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The bottom of the barrel?

Both the lawn care and landscape maintenance fields are growing at rates of 20 percent per year. One knowledgeable person predicts that staffing in the chemical lawn care industry, alone, will triple in five years.

So where are all those new employees going to come from? Not an easy question, and nobody's got an answer yet.



"Do you realize what's required to find a good employee in the greater Boston area?" asks John Kenney of Turf Doctor, Framingham, Mass. "The unemployment rate's two percent—two percent! So our employees are coming out of Pittsburgh and Buffalo. We're relocating people with funny accents, and we're investing a lot of money in them."

Industry experts predict that there will always be high turnover associated with the lawn and landscape markets. "You can't expect someone in a line-level position to get a lot of self-gratification out of pulling hose," Kenney continues. "If that person isn't getting gratification out of something else while he's out there, then you're going to turn them over in 12 months."

If there is an answer, it lies in what Don Burton of Lawn Medic, Rochester, N.Y., calls "creative management." Marty Erbaugh of Lawnmark Associates, Peninsula, Ohio, calls it "holding out the carrot."

What they mean is that the employer—either LCO or landscape maintenance contractor—must challenge line-level personnel. Applicators and crews must have a chance to work with other people (clients and co-workers). They must be given responsibilities other than lugging around a hose or hopping on a mower, in order to retain a high interest level in their occupation.

Mostly, as Erbaugh so eloquently says, "the traditional methods of developing, hiring, training, and motivating people have to be challenged in order to meet the needs of the industry."

Jerry Roche, editor

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