

Rockin' with Sam and Fred at Walnut Creek

Tall and outgoing, with a shock of white hair sticking from beneath his University of Georgia baseball cap and his soft drawl, Sam Lang gives the impression of being a good ol' boy — which, in fact, he is. He enjoys a loud time every now and again, and he can spin a good yarn.

This has served him well as owner of the application company, Fairway Green, Raleigh, NC, and as one of North Carolina turf's most vocal and influential supporters, particularly at the statehouse level.

Lang likes a stiff challenge (ask him about his branch office in Greensboro), and has partnered with Fred Yelverton Ph D., a turfgrass extension specialist at NC State, to grow grass on bare ground — over and over.

The site is the ALLTELL Pavilion, the hillside inside the Walnut Creek Amphitheater where, on any given steamy Carolina evening, a capacity crowd of 22,000 music lovers can turn Walnut Creek into a raucous rock-and-roll party, 12,000 of them greatly enjoying themselves on the turf, bowled hillside.

"A lot of strange things happen on this grass," Lang likes to say, which is probably an understatement.

Touring the site with Lang and Yelverton late this past summer, the hillside had already suffered over 30 concerts, been trod upon by at least a million feet and sopped up enough spilled beer to float the USS Constitution. Yet, the 5-acre site showed a fine cover of Tif 419 hybrid bermudagrass, and Lang and Yelverton insisted that it would be completely returfed in time for the next concert, just three days away.



Fred Yelverton, left, and Sam Lang after the concert

"Since we're growing the turf in from absolutely nothing, over and over again all season, we're here in the middle of the summer every seven days putting fertilizer down," says Lang. They don't spare the irrigation either. But, that's just half of the story.

The sloped site is surrounded by woodlands and wetlands. "We're careful here to avoid nutrient runoff. We don't want pesticide runoff either," he says.

The concert goers that flock to Walnut Creek probably don't give much thought to the condition of the turf when the singing and partying are over.

It's a good bet that they appreciate the soft green grass they spread their blankets on before the music starts.

Contact Ron at 440/891-2636 or e-mail at rhall@advanstar.com

The hillside had already suffered over 30 concerts, been trod on by a million feet and sopped up enough spilled beer to float a battleship. — RH



green side up
BY RON HALL



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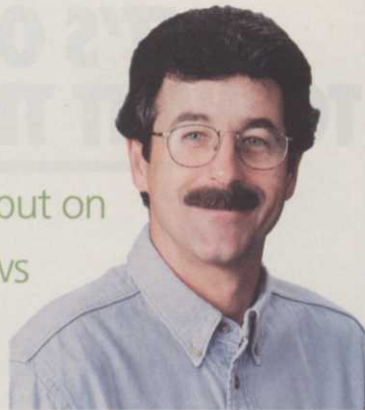
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"I've found that the most efficient crews are put on the difficult projects and the less experienced crews are put on the easier projects." - JG



Rate employees by teams

Evaluating your crews' performance is not as simple as it sounds. It would seem that all you need to do is check the time spent on the job and compare it to the estimated hours for the job. Many companies do just that, but I always have to ask these questions:

- ▶ Are all of my estimates correct?
- ▶ What happens if the estimator has produced an incorrect bid?

Your crew may have done an outstanding job, thereby reducing the loss, but not matching the budgeted hours. I've found that the most efficient crews are put on the difficult projects, and the less experienced crews are put on the easier projects. In this case, evaluating crew performance based solely on the hours used on the project may not provide an accurate picture of their performance.

Rate work quality first

You have to evaluate job quality when you review job hours. I do this in monthly job inspections, with a written evaluation for maintenance projects and at the completion of any landscape construction projects. Quality may have been sacrificed to meet the estimated hours, so that's something to watch.

Job scheduling can affect job performance as well. Suppose your manager keeps switching employees on a crew and pulling the crew off the job to solve problems elsewhere. This would affect performance on a job.

Are you giving the crew the proper tools and equipment to do the job? How well your crew takes care of the equipment is very important. A crew could be completing the job under the budgeted hours, but

abusing the equipment, which can cost your company a great deal of money.

One detail, often overlooked in crew evaluation, is how they handle paperwork. If time sheets, job reports, delivery tickets, extra charges and back charges are not completed and submitted to accounting for collection, you could be losing money for the work you are doing. Paperwork that is filled out and turned in is one of the crew's important functions.

Jerry's evaluation targets

- ▶ Level of project difficulty
- ▶ Hours per project
- ▶ Job quality (monthly for maintenance; at completion for construction)
- ▶ Scheduling changes that might affect work
- ▶ Equipment/tool care
- ▶ Timely, efficient paperwork
- ▶ Participation in training
- ▶ Attitude, reliability, willingness to cooperate
- ▶ Interaction with clients

Finding a remedy

Many companies are quick to criticize performance, but do not provide proper training for their employees. Training can be simple, in-house programs to teach basic techniques and standards to keep uniformity in your work, regardless of which crew performed the work. Education and training can be tied to wage increases.

On-the-job characteristics such as attitude, reliability, adherence to company policy, willingness to cooperate with others and interaction with clients is very

important, but often overlooked in an employee or crew evaluation.

Using teams of evaluators

If several people rather than one person perform the evaluations, it will give a more accurate representation of a crew or an employee's performance. Another benefit is the crew or employee will not be able to direct negative feelings toward the evaluator if the evaluation is carried out by several people, rather than one person who

multiply this score by the dollar amount and you will have each person's bonus. Bonuses help employees understand how they can improve their performance to receive more money next time.

—The author is a partner in The Good

Earth Inc., Mt. Pleasant, SC, a green industry consultant and a member of Landscape Management's Editorial Advisory Board. He can be reached at 843/884-6114.

MULTIPLE EVALUATION SYSTEM	
	Total Score
Evaluator # 1	92
Evaluator # 2	87
Evaluator # 3	94
Total	273
Average score	91

was put in a difficult position.

Evaluations indicate the areas that need improvement and highlight the areas in which people excel. I suggest structuring each category on a point system from 1 to 10. Points are assigned based upon performance. Develop categories like the ones I've mentioned, as well as others which reflect things important to your operations.

Once all the evaluations are complete, total all the points and find the average score. Now you have a fair assessment of that crew or employee. Different categories can be developed for management and field employees.

Working for a bonus

This type of evaluation can also be used as a bonus system. First, establish an amount of money that you would like to provide as a bonus for everyone. Next, total all the points earned by everyone. Then, divide the total points earned into the bonus money. Each point will be worth a dollar value.

Finally, go to each individual's score and

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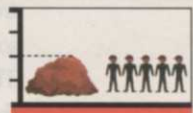
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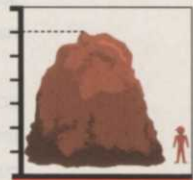
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If you think some of your colleagues work "insane" hours, you might not realize that they're not nuts, they're nuts about their work. That leads to a logical question: Do you really like what you do?



Should you be in this business?

When you examine companies like Dell, Microsoft or any of the other Wall Street giants, it's easy to dismiss the idea that there are any lessons we "ordinary" business people can apply to ourselves. After all, these are huge corporations led by brilliant individuals who dominate their industries worldwide. Most entrepreneurs neither have the inclination, nor the positioning of their company to even attempt to be an industry leader. Nevertheless, we can learn from the actions and ideas of the Bill Gates and Michael Dells of the world.

Fire in the belly

Most successful entrepreneurs are people of tremendous energy. This is not because of genetics or some right brain /left brain psycho-babble oddity. Their energy comes from the passion they feel for their work. They LIKE their chosen field. They are keenly interested in it. As a result, they see problems that would make others cringe as "challenges," not insurmountable hurdles. Of all the qualities I've observed in successful people of any field, passion is the most important. Everything else flows from it.

When you enjoy doing something, it is easier to confront what must be done to succeed. A great athlete doesn't hurt any less than everyone else when he runs at top speed, but his passion for the sport is greater, so he works at it more. Michael Jordan not only had great talent, but he tried harder than anyone else. He wanted it more.

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hours, you might not realize that they're not nuts, they're nuts about their work.

That leads to a logical question: Do you really like what you do? If you don't, you have three choices:

1. Find an area (or position) you do enjoy and get proficient at it.
2. Change your mind about your current situation and discover some things you do like about it — then do them well.
3. Keep doing what you are doing and live a thankless existence.

I don't know about you, but I like #1 and #2.

Eagle eyes: that 'vision' thing

The next question to ask is if you have a vision. That can sound like pretty esoteric stuff, but in reality, "vision" comes from understanding your work, concluding what is likely to happen in the future and deciding how you will be a part of that future.

In Dell's case, he projected the future demand for computers that everyone could use —the PC. He reasoned that if he could build a small computer efficiently, provide good service and give people what they wanted at a great price, his company could dominate the field. It did. Bill Gates (and a host of others) saw that the DOS operating system was too complicated and unwieldy to be user-friendly. Developing a simple, compatible operating system was a solvable technical problem. Selling it and getting everyone (except Apple) to use it was the major sales coup of the century. It is why he is the richest man in the world.

For a landscape industry business, however, getting

vision doesn't need to involve special insight into the future, or extraordinary brain power. It usually means finding out what your customers need and want.

Ask existing and potential customers some of the things they want, then ask about problems they have relating to your product or service area. Their responses may surprise you — even for long-time customers.

This will help you develop an approach that can give your organization an advantage over your competitors — you can establish a niche. Interestingly enough, this "niche" is often just something you do better than most because you like doing it better. You believe in it. You are willing to work harder at it. With this niche, you can go virtually anywhere. Without it, you can never be significantly better than your competitors.

Time to get tough

Whatever it is, the next step is to exploit your strengths (your niche), which means marketing. It goes without saying, however, that once you have decided

upon this particular niche, you have to deliver what you promised.

This usually requires another key ingredient in successful people — and something that usually goes un-

Do you have what it takes?

HOW DO YOU STACK UP AGAINST SUCCESSFUL ACHIEVERS? TRY THESE QUESTIONS.

- ▶ Do you really love (not just like) what you do?
- ▶ Do you know what you do better than your competitors?
- ▶ Can you make tough decisions? Do you look for balance in your decisions?
- ▶ Do you know where you want to go?

If you answered yes to these, you're obviously focused and on your own track to success. If you said no to all four, try spending some time re-evaluating your career and goals. You might do better in another field or situation.

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Circle 108

it's your life

noticed — toughness and perseverance. Life in general (and business especially) is sometimes a series of difficult decisions. I have never known someone to rise to the top without being able to make tough decisions. This doesn't imply being a "hatchet man," either. A difficult decision is one where there are a lot of possibilities, both good and bad. It is difficult to evaluate at the time because it isn't obvious. But that's part of being a manager.

Our lives have many aspects: ourselves, our families, employees, friends, our organizations and more. The best decision is usually one that does the most for the greatest number of these elements. Being tough in business doesn't mean you have to be nasty; it means you have to be willing to do the right thing for the most people in your life. No one said it would be easy. It takes courage.

Where are you going?

The last part of this idea involves something that is so basic, it almost goes without saying, and it seems incredibly easy to forget. You need a clear goal.

This sounds overly simple, but let me explain. If you traveled in a foreign country and were told you must stay on a particular road and keep a certain mountain to your left, to reach your destination, you would be crazy not to do it. You could lose your way if you left the road or lost sight of the mountain.


So it is with a goal — when you forget about it, you become unfocused and in danger. With a clear goal, your plans, strategies and solutions also become clear. They almost seem to pop out at you.

If you add these traits together, the ideal situation would be that you are vitally inter-

ested in your profession. Like Michael Dell or Bill Gates, you survey your market and decide how you can get a competitive advantage. You market it. You use your brains, guts and determination, and deliver what you promise. Voila! You're a success.

Too bad it's not that simple. Don't lose sight of the fact that reaching your goals normally takes longer than you think it will, at first. And once you get there, wealth and power don't necessarily equate to happiness. But you'll never enjoy the journey if you don't enjoy your work. Have some fun along the way.

— *The author is a registered principal/independent stock and commodity broker with more than 20 years experience in the financial industry. He can be reached at (800) 643-1155.*



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let's hear it

YOUR OPINIONS, COMMENTS, & QUOTES

In our August issue, we posed the question: **How do you keep your family business together?** Some of you re-

sponded with fascinat-

ing company histories.

One of these was from Michael Kravitsky IV, Grasshopper Lawns Inc., Edwardsville, PA.

We met Michael and his brother, Shawn, at PLCAA's "Day on the Hill" this past July. They were

on their way, along with a small group of fellow Pennsylvanians, to meet with Senator Rick Santorum (R-PA), concerning small business concerns.



The following is the Grasshopper Lawns story, as written by Michael Kravitsky IV.

Sometimes things get pretty crazy here

My dad, Michael Kravitsky III, started a lawn service in 1964 with a franchise called Lawn-A-Mat. He did all the book work, selling and servicing himself. A few years later my grandfather, Michael Kravitsky II, a retired chief of police, started helping my dad by doing some of the book work and selling.

I started full-time in 1980. (Actually I was on lawns, doing something with them, since 1969 — I was seven years old.) I, along with several nonfamily employees, did all the service work. My grandfather still did the books and sold.

My dad then somehow convinced my mother, Eleanor, to do some of the book work. This lasted for several years until Mom decided that enough was enough, and stopped doing the book work. Enter sister Michele, our new bookkeeper. This also lasted for a while, but Michele moved on to bigger and better things.

In 1984, youngest brother Shawn entered the business fresh out of high school. He, along with myself and several other employees, did all the service work. Now it was time to hire an actual bookkeeper.

Today, my dad is mostly retired — mostly, I say because he still wanders into our office (which is still in the basement of my grandparent's home) every day.

Shawn and I do not service lawns ourselves much anymore because we handle the day-to-day operations. Michele's husband, Vic, a retired police sergeant, takes care of most of our sales. We have another brother who is a Pennsylvania state trooper, who wants nothing to do with our business. (Jeez, you would think that with all the cops in our family that we would be hell-raisers!)

We conduct this business as we were taught: as a business. I am now known as "Mr. Inside" because I oversee the office staff. Shawn is known as "Mr. Outside" because he takes care of equipment, customers and service calls.

Sometimes things get very crazy because of differing opinions between Shawn and me. However, when we go home, all is forgotten. We cannot afford to hold a grudge. I think we make a good combination because of our different styles. We share almost equally in the rewards of this business.

in your opinion

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