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- EASY TO LEARN:** training time measured in minutes.
- EASY TO OPERATE:** beats pistol grips hands down.
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- SAFER:** fully intuitive, firm grasp of controls throughout the mowing process.



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Out Hustle all the rest™

The spark that LCOs need

It's March and all heck is breaking loose. It happens every spring in the lawn care industry whether we're ready for it or not. As azaleas break bud in the south and the last patches of snow recede from northern lawns, we plunge into another all-out seasonal assault.

Some of the technicians we unleash on our customers' properties are knowledgeable. The sad truth is that many aren't. Lack of employee training is the biggest failing in our industry. It costs everybody —

customers, employees, industry image. But, most of all, it costs lawn care company owners.

That's why when Phil Fogarty approached LM this past winter and asked if we would like to

partner with consulting company JP Horizons Inc. in offering its "Skills Development Series," we jumped at it. Fogarty is associated with JP Horizons, the 11-year-old consulting/training company founded by Jim Paluch. Their new program challenges lawn care companies to provide 52 weeks of training.

This is not sit-in-front-of-a-video training on a rainy day. This is interactive instruction (in 1/2 hour increments, the same morning each week) that you monitor and test to see how well you're doing. But Fogarty's making it more than that. The Skills Development Series is also a contest which allows participating companies to measure their training efforts against other companies.

We at LM and the folks at American Cyanamid, sponsors of the Skills Development Series, realize that the lawn care industry can reach the next level of service and public acceptance only by committing itself to more consistent and effective training. Representatives from both our magazine and from Cyanamid were on hand in Tampa, FL, when Fogarty wrapped up PLCAA's 2000 Management Conference with the Skills Development Series — an afternoon-long "Training Jam Session."

Representatives from about 25 lawn care companies attended the jam session and several embraced the program and set aside time for training each week, including their busiest time which is now. Good for them. Fogarty followed up with a second jam session in Cincinnati a week later, again enlisting LCOs committed to training.

We at LM believe it's high time the industry turned up the heat on training and we feel that Fogarty can supply the spark.



Top, from left, Steve Bailey, Cullen Walker, and Richard Bare. Above, Louis Kobus, Jr., outlines topics for a January training session. Left, Phil Fogarty fires up the group.

Lack of training is the biggest failing in our industry
—Phil Fogarty



I'm your go-to guy.

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in the green. I'm always on the job.
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When your business relies on the growing season, every day is a push for profit. We've engineered the classic Sierra[®] to take the heat. Even on your busiest days.

To start, the classic Sierra 3500 HD has a base payload capacity up to 9,232 lbs and is available in three wheelbases. Its flat frame rails are mounted close to the ground for easier body installation. And you have a choice of the standard 290 hp Vortec[™] 7400 gas engine or an available 6.5L turbo diesel with 195 hp.



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BY JERRY GAETA / GUEST COLUMNIST

"Perhaps you're concerned about losing employees if you discipline them. I call this being held hostage." JG



Discipline isn't easy

Discipline is a source of distress for many companies and is often due to unwritten or unclear policies. If employees know what is expected of them at the time of hiring, many discipline problems could be avoided. A detailed company manual should list what is expected of the employee and, in turn, what he or she can expect of the employer. It establishes rules and guidelines and the consequences if they are not followed. When you remove possible gray areas and provide consistency, it will make your managers' and foremen's jobs easier.

Establish a company chain of command to direct attention to the proper person who is responsible. The manual should be written so that your employees understand it.

Handling discipline problems

You must document improper discipline because lack of documentation is a major cause of employee grievances. Document verbal warnings — this will protect

you and show you take these matters seriously.

Perhaps you're concerned about losing employees if you discipline them. I call this being held hostage. In this tight labor market, that's not a valid argument. Think about the message you're sending the other employees. Also, think what affect this has on the people following the rules — you are diminishing their morale. You're better off without the offender.

When confronted with a discipline problem, always ask yourself, "How would I like to be treated if I was being disciplined?" This philosophy will make the situation easier to deal with. Think before you act and, if unsure of what to do, discuss the situation with someone else, but do not allow too much time to elapse in your decision-making process.

If you have reoccurring problems such as absenteeism and tardiness, try a reward system. This can be as simple as a weekly pay incentive for perfect attendance. Positive reinforcement may achieve the required results quicker and easier than negative reactions.

Make sure the right person handles the discipline and be careful not to overstep your foreman, for instance, if a laborer needs to be disciplined. You don't want to reduce the foreman's authority in the eyes of those in his charge.

You may want to provide training in human relations skills for your managers; it may solve future problems.

There is no magic formula in dealing with these problems; a basic system needs to be in place, as well as good ol' common sense. (See sample performance appraisal sheet on p. 23).

—The author is a green industry consultant and partner with The Good Earth Inc., Mt. Pleasant, SC. He can be reached at 843/884-6114.

Jerry's corrective steps

1. Verbal counseling — refer to rule or regulation, note date of incident, summarize the incident, get response from employee.
2. Written warning — refer to rule or regulation with date, summarize and get employee response, both parties sign. Check if employee accepts this scenario.
3. Second warning (written) or work suspension notice — detail incident (rule, date, summary), list suspension dates, both parties sign, check if employee accepts.
4. Employee termination — record summarizes incidents and rules/regulations, employee response, both parties sign, check if employee accepts.



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about working
harder.**



F680 Z-Trak™ Zero-Turning-Radius Mower
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30 hp/25 PTO hp

A TRACTOR THAT WORKS AS HARD AS YOU DO.

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The 40-PTO-hp 5105 has a wealth of advanced features like a fuel-efficient, high-torque John Deere direct injection PowerTech[®] engine, reverser transmission, excellent hydraulic flow, and large capacity 22.4 gallon gas tank. It has so many in fact, that you can hardly afford not to stop by for a test drive.



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Gas or diesel Gator[®] Utility Vehicles' ability to haul more than their own weight (up to 1400 poundst), tread lightly on turf (with a psi of just 7.1 to 7.5), and high ground clearance mean the only limit to what they can do might be your imagination. †Total capacity for the 6x4 Diesel - includes 200-lb. Operator, 200-lb. Passenger and maximum box capacity.

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XT Series handhelds set the tone for sound quality and low vibration levels. And with industry-best power-to-weight ratios and rugged construction, their performance is something competitors simply can't touch.

^{**††}See inside panel for details.

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For a limited time, we're giving away a free pair of premium John Deere 962 work boots (crafted for extraordinary comfort and strength) with the purchase of any John Deere commercial walk-behind (36-in. or larger). Act soon—offer ends July 5, 2000*.



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