

► Staffing must be an ongoing process. It takes time and effort — lots of personal, hands-on effort and a little luck to boot.

► This “people problem” didn’t develop quickly and it won’t be solved quickly.

► In some cases, management’s perspective on what it takes to develop and maintain a long-term, productive staff in the service industry must be rethought.

### The struggling manager

I recently spoke with a struggling lawn care manager, working hard to make spring a success and finding that his only real problem was people. The marketing worked, the weather was as predicted and the trucks, equipment and products were ready and waiting.

Then, as the work increased, so did turnover. His response was to run the ad. Sadly, his ad had lots of company in the classified section.

“You must do more,” I advised.

“No time now,” he shot back. “We’re getting behind — gotta put the fires out!”

Can you guess what happened next? He spread the same workload over fewer people and more quit. And so it goes.

Year after year, managers repeat to themselves “I’m all staffed up” and cross their fingers, hoping their worst fears won’t come true. The problem is that they are “staffed up” with the wrong people. Warm bodies, while appearing to be adequate, only do one thing predictably: drain your labor budget!

Like I said, “You have to do more than run the ad.”

### Recruiting doesn’t come easy

Let’s talk more about the difficulty of attracting the best people. Woody Hayes, “Bear” Bryant, Vince Lombardi and Jimmy Johnson had no problem attracting football players to their teams. But nobody wants to be on our team...or so it would seem. Recruiting “the right stuff” is tougher.

Still, I’ve observed that for every prize (especially a prize considered worth having), there is a contender in pursuit. In that respect, the game is the same. What has changed is the public’s perception of our industry. For me, that perception is part reality, part fiction. And because a job candidate’s vision of a career in the service industry is cloudy at best, that is precisely where we need to go to work.

Let me restate a fundamental idea: our people problems in the service industry have nothing to do with an absence of “good” or “adequate” people. In fact, there are just as many good people around today as at any time in this country’s labor history — maybe more. But they don’t want our jobs! That is the single most distressing problem we face, but it’s also our greatest opportunity.

In the past few years, why has the 18-to 25-year-old labor segment been “turned off” from our industry? Are you sure it’s as simple as “nobody wants to work anymore?” I’m not sure of that, and I’ve seen enough to know I’m right about this.

Let’s review some of the reasons younger workers do not want our jobs, or why they quit soon after they take those jobs. The key reasons include:

**1. Our industry has changed and our jobs have changed with it.** I recall the “glory days” of lawn care service:

- four applications per year (not six to eight);
- little or no aeration or seeding;
- few bothersome customer calls;
- not having to sell more and more — very little telemarketing;
- practically anyone could hold a job in our business and do the work at a reasonable pace (in a reasonably pleasant work environment with business enough for all who wanted it).

**2. We’ve evolved.** Landscape and lawn care firms, once operating in a sim-

## Checklist for success

Look at this typical industry manager’s checklist for success:

- Business/personal objectives clarified
- Market niche (need) identified
- Mission statement on paper
- Business plan complete
- Marketing strategy set
- Capital
- Physical plant/equipment
- Vendors/suppliers
- Human resources necessary to execute — Houston, we’ve got a problem!

This planning sequence is typical. Most landscape and lawn care managers can work out a logical plan and have the best intentions, but it all seems to unravel when we get to the people part.

Is there a strategy in the world of Y2K that will help you succeed through people? Yes.

Is it quick, easy and manageable? And will it fit into my already overloaded day? No.

You have two choices: adapt to the realities of the 21st century labor market or continue to suffer frustrating failures.

— Bill Hoopes

pler world, now face more irritating and confusing regulation, some of which relate directly to our ability to be productive through people.

One example comes to mind. In some states, even if you are able to hire effectively, veteran employees are routinely given excessively high daily production goals (creating instant alienation), while the new hire proceeds through what can be weeks of

*continued on page 52*

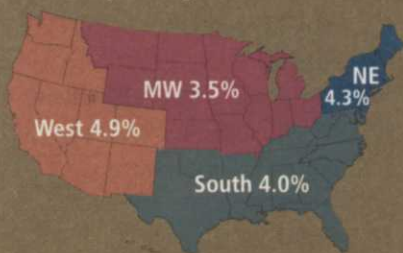
LABOR FACT

# 1999 U.S. unemployment rate

Seasonally adjusted, in percent

Average: 4.25%

January through November



Editor's note: 4.0% unemployment is the traditional threshold for 'labor shortage.' Bureau of Labor Statistics does not keep unemployment data for the Green Industry; numbers are not broken down by detailed industry.

SOURCE = US BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS (BLS)

*continued from page 51*  
 required "training" before qualifying for the certification test. Fail the test and new hires face another month of waiting.

While all of this is going on, your best person quits. "It's just not worth it," he says on his way out the door. So regulations, needed or not, impact our workplace.

**3. There is fierce competition at both ends of the competitive spectrum.** New business entrants (sometimes former employees) offer extreme personal service at one end. At the other end, large conglomerates deal out lower prices made possible through economies of scale.

The result? Everyone is forced to work harder, offer better service and charge less. We are forced to demand productivity more than we ever have before, while in-

sisting that our employees take time to do a better job.

In many cases, we are failing to do anything more than create turnover. While the few really large companies realize increased productivity through customer route density, the latest equipment and technology, most jobs in our industry have evolved into a succession of endless, pressure-packed days, few Saturdays off and an atmosphere far different than the one some enjoyed 20 years ago. Today, candidates that once gave us a close look now push the reject button and go elsewhere.

With the unprecedented 17-year economic expansion we are enjoying, high school, tech school and four-year graduates now have the largest variety of career options in history. Many candidates we were

*continued on page 54*

# Buy Lawn Equipment And Parts Factory Direct.

AERATOR • BED EDGER • LAWN OVERSEEDER • SOD CUTTER



*Turfco quality, service and speed.*  
 No middle-man margins and no middle-man delays.  
 Even parts come overnight.

- ▶ Save Hundreds \$\$\$
- ▶ 2-Year Warranty
- ▶ 90 Day Same As Cash

**(800)679-8201** or **turfco.com**



**Sod Cutter**

**\$2,125.**



**Edge-R-Rite**

**\$999.**



**Lawn Overseeder**

**\$1,725.**



**Aerator**

**\$1,580.**

**DON'T WAIT ANOTHER 1000 YEARS**

**BECOME A CHARTER Y 2K  
CERTIFIED MAUGET APPLICATOR**

A Limited number of certificates  
will be awarded at our  
Y2K SEMINARS...

REGISTER EARLY TO ATTEND A

**MAUGET MICRO-INJECTION SEMINAR**

If you thought tree pest control changed a lot in the past century - forget about the past millennium - YOU AIN'T SEEN NOTHING YET.

Tree pest control used to entail large spray rigs and drums and bags of pesticide.

**Trees can be protected with milliliters of systemic material, without drift, without runoff, and without applicator exposure.**

<u>City</u>	<u>State</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Phone</u>
RALEIGH	NC	JANUARY 12	800-655-5910
WAUKESHA	WI	FEBRUARY 1	800-423-3789
COUNTRYSIDE	IL	FEBRUARY 2	309-243-5815
LIVONIA	MI	FEBRUARY 3	800-423-3789
ORLANDO	FL	FEBRUARY 4	407-647-3335
RALEIGH	NC	FEBRUARY 9	800-655-5910
JACKSONVILLE	FL	FEBRUARY 11	407-647-3335
DENVER	CO	FEBRUARY 11	800-747-8733
MIAMI	FL	FEBRUARY 18	407-647-3335
WEST CHESTER	PA	FEBRUARY 23	610-644-3300
RAPID CITY	SD	FEBRUARY 24	800-658-5457
ROCKVILLE	MD	FEBRUARY 24	301-881-8550
OKLAHOMA	OK	FEBRUARY 25	800-747-8733
CASPER	WY	FEBRUARY 26	800-658-5457
RALEIGH	NC	MARCH 1	800-655-5910
TOTOWA	NJ	MARCH 2	973-227-0359
BAY SHORE	NY	MARCH 2	800-842-1104
KANSAS CITY	MO	MARCH 3	800-747-8733
INDIANAPOLIS	IN	MARCH 7	317-891-8411
BLOOMINGTON	MN	MARCH 10	800-747-8733
SILVERTON	OR	MARCH 16	503-635-3916
ELKHORN	NE	MARCH 17	402-289-3248
SPOKANE	WA	MARCH 21	503-635-3916
SEATTLE	WA	MARCH 23	503-635-3916
MT. KISCO	NY	MARCH 23	800-746-0776
WATERBURY	CT	MARCH 24	800-746-0776
STURBRIDGE	MA	MARCH 27	800-746-0776
BEND	OR	MARCH 30	503-635-3916
GRANTS PASS	OR	MARCH 31	503-635-3916
RALEIGH	NC	APRIL 12	800-655-5910
RALEIGH	NC	MAY 10	800-655-5910

**That's the future ...**

And you can be part of the future by attending one of Mauget's Micro-Injection Seminars going on this winter across the country. If you are already a certified Mauget applicator, you will learn about additional pests, diseases and tree health problems solved by micro-injection. Information on new products, expanded labels, and refined use of the micro-injection treatment system, all available in a one-day seminar.

**Don't get hung up in the past**

Start the new millennium with the future of tree health care, micro-injection by Mauget. We'll award you with a special Year 2000 certification.

**Mauget**  
800-TREES Rx (800-873-3779)  
877-TREE HLP (877-873-3457)

(New toll free technical support Line)

www.mauget.com

## LABOR FACT

## What exactly is H2B?

By now the once obscure acronym 'H2B' is well known in the Green Industry. But what is it exactly? It's a visa classification of the U.S. State Department.

The 'H' is the category of the visa ('T' would be a NAFTA visa, for example); '2' refers to the educational level, in this case 'below college' or unskilled; and the 'B' stands for 'business.' The last is one of two dozen categories — for example, you may also have heard of H2A, in which the 'A' stands for 'agriculture.' The categories are very specific, and the distinctions between them are hair-splitting. But for the Green Industry, H2B is almost always the applicable program.

H2A carries no numeric limits with it, but H2B caps at 66,000 workers yearly. Interestingly, the industry has yet to reach that 66,000 number, despite the labor needs. (*Landscape Management* has heard different quotes for 1999, ranging from 50,000 down to 32,000 workers.) The bureaucratic complexity of the H2B process probably accounts for that.

But if you can get past the red tape, perhaps with the help of a company specializing in H2B, you've got labor that definitely won't be sent back to Mexico if the Immigration and Naturalization Service pays your job site a visit. That's worth something!

— 'Labor Facts' are contributed by George Witterschein



*continued from page 52*

once able to attract and keep now see a limited opportunity with a lot more work and less leisure time than before. They simply opt out, partly because they can.

### Attack the people problem

First, we need to attack the mistakes we made along the way. We can make great strides in improving our human relations status if we can correct four basic mistakes that are at the root of our troubles:

**1. Unclear message.** I implied that the public's perception of our industry as a career destination has become negative. Changing that perception starts with individual managers and operators.

Sadly, I've observed that too many managers have no clear self image as a person or a manager. Start there. If you are not totally clear about and comfortable with who you are and what your business

stands for, how can you communicate it to a job candidate surveying the opportunities?

If you are one of those who still thinks people work for money alone, think again. Today, more is required to attract and keep people and it begins with a clear, communicable picture of what you are about.

**2. Poor recruiting.** For many reasons that are partly related to the image problem, we may be ineffective recruiters. That must change.

**3. Weak priorities.** Too often, we are consumed by putting out fires — failing to correctly prioritize our time and efforts. We can do better and spend our time better.

**4. Poor environment.** Finally, we don't maintain positive workplace environments for our people, and we must do that if we want to improve our lot.

—The author is director of training and development at Scotts Lawn Service in Marysville, OH.

# (XXL) PERFORMANCE FOR (S) AND (M) JOBS.



## Seed Aide® Mulching Granules for rapid turf establishment.

Seed Aide can be applied with a drop or broadcast spreader and by hand. Seed Aide's granular texture and unique physical properties allow for rapid water absorption. Our granules swell and as raindrops impact the swollen particle they flatten to better cover the soil surface. Seed Aide provides hydro-seeding performance without a large capital investment in equipment.



## Jet-Spray™ Pourable Fiber Mulch Flakes for professional hydro-seeding results.

Jet-Spray with poly-fibres load fast in small tank openings. Designed specifically for jet-circulated hydraulic machines, our fiber mulch flakes pour into the tank reducing loading time by up to 90% versus baled fiber mulch. Poly-fibres enhance the water holding capacity of the slurry while improving the erosion control performance of the fiber mulch matrix.



Profile Products LLC • Superior Soil Solutions  
800-207-6457 • Fax: 847-215-0577 • [www.terra-mulch.com](http://www.terra-mulch.com)





# THESE TERRA-MULCH® ACCESSORIES ARE A PERFECT FIT, TOO.

Customize any tank mix to meet specific job site requirements by choosing from these soil and fiber amendments. Only Terra-Mulch has everything the specifier and professional contractor needs to plant it, tack it, dye it, lock it, grow it, lime it, seal it, gel it and spray it.

**Poly-Fibres:** A combination of 1/2 to 3/4 inch long polyester fibers, specially cut and treated to disperse rapidly in water. Poly-Fibres increase the mechanical bonding of all types of hydraulic mulch products.

**Tacking Agent III:** University tested and proven to reduce erosion and water runoff immediately after hydroseeding. No cure time required.

**Liquid Lime:** A super-high concentrate of the purest form of limestone. Quickly improves soil pH in the seed germination zone.

**Also Available:** Terra firm™ psyllium powder, Growth Stimulant, Locking Fibers, Co-Polymer Gel, Fibre-Tak, Seal, Dye Crystals.



Circle No. 125 on Reader Inquiry Card

## Don't ask why,

# just do it!

**When you become the industry's 'ambassador' in your area, you might discover that good employees will find you**

BY PHIL FOGARTY

**W**hen I entered the lawn care industry in the early 1980s, the atmosphere was a little on the hostile side. For those of you who remember that era, it won't surprise you that in

my first spring of ownership I was in two different city council chambers for hearings on lawn care. The day after one of the hearings, my company was on the front page of a local daily newspaper (we had the contract for that city's park system) with pictures showing picket signs held by little blond-haired boys: "Please don't make us the guinea pigs!" they pleaded.

At the time, I thought it was a dirty trick to play on the new entrepreneur. I barely knew how to calibrate a spreader and I had people with television cameras asking me for comments. I stammered and swore I would never be that ill-prepared for a chance meeting with the press again.

Those dark days turned out to be a blessing in disguise. I reluctantly became an official representative, or ambassador, of my industry.

The political atmosphere has changed a bit but the advantage I gained by being thought of as the

official representative of my industry in my market has not. Ambassadorship is representation of a group, but it can be so much more.

This ambassador thing is amazing because it does so much good for so many people. It is a true win-win-win situation. Your industry benefits from your efforts — that's good. But let's be a little more self-ish here and also check out what it can do for your company and for you personally:

**1. Industry image**—Instead of allowing others to define your industry, you are out there promoting your profession. There are countless free opportunities to influence the public opinion. Is that important? Just ask Bill Gates, whose recent position in Gallup polls may have saved his skin (for now). Gates enjoys a 68% approval rating by consumers these days. He knows that presenting a positive image to the consumer will ultimately influence political opinion, which in turn decides much of the business climate in which he operates.

Okay, so political opinion may not be concrete enough for you. Wouldn't it be nice to be able to charge a little more for your expertise and time? Let's face it, John Q. Public doesn't think we are brain surgeons at this point. Our image is improv-

*continued on page 58*

## LABOR FACT

## The going rate for landscape

► U.S. average hourly earnings in dollars Nov. 1998 through Nov. 1999

Average: \$13.18 (include preliminary figures for Oct. and Nov.)

Average weekly earnings rose by 3.6%, seasonally adjusted, between November of 1998 and 1999. After adjustment for inflation, average weekly earnings grew by 0.9%. Before adjustment for seasonal change and deflation, average weekly earnings were \$463.68 in November 1999, compared with \$451.10 in 1998.

► 1998 National Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates

Laborers, landscaping and groundskeeping

Median hourly \$8.24

Median yearly \$17,140

(note: these are median figures; no average available)

*continued from page 57*

ing as our professionalism rises, but you can speed up the process exponentially by playing an active role and "selling" our trade and its benefits to everyone. Why isn't everybody standing in line to be the ambassador? Don't ask why!

**2. Company positioning** — So much of selling is trying to differentiate your company, service and product from the competition. "Industry representative" equals "industry expert" in the eyes of the public. You and your company are now pre-sold as the best in your area. What an incredible advantage when the biggest clients in town are looking for the solution to a prob-

## How to get started

- *Create a media database* complete with community service leaders and other influential people. Include these people in all formal communications and marketing efforts throughout the year. If you don't have a newsletter, start one this month.

- *Have a five- to 10-minute talk prepared.* There is ambassador training through RISE and PLCAA, as well as videos available to help create a format with which you are comfortable. Become familiar with the issues surrounding our industry so you can be the person others look to as a spokesperson. Don't hesitate to call another ambassador in another market for tips on how to structure your presentation. (PLCAA can help with names.)

- *For good practice and experience* with public speaking in general, become active in your local Toastmasters group.

- *Practice on your staff, family and friends.* Remember, selling is the transfer of enthusiasm from one individual to another.

- *Attend and speak* at every career day you can, especially at elementary and secondary schools.

- *Make yourself available* to radio stations and local print media. A simple letter introducing yourself and letting them know what you could offer in the way of tips for better landscape care or an article on a new way to improve a property may be all that is necessary. Offer to be a speaker at a local garden club or community service organization such as Rotary, Kiwanis or Lions. Leave the technical jargon at the office and talk enthusiastically about the emotional connection people have with your product or service.

- *Consider teaching* at a vocational or technical school in your area. Many community colleges are interested in industry experts as "visiting professors."

- *Take these one step at a time* and be patient with the results. If possible, solicit the advice of a local public relations expert to get you started.

lem or an alternative to business as usual.

And how about the best employees?

Who would they rather work for—a company that pays pretty well or the "industry expert?" (But you probably don't need to hire anybody these days.) What a recruiting tool! Why isn't everybody standing in line to be the ambassador? Don't ask why!

**3. Personal growth** — "This ambassador stuff sounds like a stretch of the abilities. I didn't sign up for any speeches when I decided to run this company — I just want to sell fertilizer, so leave me alone, will ya?"

In the world of selling, we know that what we are really selling is ourselves — every day, in every situation, all the time. By preparing yourself to sell your industry and your company (to a group or to the media), you move out of your comfort

zone fast. I am still uncomfortable with public speaking but I do not know of a better way to compete with the big guys and their multimillion-dollar marketing budgets. And by the way, the "big" companies also train their managers as ambassadors.

With so many advantages and so much to gain, why don't others assume the role? Don't ask why! Maybe they have convinced themselves that it isn't worth the time or the risk. It doesn't matter.

You now know what an incredible tool being an ambassador is. And someone in your market is going to assume the ambassadorial role. As the wise man said, "If not you, then who and if not now, when?"

—The author owns Crowley's Vegetation Management and serves as a consultant with JP Horizons Inc., Cleveland



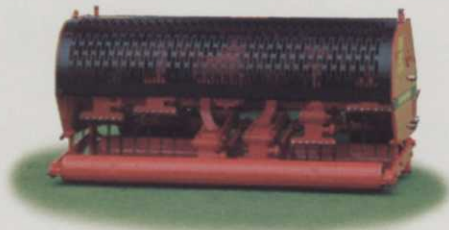
## In aeration, there are three ways to go.



**Too fast.**



**Too slow.**



**Just right.**

### Knowing the difference could make all the difference in your job, not to mention your turf.

Sure, there are pull-type aerators that will run over your turf very fast. But like the hare in the fable, they won't produce winning results. And, of course, there are those drill-type aerators where you have to be a little more cautious like our friend the tortoise, because you're not quite sure of the result, how well it will work. What you're really looking for is an aerator that will go just right.

Fitting your needs exactly with the correct piece of aeration equipment for your soil conditions is precisely why Verti-Drain® offers a dozen models, from a narrow width pedestrian to a wide-swath, high-production unit.



*Verti-Drain's unique, patented shattering effect.*

And all Verti-Drain models offer you the option of either solid tining or pulling cores. You

might be surprised to find that solid tining is preferred often for severely compacted soils.

Many turf professionals have discovered our thinner tines called needle tines – the aeration holes are so small that you can hardly see them, yet you still get the patented Verti-Drain shattering effect under the surface.

With the heaving/shattering action, each tine is forced backwards underground, cracking the soil so air and water can move freely, strengthening roots and helping grasses resist pests, weeds, disease,

drought and hard play.

So, the moral of the story is that there is a Verti-Drain® just right for you. Call today to contact one of our knowledgeable distributors to find out more details.



*Verti-Drain's Mustang model*

**VERTI-DRAIN®**



Breaking barriers to better turf.

950 Sathers Drive, Pittston Township, PA 18640

1-800-597-5664



ALWAYS READ AND FOLLOW LABEL DIRECTIONS © 2000 Bayer Corporation Printed in U.S.A. 00S19A0231

Some products live up to standards. Others set them. When Bayer brought the chloronicotinyl class of chemistry to the turf market with MERIT<sup>®</sup> Insecticide, it revolutionized grub control. Six years later, MERIT provides longer soil residual and broader spectrum grub control than anyone else. And one application is still all it takes to control grubs through the fall