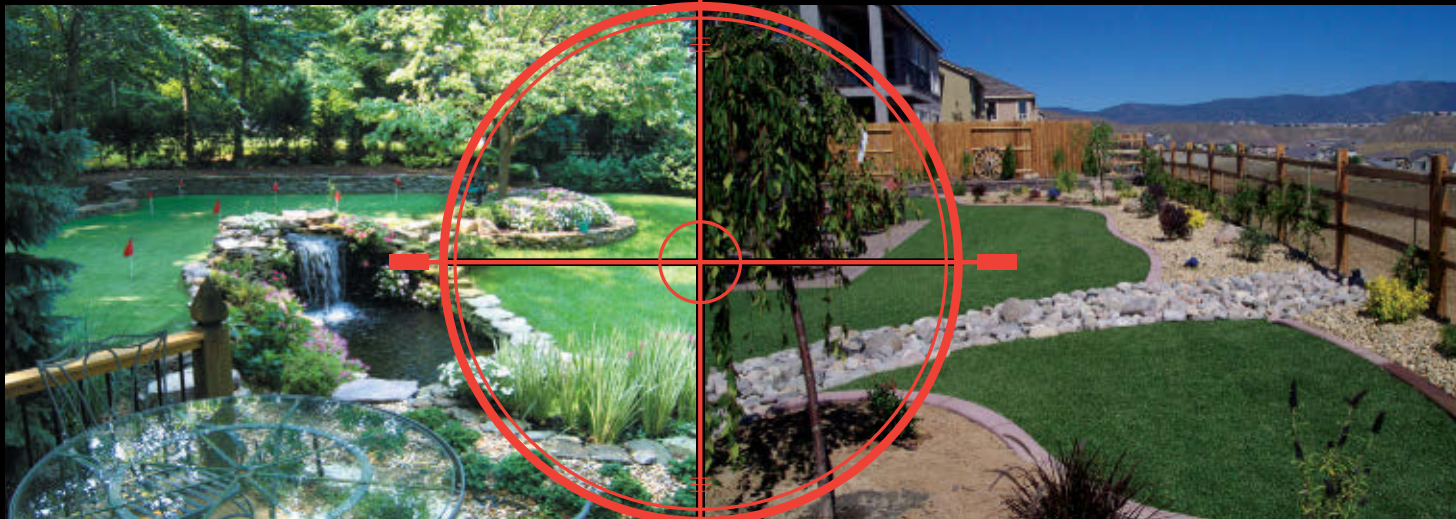


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COVER STORY

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and Scotts Lawn Service before founding his consultancy. "But if we work harder to find and deliver what matters most to each one of our employees — when it makes sense — then maybe we can find and keep more good people."

Show your employees you listen and truly care, and many (not necessarily most) will listen more closely and care more, in return. But sources say motivating a sluggish and/or grumpy employee to revolutionize his thinking and behavior is a team responsibility shared by all who touch that individual — the hiring manager, direct supervisor, training director and business owner — as well as, of course, the marginal man himself.

Hard look in the mirror

Once upon a time, in a land not so far away, a certain company held a three-day, off-site management meeting. When the meeting moderator asked



"MOST PEOPLE PROBLEMS BEGIN AT THE VERY BEGINNING"

— **Bill Hoopes**, Grassroots Training

each manager to openly share his or her Achilles' heel with the group, one of the enlightened actually proclaimed, "My biggest weakness is my people."

Sadly, Hoopes and other industry insiders say this manager is far from alone in playing the blame game. Many Green Industry managers need to take a hard look in the mirror. Perhaps then they'll see their biggest weakness is hiring, developing, motivating, rewarding and retaining good people.

"The single-biggest hindrance to developing productive teams is poor hiring — or, as they say in the tech world, 'garbage in, garbage out,'" Hoopes notes. "Most people problems begin at the very beginning."

Hoopes says most landscape and

lawn care companies have poor recruiting programs, if they have them at all. Many fail to leverage popular social media, such

as LinkedIn and Facebook, or even key virtual job boards including, among many others, HortJobs.com, CareerBuilder.com, Monster.com and Craigslis.com.

"Without cutting-edge recruiting tools, we'll never attract the best of the best," Hoopes says.

Landscapers also must improve their people interviewing and selection techniques. They also need to regularly sharpen their people's skill sets and job performance with mandated, formalized training and daily coaching, Hoopes says.

"Too many Green Industry businesses treat their people like any other resource — like a tire on a truck — when, in fact, people are *the* resource," Hoopes adds.

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Addition by subtraction

No doubt, the mirror reflects plenty of growth opportunity for hirers. But many times an employee is an under performer and/or has a bad attitude and is incorrigible. Hoopes and landscapers say slouches and grouches must not be tolerated.

“In these cases, you have to do something — and, for the record, doing nothing doesn’t qualify as ‘something,’” Hoopes says. “I work fast, using a three-strike system. It’s ‘grow or go’ time. People are too important to settle for less. We owe it to them, ourselves, and our companies and customers, to help these people reach higher ground fast.

“Be careful not to waste time trying to save a dead duck,” he warns. “Build a people culture to avoid the problem in the first place.”

Sometimes, cuts equal gains. Last summer, for example, Burlington, MA-based Mac’s Landscaping laid off seven of its 22 employees and individual productivity rose 25%.

“We cut four for under performing and three others for having bad attitudes — they weren’t team players and wouldn’t change,” says President Gerry “Mac” McCarthy. “Our 2009 sales were down 15% because of the recession, but we did the work with 33% less people.”

At age 55, McCarthy has ridden out a few economic storms: “1975 and ’89 were bad, but this, by far, is the toughest, longest-lasting recession I’ve endured — and I don’t see it ending until 2011.”

McCarthy’s two sons, Keith and Shawn, work for the business and

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4 PEOPLE PRINCIPLES

According to Bill Hoopes, president of Delaware, OH-based Grass Roots Training & Consulting, the cornerstones to maximizing individual productivity and minimizing people problems are:

1. Recognize that individual productivity begins with the hiring decision.
2. Reasonable expectations and procedures must be set, understood and accepted by all.
3. Realize initial socialization, training and transition to routine — transition from the warm-and-fuzzy training room to the often cold, wet and harsh real world — will have an impact on future productivity.
4. Team and individual activity (what you are doing) and performance (how you are doing it) must be tracked, and coupled with appropriate daily coaching responses. — MW

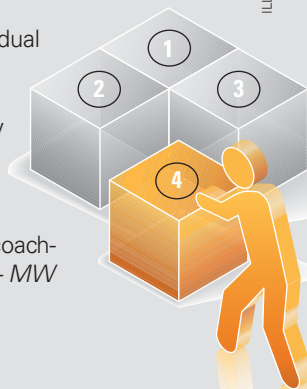


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“LESS THAN 10% OF SLOUCHES AND GROUCHES CAN BE TURNED AROUND”

— Kurt Kluznik, Yardmaster

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nudged Dad to part ways with “the strays and BAs” (bad attitudes).

“For 35 years I’ve been Mr. Nice Guy. I give employees first, second, third — you name it — chances,” McCarthy says. “But in this economy, there’s zero room for weak people — or those who employ them.”

Grow or go

“Less than 10% of employees who are slouches or grouches can be turned around,” says Kurt Kluznik, president

of Painesville, OH-based Yardmaster.

Kluznik should know: He’s attempted plenty of people makeovers since launching his now-300-employee, four-branch business 38 years ago.

“Of the select few I’ve seen do an about-face, many didn’t do so until they were working for themselves,” Kluznik notes. “I used to ask myself, ‘Why couldn’t we harness that?’ But I don’t any more. I now know the ‘it’ wasn’t there to harness — not then, not for us.”

On the people side of the green busi-

ness, little stays the same, Kluznik says.

“One of our branch managers was a real all-star, but fell far and hard,” he adds. “The guy was a solid hire and a well-liked manager for years. But, as it turns out, part of why he was so well liked was he would let his people take shortcuts and would clean up after them. It got to the point where even our best guys were taking advantage of him. He learned a hard lesson on the difference between being liked and being respected. A good manager earns both.”

A smart manager also knows how one individual, no matter his or her position, can sway the energy of an entire organization, Hoopes adds.

“I recently witnessed a CSR (customer service representative) take down an entire office with her infectious bad attitude,” Hoopes shares. “I wish I could say that ugly scenario is the exception, but I’d be lying through my teeth.” LM

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KEVIN KEHOE

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The first two rules of selling

The phone doesn't ring as much anymore. Does this mean there's no demand for your services? No, of course not. But it does mean that the days of simply answering the phone to sell work are over.

There's no way around it: You need to invest in a *sales organization*. A sales organization is built around an investment in *staffing* and *systems*. The question is, "What is the best way to make this investment?"

Spend enough money

The cost of making a sale is spread all over your profit and loss (P&L) statement, and therefore hard to see. There are salaries for staff (salespeople, designers and estimators), plus perks (benefits, vehicles, computers and phones), advertising expenses (phone books, direct mail, brochures, Web site and fliers), and promotional spending (events, gifts and entertainment).

Let's look at the cost of making a sale by segment using three \$2 million companies as a comparable baseline. Maintenance contractors spend 8% of revenues; design/build contractors spend about 10%, while bid/build contractors invest the least at 4% of revenues. While the relative mix of these costs varies, the total level of investment is consistent within each segment.

The first rule of selling is to invest enough money to create revenue.

Get more productive

The cost of making a sale is primarily staffing-related. This is because the most effective customer channel is what marketers call the *direct channel*. The primary tool in this channel is the sales representative.

Because sales reps are expensive, the key to your sales force return on investment (ROI) is to increase efficiency and monitor velocity. Efficiency is measured as dollars sold per dollars bid, and velocity as the total dollar volume bid per month. In

other words, staffing and systems must be designed to bid more — and do it faster.

A *pipeline report* is the primary management system essential to achieving this objective. Many contractors use a simple Excel database as the backbone of their system. The report is used weekly (and at times daily) to prioritize the four basic sales activities:

1. Lead generation
2. Appointment setting
3. Estimating/design, and
4. Presentation/closing.

Pipeline management addresses a problem that plagues many sales reps: ineffective prioritization and use of time.

In addition to the system, staffing specialization is required. Too often, sales reps burn too much time on activities where they are less effective. It makes little sense for a sales rep to measure, design, draw, estimate and wordsmith a proposal, for example. It is far more efficient to instead offload 70% to 80% of these activities onto administrative and production functions. Offloading can increase velocity 50% or more.

Many good sales people are inefficient at prospecting new leads, but very good at closing. Investing in a prospecting function that does little else but cold calling and appointment management can increase efficiency (close rates) 5 to 10 percentage points.

The second rule of selling is to divide and conquer the channel.

The payback for these strategies, of course, must be increased sales per sales rep. I have observed that deployment of these strategies can increase the production of sales staff 40% to 50%, making it possible for a grounds maintenance sales rep to sell more than \$1 million in new contracts, and design/build sales reps to close in excess of \$2.7 million in design/installations.

Because the customer is less likely to come to us, we have to go to them.