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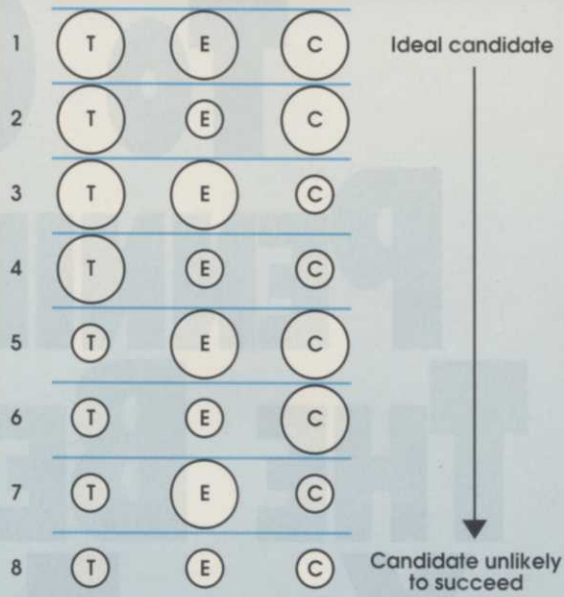


TALENT INTERVIEW SCORE CARD

Behavioral traits	Questions: + evidence ? no evid.; 0 counter	Additional information and observations	Concerns
1 Ego/achievement drive • Recognition & independence • "My campaign was chosen"			
2 Technical mastery • Enjoys creativity • Stays current in field • Explores new approaches			
3 Discerner • Sorts well • Grasps essential points • Good judgement, appropriate			
4 Innovator • Visualizes the possibilities • Sees new frames of reference • Picks up linkages			
5 Intensity • Works long hours • Meets deadlines • "Whatever it takes"			
6 Strategist • Grasps strategic directions • Coordinates steps & details			
7 Persuader • Listens well • Convinces customer of benefits/advantages			
8 Communicator • Skilled presenter • Talks and listens with "real world" perspective			
9 Relator • Friendly • Values personal relationships			
10 Assertor • Straightforward • "Driven"			
11 Values • Honesty • Ethics			

Source: MPR Co.

THE THREE DIMENSIONS OF COMPETENCY



T = TALENT - Behaviors required to get the job done.
 E = EXPERIENCE - Job-related experience, education, and training that contributed to earlier productivity.
 C = CHEMISTRY - Personality that fits into company and work group.

Large circle = STRENGTH Small circle = WEAKNESS

Source: MPR Co.

It's too costly not to."

His keys to staffing with the best possible employees is to (1) know what is the best (specifying the position); (2) discover where to find the best (sourcing); (3) learn how to determine the best (interviewing); and (4) use the profile of the best to evaluate employees (assessing).

"We've got to focus more on behavior," he says. "You get hired for what you know; you get fired for who you are—and that's wrong."

Here are some key factors which may or may not enter into your hiring decision:

- Start a talent file of people you meet. Good managers are always, always recruiting. They never stop, even if they're downsizing. Once you increase applicant flow, you can and will get more selective. "Seventy percent of all employees should come from referrals," says Ryan. "Work the networking to death."

- "Street smarts" is essential. The person you hire must be pragmatic.

- Women make better hiring decisions than men, so don't be afraid to ask a female for her opinion.

- Define the traits you're looking for, ask questions, observe, and note your concerns.

- Never interpret a question for interviewees. Let them interpret it themselves.

The three main ingredients to a good employee are behavior, experience and how the individual fits into the organization. Each employee prospect should be graded in these three areas (see Chart 1).

The personal interview is of utmost importance. It should be structured and use zero-based evaluation in a variety of categories, depending on the type person you're looking for (see Chart 2).

"More often than not, the interviewer talks more than the interviewee," Ryan points out. "From now until the moment you die, when you ask questions, ask for an example. The more specific and recent

the answer is, the more the behavior is practiced."

Ryan also suggests to tape every job interview—with permission. The best tack to use is to tell the interviewee that the tape will be erased as soon as the position is filled. "You'll be a better interviewee and you'll hear a lot of fresh material," Ryan contends."

Finally, remember that many talented, successful people don't meet society's definition of a "normal, well-adjusted person." In particular, MPR points out, if the position requires that a person be exceptionally "driven" in order to be successful, you should be prepared to accept behaviors that might not match your expectations of "normal behavior."

—Jerry Roche

—For more information on what MPR Inc. can do for your business, call Ed, Julie, Dennis or Sarah in Chicago, Ill. at (800) 888-1976.

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Scotts
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Can information blitz keep 'anti's' at bay?

■ Here's a blueprint for starting a pesticide controversy in a community, any community.

1. **Inspire** a single person, then a small group of people to express concerns about the health, safety or environmental aspects of pesticide use.

2. **Ignore** and/or antagonize this group so that it becomes vocal enough to attract the attention of a larger audience.

3. **Argue** the controversy long enough to whet the interest of the media.

4. **Add** fuel to the issue, raising it to the level of public debate.

5. **Avoid** compromises so that the controversy lands on the doorstep of lawmakers—local, state or federal.

Now that ChemLawn Services Corp. has identified the life cycle of a typical community pesticide controversy—astounding how similarly they unfold—the company's management is more confi-

dent it can address them.

And the number one way it addresses them is with information.

Deb Strohmaier, ChemLawn's chief public relations specialist, told an audience of about 200 turf professionals at the Ohio Turfgrass Conference this past December that the nation's largest lawn care provider is continually increasing and upgrading the information it provides its customers.

Brochures, videos, fact sheets—your name it, ChemLawn can provide it.

"We have a positive story to tell on the issues and we've made it easy for our employees to tell it," says Strohmaier who's been with the company for five years.

Strohmaier made these further observations specifically about dealing with the media:

● Recognize that most reporters and editors probably know little about chem-

istry.

● Recognize that they're working under a deadline.

● What's the background of the reporter seeking your comments? What's his angle?

● If an interview is being arranged, it's to your benefit to find out in advance what the reporter wants to cover.

● If you can—and want to—answer specific questions, be truthful. Never lie.

● Don't guess or speculate about answers. Offer to find out.

● Avoid saying "no comment." It's much better to say, "I can't comment on that just yet."

● Present your point but don't argue or debate with the interviewer.

● Know when to duck and get out of the way. If the story is bigger than you, refer your interrogator to your business association.

"In years past ChemLawn did find itself speaking for the industry and we became the magnet for controversy. We've since discontinued the practice of commenting on generic stories," says Strohmaier.

Smart billing KOs cash flow crunches

by Ed Wandtke

■ Lawn care and landscape company owners often say, "If I can make it through the first quarter, I'll be all right with cash flow."

There are ways, however, to minimize—or possibly eliminate—your cash crunch.

1) **Convert your current budget to a cash flow budget**, detailing when all monthly expenses and income will occur. Planning the year this way will help you better forecast major purchases. In addition, the cash flow budget will show you when cash will be tight. Confer with your accountant the first time through; he or she should be able to thoroughly explain this cash management tool to you.

When you apply for the line of credit, make sure that you and your accountant do a thorough job of explaining the cyclical nature of your lawn service business. By doing this, you stand a much better chance at receiving the line of credit you

are applying for.

2) **Offer a five percent discount for pre-payment.** A discount of five percent is typically enough to get five to 15 percent of your current customers to pre-pay. Some firms approach this method of generating cash flow more aggressively, and have an astounding 40 percent of customers prepaid by December 31.

3) **Billing at the beginning of the month** can accelerate your collection period by as much as 30 days.

The "on-time" customer always pays his bill within 30 days. The "past-time" customer pays within 60 days. For March application, look at how the billing could effect cash flow:

Bill March 1: Collect customer on-time March 30
Collect customer past-time April 30

Bill March 30: Collect customer on-time April 30
Collect customer past-time May 30

4) **Bill commercial accounts monthly** to guarantee certain cash flows each month. Some companies have even set up a program with their residential customers in which they offer monthly billing instead of five or six larger payments. Both of these methods can be implemented on a very cost efficient basis.

5) **Send customer statements on the 15th and the 30th of application month.** Reminding your customers often of the need to pay on time will assist in more of paying as soon as the bill is left or mailed to them.

Don't abuse your customer by calling for a payment two days after you have rendered an invoice for the prior 30 days. If you need to do this for cash, review the suggestion above as to a better collection system for these type of customers.

When you buy a new vehicle or other piece of equipment, do you take a 12 payment per year plan? Why take a 12 payment per year plan when cash is coming in for only eight to nine months of the year? Ask the financier next time if you could pay for this purchase on an eight-month schedule. This will help prevent you from paying out money when none is coming in. Remember it can never hurt to ask, because often the financier is happy to
continued on page 48

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To give you even more cutting control, Groundsmasters feature a single knob deck-to-tractor weight transfer system. A twist of the wrist is all it takes to balance cutting unit flotation to height of cut and traction needs. The result is better traction and better flotation without scalping.



When it comes to engine size, Toro gives you the power of choice. The new Groundsmaster 220-D features a 20 hp liquid-cooled, 3-cylinder Mitsubishi diesel engine. The new Groundsmaster 224 gives you the same engine in a gas model, providing you with the durability diesels are known for, but with more power. Both give you all the speed and power needed for the most demanding jobs.

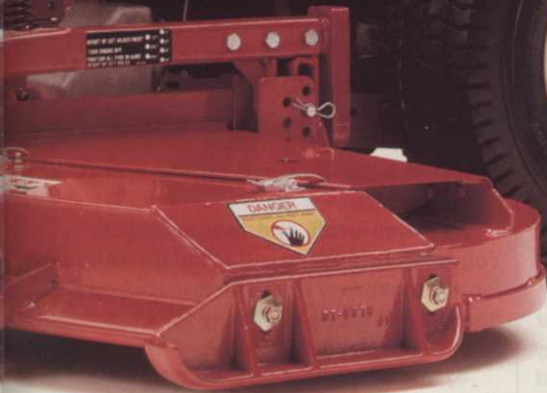
The Groundsmaster 220 also is available with a 20 hp air-cooled gas engine.



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A small, compact wheelbase provides a small uncut trim circle and tight turn-around enabling you to trim close around any obstacle. Just what you need to get into or out of tight areas.



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work with you.

6) Slow down your first quarter payments. Many purchases are made during the first quarter, but the payment for these purchases can be scheduled for the second and third month of the second quarter. Suppliers will work with you when you negotiate these payments in advance,

rather than after you have purchased the items. Often, the interest a supplier charges for extending payments is slightly higher than the interest a bank would charge, but you do not use your line of credit up at the bank when you can negotiate this type of payment plan.

Ask for a deferred or extended payment

terms, and you will be surprised how accommodating some of your suppliers can be. Prior payment performance will be the basis upon which a supplier will decide if they are willing to carry your bill for a deferred payment system.

—The author is a senior consultant with PC Systems, Inc., Columbus, Ohio.

Snow thrower safety: don't put your hands where you shouldn't

■ The biggest chance you have of injuring yourself while operating a snow thrower is by putting your hands where you shouldn't.

More than 4,000 people require emergency room treatment every winter because of injuries from snow thrower-related accidents, reports the Consumer Products Safety Commission. These injuries are usually to the fingers, hands and arms.

George R. Thompson, III, director of corporate communications for Briggs & Stratton Corporation, offers these snow thrower safety tips:

- Stop the engine before attempting to

unclog the machine.

- Use a wooden block to clear a clogged passage. "Even if the snow thrower is turned off, operators must make sure all moving parts have completely stopped before they attempt to unclog the machine," says Thompson.

- Read and understand all operating instructions.

- Don't touch hot mufflers, cylinders or fins.

- Don't fill the gasoline tank while the engine is running. Allow the engine to cool before adding fuel.



- If gasoline is spilled, move the machine away from the area of the spill and avoid creating any source of ignition.

- Don't wear loose clothing that could be caught in moving parts of the equipment.

The marketing plan

As the Cheshire Cat told Alice, it doesn't matter what road you take if you don't know where you want to go.

by Rudd McGary, Ph.D.

■ A big misconception in many green industry companies is that advertising equals marketing. But advertising is only one part of the marketing matrix.

The idea that advertising can make up for other marketing inadequacies is a fallacy. When several companies I know severely curtailed or eliminated their advertising for a whole year, the overall effect was actually *positive*. They saved money on advertising and, in addition, attracted new

customers through other means.

Marketing plans usually take at least a year to fall into place, since they contain many parts. Impatient management is the greatest impediment to a marketing plan's success.

Here are some key elements to a successful marketing plan:

1) The consumer—What does the customer want to buy? How much will they pay for it? How are you going to determine this information?

One of the factors in planning is that not everyone buys lawn care, nor tree work, nor design/build services, nor irrigation. Each segment of the population buys different services in different ways.

Ask the consumer what he/she wants. It's always best to ask in person, second-best to ask by phone, and third to ask by mail.

2) Control—If you're going to spend money in advertising/promotion, you should have a way of determining whether

or not you get a return on the money you've invested.

3) Sales staff and management—You need to understand what the sales force is to do, how it is to be managed, and how the rest of the marketing activities fit in with the sales force actions.

4) Mix of services—Have a clear focus. I've worked with many companies that have branched into areas that don't exactly fit into their original mission. The classic line is that "we went into (fill in the blank) because we had someone who could do it." Make sure your customers want it first.

5) Outside influences—How will reports on 2,4-D affect the lawn care business? What will a down economy do to the buying patterns for services? Regulatory, economic and environmental issues are as important a part of planning considerations as any of the internal issues.

6) Owner needs—What is satisfying to the owners of the company? For instance, in a small company, the owner is probably also working; in a publicly-held company, there may be thousands of owners peering

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over management's back.

After getting the proper input from everyone required, you need to determine the company's strengths and weaknesses from financial, marketing, operational and management viewpoints.

The next step is to look at both long-term and short-term objectives. Short-term objectives should change depending

on how the long-term objectives are framed, and *not* vice versa.

The planning at this point takes into account information on the consumers, the company and overall objectives. These are examined at the same time, not sequentially.

The next part of planning is to determine accountability. If no one is responsible for either the plan or its final outcome,

there isn't much chance it'll work.

The final cog is to work out some sort of contingency plans. Obviously, it's impossible to foresee all the variables that can occur during the year. If the plan is not working, there must be an alternative. Failure to understand when the plan is going poorly is often a major problem in the planning process.

'Critical heights' of playground tested materials

■ Natural and artificial turf are not recommended by the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) for surfacing public playgrounds "because their effectiveness in absorbing shock during a fall can be reduced considerably due to wear and environmental conditions."

According to a CPSC pamphlet entitled "Handbook for Public Playground Safety," unitary and loose-fill materials are better suited than grass.

Unitary materials are generally rubber mats or a combination of rubber-like materials held in place by a binder that may be poured in place and cures to form a unitary shock-absorbing surface.

Loose-fill materials include sand, gravel and shredded wood products. The table lists the critical height—maximum height

from which a child can safely fall—for each of seven materials tested by the CPSC. (For example, if uncompressed wood mulch is used at a minimum depth of six inches, the critical height is 7 feet.)

The depth of any loose fill material could be reduced during use, which would result in different shock-absorbing properties. For this reason, a margin of safety should be considered in selecting type and depth of materials, the CPSC warns.

CRITICAL HEIGHT OF TESTED MATERIALS

Material	Uncompressed to:			Compressed to:
	6"	9"	12"	9"
Wood mulch	7'	10'	11'	10'
Double shredded bark mulch	6'	10'	11'	7'
Uniform wood chips	6'	7'	>12'	6'
Fine sand	5'	5'	9'	5'
Coarse sand	5'	5'	6'	4'
Fine gravel	6'	7'	10'	6'
Medium gravel	5'	5'	6'	5'

Source: CPSC

—Landscape Structures Inc. is offering free reprints of "Handbook for Public Playground Safety." To get yours, write 601 Seventh St. South, Delano, MN 55328; or phone (800) 328-0035.

Selecting plants: a backwards method

■ If plants have not been specified in a landscape design, here is a "backwards" process for selecting them, as suggested by Bonnie Lee Appleton of the Virginia Hampton Roads Ag Experiment Station:

1) Decide generically what type of plant is needed: a tree, a shrub, vines, a ground-cover; deciduous or evergreen.

2) Decide what plant characteristics (time of flowering, fruit, fall color, bark or branch patterns) you want. She suggests to aim for multi-seasonal interest.

3) Decide—realistically—how large a plant can grow in its intended landscape

site. Consider height and spread, and growth rate.

4) Decide the degree of maintenance (pest control, pruning, fertilizing, etc.) desired.

5) List the existing landscape site conditions, to include:

- soil: type; pH; moisture content
- exposure: full or partial sun or shade; direction and amount of wind
- available moisture: precipitation and irrigation
- temperature tolerance: both winter and summer.

6) Use plant reference guides to select a

specific plant of the desired type with the desired characteristics and level of maintenance.

7) Shop for plants that are labeled as to type; healthy looking; free of insects, diseases, mechanical damage and well-cared for.

8) Look for a few specific things based on the way the nursery produces the plants:

● bare-root: adequate number of roots, roots not dried out

● balled and burlapped: tight rootball, no weeds, rootball not dried out, rootball well wrapped and/or laced

● container-grown: adequate number of roots on outside of rootball; no major circling roots; no weeds; not dried out

● containerized/process balled: adequately rooted into the medium packed around the roots; not dried out.