dave Hanson gave a talk, "Raising the Bar—The Importance of Competing on Service & Quality," at the Professional Landcare Network's Great Escape event late last month in Anaheim, Calif.

A survival-of-the-fittest element—which was evident in full force during the 2007 to 2009 recession—has continued post-downturn and will persist, Hanson predicted. "The weak will get weaker," he said. "Bad decision-making compounds itself over time."

So, what will make the difference? Hanson and Zino focused on four factors.

**Excellent relationships.** "Loyalty, as we know, is tough to win and easy to lose," Hanson said. "Those who stay close to their customers will win." How? Professionals who are tied in with their clients may get a "last look" at a bid, for example, or a phone call

rather than a cancellation from a client with service concerns.

**Quality work.** This one should go without saying, but Hanson put it into simple terms. The goal, he said, should be to have clients who may say "I want to get it cheaper," but never "I want to get it better."

**Best-in-class skills, technology.** "Technology is driving our future and we need to embrace it," Hanson said. Clients' communication needs have increased fivefold over the past few years, Zino added. Don't miss the boat on documentation, client access to information or responding to inquiries in real time, he said.

**Strong teams.** The landscape industry's labor situation shows little promise of improving any time soon. "You've got to treat your people right because the best people in our business are in demand," Hanson said. "The way you'll win is by keeping them on your team."

Zino emphasized the importance of "career pathing," showing employees they have a future with the company and not just a job today. He also said ValleyCrest strives to make its positions rewarding for employees through recognition, such as celebrating wins like positive customer survey results.

The labor component—specifically promoting the Green Industry to young, would-be landscape workers—is an area Zino said the industry as a whole needs to improve if it wants to compete with more glamorous, less labor-intensive and better paying trades.

"Being a gardener is a pretty god-damn good thing," he said. "And we need to talk about it more."

# Landscape Management

HEADQUARTERS

1360 EAST 9TH ST., SUITE 1070, CLEVELAND, OH 44114

## EDITORIAL STAFF

**Editor** Marisa Palmieri 216/706-3764 | mpalmieri@northcoastmedia.net

**Associate Editor** Sarah Pfledderer 216/706-3756 | spfledderer@northcoastmedia.net

**Contributing Editors** Heather & Jamie Gooch 330/723-3539 | hgooch@northcoastmedia.net, jgooch@northcoastmedia.net

**Art Director** Tracie Martinez 216/363-7924 | tmartinez@northcoastmedia.net

**Digital Editor** Joelle Harms 216/706-3780 | jharms@northcoastmedia.net

## ADVERTISING STAFF

**Publisher** Bill Roddy 216/706-3758  
Fax: 216/706-3712 | broddy@northcoastmedia.net

**North American Sales Manager** Craig MacGregor 216/706-3787  
Fax: 216/706-3712 | cmacgregor@northcoastmedia.net

**National Account Manager** Chris Lavelle 216/363-7923  
Fax: 216/706-3712 | clavelle@northcoastmedia.net

**Account Executive Classifieds** Kelli Velasquez 216/706-3767  
Fax: 216/706-3712 | kvelasquez@northcoastmedia.net

## BUSINESS STAFF

**Vice President, Sales** Patrick Roberts 216/706-3736  
Fax: 216/706-3712 | proberts@northcoastmedia.net

**Administrative Coordinator** Petra Turko 216/706-3768 | pturko@northcoastmedia.net

**Marketing Manager** Ryan Bockmuller 216/706-3772  
Fax: 216/706-3712 | rbockmuller@northcoastmedia.net

**Marketing Specialist** Michelle Mitchell 216/706-7922  
Fax: 216/706-3712 | mmitchell@northcoastmedia.net

**Manager, Production Services** Terri Johnstone 216/978-9622 | tjohnstone@northcoastmedia.net

**Senior Audience Development Manager** Antoinette Sanchez-Perkins 216/706-3750 | asanchez-perkins@northcoastmedia.net

**Digital Operations Manager** Bethany Chambers 216/706-3771 | bchambers@northcoastmedia.net

**Digital Media Manager** Rick Ulricks 216/706-3796 | ruldricks@northcoastmedia.net

**Web Developer** Jesse Malcmacher 216/363-7925 | jmalcmacher@northcoastmedia.net

## MARKETING/MAGAZINE SERVICES

**Reprints & Permissions** Nick Iademarco 877/652-5295 | niademarco@wrightsmedia.com

**Circulation List Rental** Antoinette Sanchez-Perkins 216/706-3750 | asanchez-perkins@northcoastmedia.net

**Subscriber, Customer Service** 847/763-4942

For current single copy, back issues, or CD-ROM



## CORPORATE OFFICERS

**President & CEO** Kevin Stoltman 216/706-3740 | kstoltman@northcoastmedia.net

**VP of Finance & Operations** Steve Galperin 216/706-3705 | sgalperin@northcoastmedia.net

**VP of Graphic Design & Production** Pete Seltzer 216/706-3737 | pseltzer@northcoastmedia.net

**Editorial Director** Marty Whitford 216/706-3766 | mwhitford@northcoastmedia.net