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How do you raise pay rates when you can't even raise prices? Experts share strategies in our exclusive **WAGE & BENEFITS REPORT**.

BY NICOLE WISNIEWSKI (B) (D/B) (I) (LC) (M)

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B – Business, D/B – Design/Build, I – Irrigation, LC – Lawn Care, M – Maintenance



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Follow your white rabbit

Alice in Wonderland has been called one of the best examples of the “literary nonsense” genre. Not really the biggest compliment. In fact, when the book was released in 1865 depicting a ‘Wonderland’ behind a small door reminiscent of the forbidden Cathedral Garden in which the author wasn’t allowed to play, it received little attention and poor reviews.

But by the end of the 19th century, Sir Walter Besant said it “was a book of that extremely rare kind which will belong to all the generations to come.”

From nonsense to infamy.

Alice has been on my mind a lot lately. During February’s Great Big Home & Garden Expo in Cleveland, OH, landscape contractor exhibitors created gardens inspired by films. Attendees were lined

up outside some of the most iconic, which included the *Alice in Wonderland* garden by Barnes Nursery. No one can deny the imagery an Alice-themed garden can inspire.

To become a literary classic, *Alice in Wonderland* had to be different, unusual. The author had to take extreme risks, fearing ridicule and failure.

As business owners, you make these same choices

everyday. You can choose to follow the status quo, conduct business as usual and be moderately successful as a result (the straight and narrow path). Or you can step outside of your comfort zone and do something completely different, risking failure and remarkable success beyond industry expectations and business norms (Wonderland). It’s a classic gamble where the resulting failures and successes are equally great.

One of the best examples of a risk-taking innovator who took a chance on an idea and is today experiencing great success while its main competitor suffers great failure is Netflix. When Netflix execs

first came up with their business model of mail-order video based on convenience and limited fees and labor costs, they took the concept to Blockbuster, and “they just about laughed us out of their office,” says Barry McCarthy, Netflix CEO.

Today, Blockbuster execs aren’t laughing. Netflix has more than 20 million members as of January. With a \$9 per month membership fee, that amounts to more than \$2 billion annually in gross revenue. Basically, “a small new entrant ran by a brilliant tech savvy individual tore the heart out of a giant video rental,” shares Don Seal of the Smallcap Network. “Blockbuster’s board members ... didn’t understand that generation ‘Y’ would rather watch TV on their laptops.”

Today, Blockbuster has stock trading at \$0.09 and is going through a slow, painful bankruptcy, while Netflix remains one of the hottest stocks, trading at \$217 per share, Seal explains.

All because one business was thinking outside of the box and the other was “too little, too late,” Seal says.

If the rise and fall of Blockbuster has taught us anything it’s “evolve or fall by the wayside,” points out Mike Schuster, a Minyanville.com staff writer.

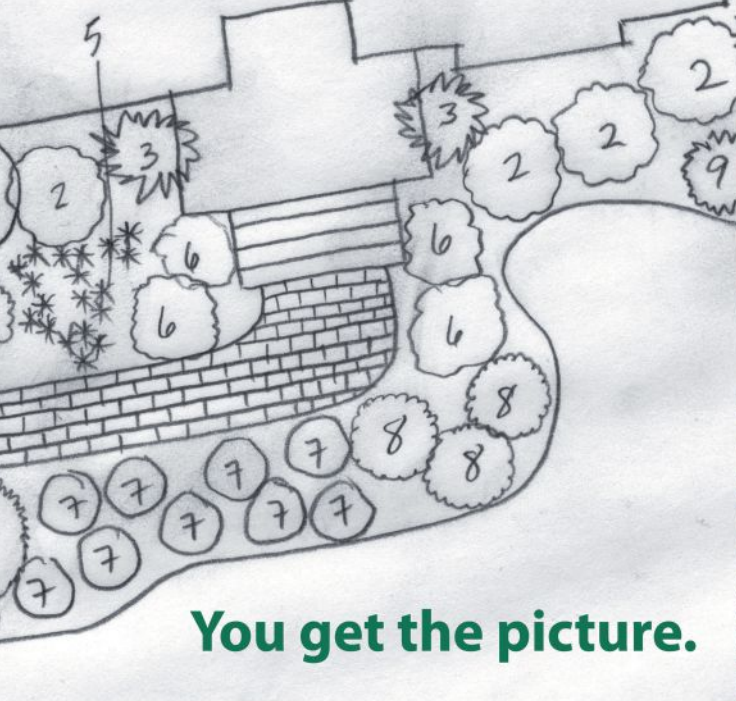
While it’s not easy to translate Netflix’s idea to the landscape industry, it’s not as hard as you think to put a new spin on something you do. At PLAN-ET’s Executive Forum this February, innovation was the theme, and I was surrounded by new ideas. Yardmaster’s Kurt Kluznik tried a weekend work schedule to gain better equipment utilization (see more on page 28). Davey Tree helped the USDA Forest Service develop i-Tree to track the relevance and value of trees on properties (see more on page 14). Dennis’ Seven Dees Landscaping’s David Snodgrass introduced “checkbook” thinking to his foremen to help them better understand job costs.

The ideas don’t have to be big or transform the industry. In fact, they may even prove unsuccessful. That’s the risk you take. If the new concept ultimately improves the way you and your people think, you win.

The lesson: Never be afraid to follow your white rabbit. You never know where it’ll take you.



Tea party anyone? Barnes Nursery’s *Alice in Wonderland* garden.



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COMMON

senses

Consumer confidence levels got you down? Help clients relax ... in the landscape.

BY NICOLE WISNIEWSKI EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Built or urban environments with the hustle and bustle of traffic, work and crime tend to evoke stress. Even just thinking about these spaces can make people feel edgy. Pile that on to recent low consumer confidence levels and the outlook is rather grim.

But there's a reason why researchers say urbanites escape to beaches and parks for vacation: Natural spaces help them reduce stress by taking necessary breaks from these highly noisy and visually complex environments.

In fact, natural settings have been favored during two to 3 million years of evolution, so it's possible people may even be genetically inclined to respond positively to them, according to Roger Ulrich, professor and director of the Center for Health Systems & Design at Texas A&M's College of Architecture.

"While the sensory qualities of sight, touch, sound, etc. suggest something a bit different to each of us, we share common threads in our response patterns to natural elements," agrees David Slawson, a landscape artist and designer with more than 30 years of experience and author of books on Japanese-inspired garden



Compositions of water, plants and walls create distinct garden experiences. Thin rivulets of water fall into a shallow pool, creating a bright sound to help muffle nearby traffic noise.

design. Slawson highlighted design inspirations that come from popular landscape elements during "The Art of Evoking the Natural World in Restorative Gardens" at the Cleveland Botanical Garden's 6th annual Sustainability Symposium this February. "Certain natural patterns have universal appeal."

"You can design an outdoor space that

uniquely invites each person to be a part of the experience, connecting themselves to the larger world," adds David Kamp, landscape architect and founder of Dirtworks, PC, as well as designer of the Elizabeth and Nona Evans Restorative Garden at the Cleveland Botanical Gardens and keynote presenter at the Sustain-

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The stone retaining wall defines and separates gardens. The 6-ft. wall steps in height and features cascading plants, water features and interesting native stones.

continued from page 8

ability Symposium, speaking on “Creating Restorative Environments.” “We want to emphasize a close connection to nature in our design solutions — we believe this is essential to the health and well-being of ourselves and our communities.”

Both Kamp and Slawson shared their tips for creating these healing spaces with approximately 60 landscape professionals during the symposium. Whether creating a public garden or one intended for a client’s private use, there are restorative elements that can be used to make every space more memorable and valued, both professionals agreed. It all starts with the senses.



The sense of **SIGHT**: seeing is believing

Kamp uses plants as a veil to create intimacy in larger spaces

but also provide a way to peek through and see more. Reflective ponds can also enhance the sense of sight by doubling natural images, he says.

Slawson draws visual inspiration from beautiful, well-loved landscape elements, such as a misty lake or a

mountain ridge. He recreates these elements in a space by using various plants to replicate the inspiration — differing heights of spruce, for instance, to evoke a mountain ridge.

“Meandering lines always invite visitors to enjoy the journey,” Slawson adds, pointing out another visually intriguing element in landscape design. “An ‘S’ curve suggests hidden mysteries around the corner — people prefer them to straight lines every time.” Exaggerating this pattern, Slawson has also drawn landscape design inspiration from the spiral galaxy pattern of the Milky Way, another soft and home-inspiring shape people tend to embrace.

Mimicking the effects of weather on the landscape can also create inspiring visuals. Slawson suggests copying the look of wind-blown trees.



The sense of **TOUCH**: a touch of Zen

Kamp incorporated a variety of textured stones

and planting pockets into a retaining wall in the Elizabeth and Nona Evans Restorative Garden. The 6-ft. wall cre-

ates separation for “private moments in a public setting,” Kamp says, and “ranges of touch within a small space.” This creates layers of sensation from the cool moisture of a water feature to fuzzy mossy plants, prickly leaves and hard and smooth rock edges.



The sense of **SOUND**: selective hearing

Slawson suggests landscape professionals study and copy water patterns in landscape design. Single thread water falls or braided falls, for instance, are not only peaceful to view, as people watch the water cascade over rocks in a specific pattern, but they also bring soothing and interesting sounds. In the case of the Cleveland Botanical Gardens restorative garden, these sounds also muffle other undesirable noises like traffic.



The senses of **SMELL & TASTE**: ‘scent’sational spaces

Creating areas of tension, as Kamp describes them, can enhance certain sensory experiences. In the Elizabeth and Nona Evans Restorative Garden, he created a wide path that slowly becomes narrow. This smaller pathway is then cascaded over on each side by various types of basil plants. The combination creates an intoxicating scent, “one that even goes home with you on your sweater as you brush by the basil,” Kamp says, adding that this could go one step further inspiring what that person then chooses to have for dinner.

Heightening the senses in the landscape by creating areas where people see a beautiful space, hear water and birds, “enjoy fragrances and catch their breath takes a level of detail and focus,” Kamp explains.

And designing to enhance the senses in a client’s space is worth it, Slawson adds, because it “makes customer experiences more memorable” - and you more memorable as their service provider. **LMM**