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ON THE COVER Photo illustration by Carrie Parkhill; source photos by iStock International Inc. (crown) and Dreamstime

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FIRSTCUT

NICOLE WISNIEWSKI EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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Perfection obsession?

I recently noticed something in my daughter's behavior that concerns me. Before we leave a room, she likes to put certain toys away. And she's very particular. The bear must be seated to the right of the elephant and the doll must have her shoes on. And all of the toy drawers must be closed — all the way. Not even open a crack. And if there is mud on her hands, she washes them immediately. She's not a fan of dirty fingers.

You might say this sounds like a parent's dream — an organized, orderly child. But I'm concerned at 2½ years old she worries about trying to be perfect too much too soon. Life doesn't always work out to perfection's standards, and I'd hate for her to get in the habit of setting unrealistic goals for herself.

I think some business owners do the same thing. Today, it is drilled into our brains that every little thing must be absolutely perfect or it's considered a failure.

But when we do that we ignore the actual merits of a task, day or project and put a magnifying glass on the one thing that went wrong. It makes employees anxious and uncertain — it crushes their confidence in their work. This lack of self-assurance is apparent to customers who become wary to trust you. And all of this means you, the owner, become miserable.

We are a performance-obsessed society, and with growing technology there is even more room for highlighting each error — and blogging about it, and tweeting about it and having accompanying video and photos as exhibits A and B. As mere humans, we can't sustain this unwavering and intense microscope.

As marketing guru Seth Godin recently pointed out in his blog (sethgodin.typepad.com), this also causes bad prioritization decisions. For instance, "the

owner of a bar says to the manager, "How was the night?" and the response is, "The cash register came up \$8 short." Suddenly there's an urgent problem to be solved. How to replace the \$8 and who to fire?"

But if the question instead had been, "What's up?" — literally, "up," Godin says, "the answer might have been, "There's a big party at table 12, a going away party that's been buying champagne all night, and Mary set a new record for tips."

You get the point. "Highlighting what's working helps you make that happen more often," Godin insists. "Perfect is overrated. Perfect doesn't scale, either."

While he doesn't encourage ignoring bad news or permitting employee theft, focusing on the successes — in this case, the going away party that surely covered the missing \$8 — might make up for the failures every time.

So as you put out daily fires and set priorities for yourself and your business, take Godin's advice and remember to look at the whole picture.

Time to go finger paint with my daughter. And to encourage her that a little extra paint on our fingers, clothes, table and nose is part of the fun.

As you set priorities for yourself remember to look at the whole picture.

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NEWS+VIEWS

GREEN INDUSTRY EVENTS, TRENDS AND TIPS

Labor, pesticides top Day on the Hill issues

BY RON HALL EDITOR-AT-LARGE

On July 20, about 80 landscape/lawn service company owners and managers traversed the halls of the Senate and House office buildings in Washington D.C. to educate legislators on issues affecting landscaping businesses.

Not unexpectedly, the two issues foremost on the visitors' minds were labor and pesticides. Specifically, they urged lawmakers to support the H-2B seasonal guest worker program — and to increase the number of visas available to foreign H-2B workers. They also petitioned legislators to reign in pesticide provisions being considered for the Clean Water Act, and to modify the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's

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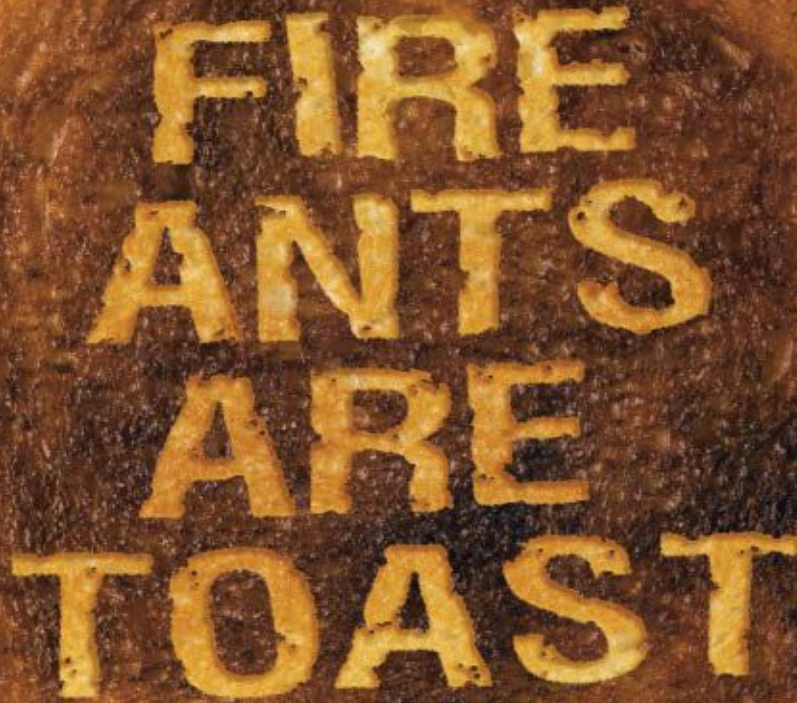


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(EPA's) proposal for zero spray drift for pesticide applications.

The group was part of the 505 volunteers (450 adults, 55 children) working in the Professional Landcare Network's (PLANET) Renewal and Remembrance project at Arlington National Cemetery the previous morning. One hundred companies sent volunteers who provided more than \$250,000 in fertilization, aerification, soil modification, planting and tree services at the 146-year-old, 634-acre military cemetery.

While Renewal and Remembrance has grown into one of PLANET's most popular annual events, its Legislative Day on the Hill, which takes place the following day, was the reason 20 years ago why Green Industry professionals gathered here for learning and lobbying annually in the first place.

"Zero is a very small number," says David T. Crow, president of DC Legislative & Regulatory Services, regarding the EPA proposal to limit spray drift. Crow, who spoke to the PLANET volunteers prior to their Hill visits, said the proposal, if approved, could subject lawn application companies to lawsuits.

"The EPA is going farther than it should go," he told attendees, advising the audience to ask legislators and staffers to modify both this regulation and one in the Endangered Species Act (ESA) establishing 20-yard buffer zones for ground applications of pesticides along waterways in much of the Pacific Northwest in an effort to protect salmon.

Crow urged landscape and lawn care professionals to "encourage" the EPA to develop reasonable approaches to spray drift and endangered species protection that allow lawn care companies to continue to use the pesticide tools needed to maintain lawns, athletic fields and other green spaces that provide significant benefits to local communities.

Visit LandscapeManagement.net to read the complete text of the "Issue Briefing" papers issued to industry professionals participating in the 2010 Legislative Day on the Hill.



David Crow

PHOTOS BY: RON HALL

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