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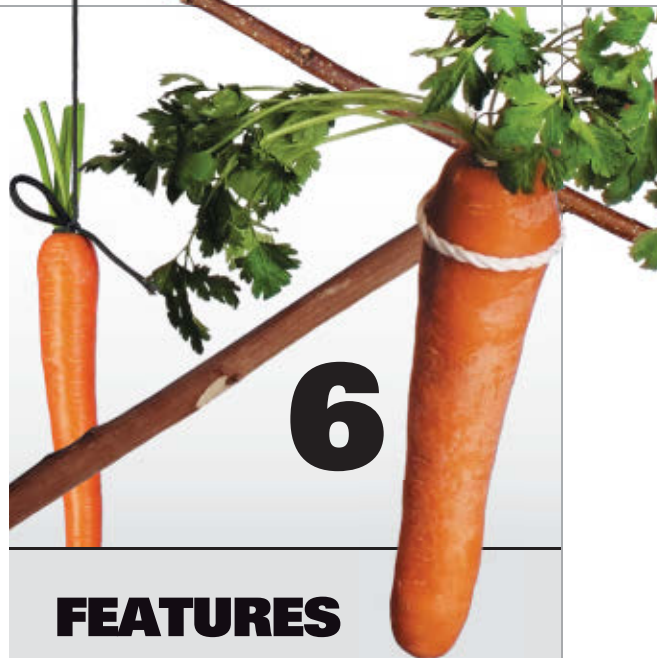
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Three green services that can't miss

Green, sustainable — or whatever you call it — is here. It offers us limitless opportunity. Few industries stand to gain as much from the growing consciousness among the public that we must conserve our resources and protect our environment as we do. But with this incredible opportunity comes responsibility.

Take this responsibility seriously. It's the future of our businesses and of our industry. Start by identifying, researching and providing those services and products that offer the greatest return in terms of environmental benefits and to the health of our businesses and our industry.

Using green merely as a marketing hook and promoting green services that aren't genuinely green is self-defeating. If the market sees through this veneer (and it will), you will be finished.

Here are three services that deserve your consideration because they offer recognizable environmental benefits and, in most cases, measurable returns for customers and for you. Could there be more compelling reasons for providing them?

1. Green roofs. Any landscape company expecting to be a leader in a major or mid-level metropolitan region should learn as much as it can, as fast as it can, about green roofs. Green roofs offer so many benefits they'll eventually be specified for almost all new major public and commercial buildings.

2. Water-efficient landscaping. There will come a day (one that has already arrived in California,

Florida and elsewhere in the United States) that every landscape you install and maintain will have to be water-efficient. This means acquiring specialized knowledge and skills encompassing such areas as native/regionally adapted plants, installing and maintaining smart irrigation systems and providing water harvesting products and services, to name a few. The use of potable water to irrigate landscapes will be limited and become increasingly expensive in many parts of the United States.

3. Holistic turf/ornamental care services. While synthetically produced fertilizers and pesticides have a legitimate place in our industry, many lawn service companies are shifting efforts toward a plant health care (PHC) philosophy. PHC recognizes the use of these products, but mostly to solve specific problems that aren't otherwise manageable. Chemical products are valuable tools as long as they're used for the right purposes, in the correct locations, at the appropriate times and in the right quantities.

Liken PHC to your own health, which is dependent on eating correctly, getting the proper amount of exercise and avoiding harmful environmental conditions. Staying healthy, of course, is preferable to daily doses of medicine. The same goes for the turf and other landscape plants we maintain.

Offering PHC, of course, offers a more complete system of care. It requires scouting and monitoring, and a thorough knowledge of plant/soil relationships. PHC (or whatever your particular term for it is) will grow as a choice for our customers as the green movement grows.

You won't master these — or any other sustainable initiative or service — without a well-thought-out plan. Avoid the “ready, fire, aim” syndrome. Otherwise, you disappoint. Even worse, you might become disillusioned with the concept of green itself. That would be a shame.

We have so much to offer in terms of improving and restoring our urban environments, as well as increasing the value of our businesses and our industry, if we proceed intelligently.

Avoid the “ready, fire, aim” syndrome. Otherwise, you disappoint. Even worse, you might become disillusioned with the concept of green itself.



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REPORTERS OFTEN ask business owners, “What’s your company’s greatest asset?” The almost-universal refrain: “my people.”

Whether all business owners actually believe that or not, usually there are a few employees at every company who deserve such special recognition — all-star employees who outwork, outsell and/or outperform most others in the company (and sometimes most others in the industry). It’s not necessarily that the other teammates aren’t meeting or even exceeding expectations. It’s just that one guy, or a small group of employees, does it better, faster — almost every time.

“Many people can give the impression they are stellar for a short period of time, but in my eyes the term ‘stellar employee’ is reserved for a co-worker who is extremely reliable and dedicated, and can manage and work well with others over a *sustained* period of time,” says Steven Jomides, owner of Lawns by Yorkshire, based in Westwood, NJ.

Whether it’s sheer luck or a company culture that allows individuals to excel, *continued on page 8*



CARROTS

Landscapers and a consultant share tips to recognizing, rewarding, retaining and fully leveraging your all-star players.

BY **DANIEL G. JACOBS** MANAGING EDITOR

Industry insiders say its 'grow or go' time for slouches and grouches — employees who under perform or have bad attitudes.

BY **MARTY WHITFORD**
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

AND STICKS

THEY CALLED him “toothless Frank.” He didn’t smile much — for obvious reasons. He was a perennial under performer with a national lawn care company. He didn’t seem to care what management wanted him to do. But one day, Frank’s manager sat down with him and said, “We’re having difficulty getting you productive. We’ve tried almost everything. What’s it gonna take?”

“Teeth,” Frank replied.

And according to Bill Hoopes, president of Delaware, OH-based Grass Roots Training & Consulting, that’s exactly what they gave him — new teeth and a new outlook on himself

and his employer.

“Frank turned on a dime,” Hoopes says. “Overnight, he became one of the company’s most productive and loyal employees.”

The lawn care company didn’t even have to pay for Frank’s new bridge and other dental work. One of its managers simply asked his dentist to give Frank an extreme mouth makeover and accept an affordable, monthly payment plan for the work.

“For every turnaround story like Frank’s, there are nine others with unhappy endings,” notes Hoopes, who served as director of training for Barefoot Grass *continued on page 12*

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when business owners find star employees, the top challenges are how best to reward them without making others jealous, preventing competitors from poaching them and figuring out a way to clone them.

Recruiting & retaining winners

There are countless books and strategies touting foolproof solutions to hiring quality employees. And while technology might help weed out the misfits, anyone can look good on paper or online. In many cases, you really don't know what you have until you've made the hire.

"Regardless of the interview process and all of that pre-work stuff, we don't know until we get them out in the field, whether they have the aptitude or the will or any of that other stuff," says David Weekley, master pond builder and owner of WaterScapes Pro, Charlotte, NC. "Usually, we can tell in the first three or four days if they have what we're looking for."

It often takes several swings to get a hit. In the past five years, Weekley has hired between 30 and 50 people to fill his three-person staff.

"It's not tangible at all. It's about observation," Weekley says. "The formula I'm looking at is not written down. The trait I found that fits well in our organization is a dedication to really learning the craft. We're artists, when it comes right



"YOU CANNOT TRAIN THEIR GENUINE INTEREST TO LEARN AND GOOD ATTITUDE."

— David Weekley, Waterscapes Pro

career opportunities arise," Wilson says. "And, of course, you should pay them at the high end of the pay scale for those positions.

"Employees also respond really well to public

recognition," he continues. "Recognize them in front of others: Highlight what they're doing so well; call attention to them in a positive way."

Jomides says a few well-timed, carefully chosen words serve as great motivators.

"Praise and acknowledgement go a long way — along with an occasional lunch and maybe even a company-paid trip to the annual Green Industry Conference," Jomides says.

Such perks and public pats on the back are a great way to recognize workers who consistently go above and beyond their job descriptions. But remember: Hard work affects more than just your company.

"A lot of all-stars put in major overtime," Wilson says. "They are away from home a lot. If you give them something they can share with their spouses and children, the entire family will appreciate your company more."

It's the "happy wife, happy life" approach to managing.

"It's buying them lunch," Weekley says. "It's offering to do things outside of the work that can help them. Anything they want to do to improve their lot, I am in favor of, whether it's education or supporting an outside interest. If they're happy at home and overall, then they're certainly going to be happier at work."

It's not all about the green.

"Retention is not all about money," Jomides says.

"People want to be part of a team and know there is a future for them. Encourage co-workers to get involved

and listen to what they have to say. When possible, promote from within and encourage and communicate a succession plan for your staff."

Risk versus reward

Few argue rewarding stellar work is a problem. But there can be a downside. The challenge rears its head when those who don't receive the recognition become jealous.

"If it's not part of a prescribed benefits plan, other employees might find out about it and think it's favoritism," Wilson says. "You have to be careful."

You also need to consider Uncle Sam's take — literally. Such employee rewards might be taxable to the employee.

"If you don't put it on their W-2s (tax forms) at the end of the year, and you are audited, you could face a tax penalty,"

continued on page 10



"RETENTION IS NOT ALL ABOUT MONEY."

— Steven Jomides, Lawns By Yorkshire

down to it. Any characteristics of a great artist are the kinds of things we're looking for — not just the creative side, but also the ability to work with a team."

The atmosphere you create has a lot to do with finding and developing all-stars. When he ran his own Green Industry company, Bruce Wilson sought to promote from within.

"We had a culture of train your replacement," says Wilson, now with the Wilson-Oyler Group consultancy and a *Landscape Management* columnist. "To move up, people had to train their replacements — so they would focus on coaching the better employees and encouraging them to step up."

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COVER STORY

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Wilson warns. "One thing about the government: They don't miss many opportunities to shove their hands in your pocket."

Rewards can have a positive effect on other workers, encouraging them to work harder, but there is one key caveat.

"Co-workers will learn to respect the stellar people in the organization," Jomides says. "Resentment comes when someone is granted stellar status who has not earned it."

Nature & nurture

How many business owners have fantasized about cloning their best employees and creating a staff of super sales reps, fantastic foremen and wonderful workers? The general consensus seems to be that while exceptional talent is a gift from God, whatever abilities exist in a person can be enhanced.

"The part of it you cannot train is their genuine interest to learn and good attitude," Weekley says. "You can't instill that. That comes from inside."

Some gifts come from above, and others from the home. "Family upbringing has a lot to do with this," adds Jomides.

Wherever it comes from, talents can be honed.

"If they have a great attitude and want to learn, then the rest of it you can build — whether it's loyalty to the company or production quality," Weekley says. **LM**

LOSING YOUR BEST SALES REP

One way to reward your best salesperson is to make him or her a manager. But what if that person is lousy with working with subordinates.

"This happens in a lot of companies with sales forces," Wilson says. "They have a really good salesperson and make him a sales manager. They lose their best sales person and promote a person who doesn't know how to manage people. That's very, very common. The challenge with that is your best sales person could get de-motivated if you pick somebody else to be the sales manager."

Weekley says it's worth the risk. "You'll never know if they can manage unless you give them a shot," he adds. "To not take the risk is to be satisfied with the status quo, which is fine if that is the track you're on." — DJ



Good workers aren't always good managers.

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