

# BUSINESS PLANNER 2012



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Whether your business thrives — or simply survives — over the next year depends on the business strategies you implement in 2012.



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# RUNNING A BETTER BUSINESS IN 2012

With so much focus on the recession, business owners sometimes forget what they're working for.

BY **DAN JACOBS** EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

I've been writing about business owners a long time. I never cease to be amazed at the ingenuity, resourcefulness and dedication they show when it comes to running their enterprises.

The challenges they face — from the small mundane daily issues to the large, seemingly intractable ones — make those of us content to sit behind a desk and write about it wonder why anybody would attempt to start and run a business. But run them you do, and most of you do it well.

*Landscape Management* has always touted itself as "the business book" for the Green Industry. Our objective has always been to help you run your businesses more efficiently and more profitably in hopes that you'd have more time to spend with your families and on the things you enjoy outside the office.

That's why we've spent so much time writing recently (and in this issue in particular) about the recession. For most of us, the economic worries have required us to put more focus on work and less on what we're working for.



For that reason (among many others) it might be hard to imagine, but in some ways this economic slowdown has been good for business. Before you start sending hate mail, let me explain. Yes, increased competition from low-bidders driving down prices, increased taxes and regulation, higher fuel costs, a lack of consumer confidence and cash flow worries (among many other factors) have made running your business more difficult. I get that. The publishing business, or for that matter any business, is dealing with a host of challenges.

Knowing that everyone else is going through the same thing isn't my point here. Misery might love company, but even the best company gets old after long. Instead, the point is this: If you've survived this prolonged recession, you are a better businessperson than you were when you went into it. Sure, it's been a trial by fire,

but I suspect your operations are leaner, more efficient and more profitable

(at least on a per project basis). And when the downturn eases, when the housing market rebounds and when customers reopen their wallets, the lessons you've learned — been forced to learn — will serve you better.

So, while you continue to work at what you do best, we'll continue to do

what we do best, which is tell your stories. Our goal is to help you do your jobs better by learning from those who are doing it well.

In this, our annual Business Planner issue, we talk with a number of contractors who've learned strategies to combat the issues bred in these weak economic times.

You'll hear from contractors on a variety of topics, which we've divided into four categories: Leadership, people, finances and social networking. Those areas are key to your continued growth no matter what state the economy is in.

Consider this our collectors' edition. The business planner (and for that matter the entire issue) is full of tips, tricks and strategies to not only help get you through this recession — no matter how long it lasts — but also to continue to grow in the midst of it.

And that, ultimately, will allow us to get back to what we're working for. **LM**



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# THE JOURNEY STARTS BY TAKING THAT FIRST STEP

Even successful business owners sometimes need a little push in the right direction. BY PHIL HARWOOD

**M**ike called on a Monday afternoon. He told me he'd been putting off this call for months, hoping he'd be in a better financial situation before calling me. We talked for a while. Actually, it was mostly Mike talking and me listening.

He was frustrated, and he shared with me his concerns about the direction of his company. He felt like he had lost his sense of direction. He also had some things to say about his employees, the industry, and even his marriage.

As it turned out, the day before Mike called me, he'd had a conversation with his father, who told him to get some business advice from an experienced person. His father reminded him of a verse from Proverbs that says: "Listen to advice and accept instruction and in the end you will be wise" (19:20) and another that says: "The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice" (12:15). Mike knew this to be true, but needed his father's counsel to motivate him to action, to overcome his fear.

Many business owners and managers are held back by their fears. They fear that someone will find out that everything isn't perfect. They fear that others won't follow them as a leader if they don't

have all of the answers. They fear the unknown.

Mike was afraid, too. He was afraid of losing all that he had built over the past two decades. He was afraid of who he was becoming.

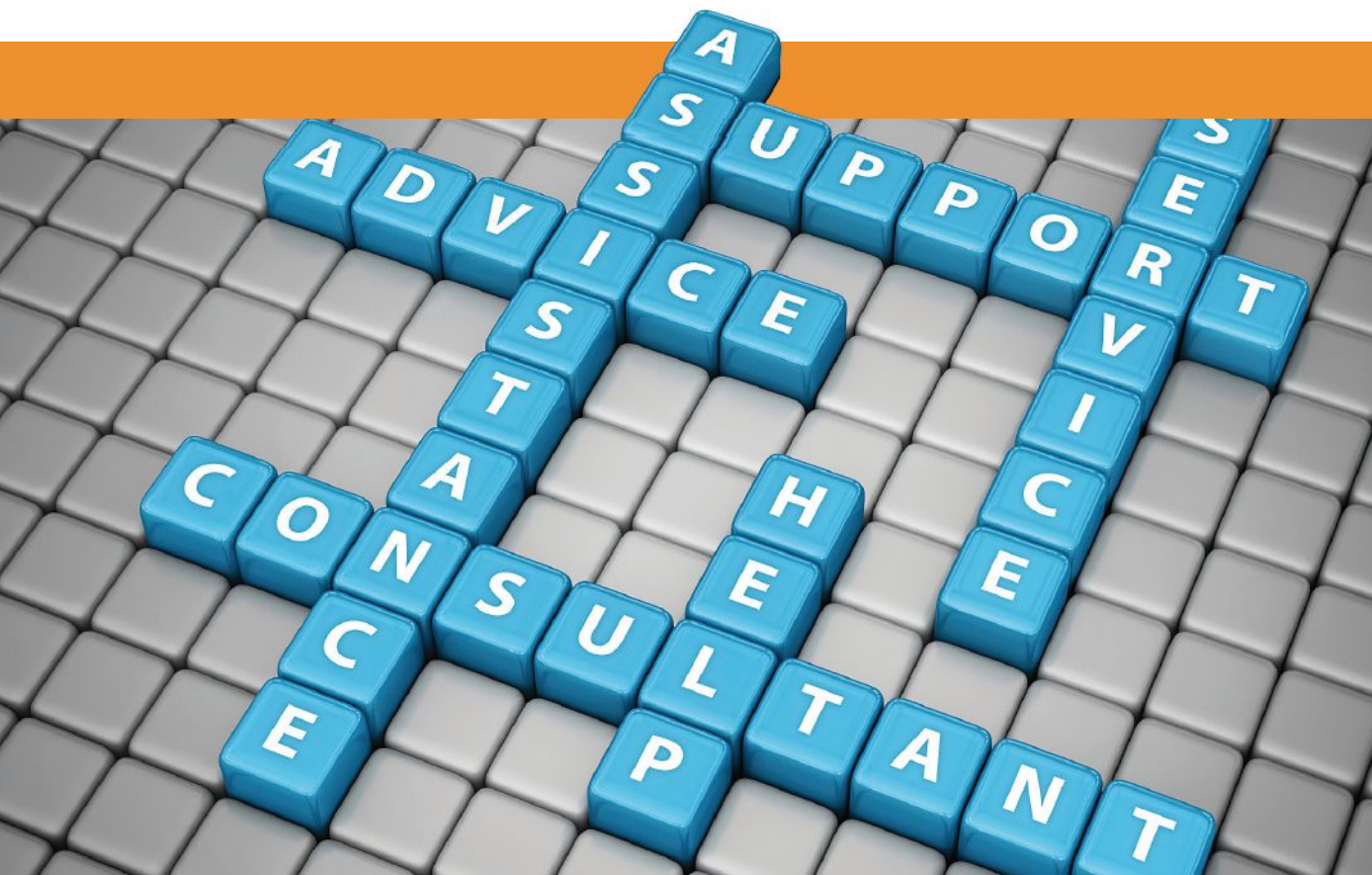
Mike needed help. He had been in business for more than 20 years and had been relatively successful. His landscape company had exceeded \$7 million in annual revenues. He was active in his community and was a well-respected business owner. He and his wife lived in a beautiful home on a golf course with their three children and their dog. To the outside world, Mike was the picture of success.

While Mike was an intelligent, driven and focused person for most of his career, he had lost his way as a leader. He was in a rut. Instead of being decisive, he was second-guessing himself. Instead of leading the charge, he was hiding. He felt out of control and didn't know what to do about it. So he called me.

## TURNING THE TIDE

I began working with Mike and his leadership team, meeting on a regular basis, in-person and by email and phone. Over the course of the next few months, we identified a number of business problems and worked together to implement solutions to address these problems. Problems that had long been ignored were addressed head-on and fixed. A sense of teamwork and camaraderie had replaced complacency and self-interest. Employee satisfaction improved, followed by customer retention and increased profitability.

For Mike and his team, this was a life-changing experience. For me, and for my consulting team, this was just what we do. After all, the business



problems Mike was facing were not unique to him, even though I would have never been able to convince him that this was the case. In fact, Mike's problems were very common — textbook, even. The rest of this article discusses Mike's Top 2 business problems, and the solutions we implemented.

You may think this article is simple self-promotion. It is not. Rather, I'm attempting to make a case for seeking out objective, outside advisors. In order to do so, I'm giving you a "behind-the-scenes" look at my world so you may learn from this situation.

Before exposing these problems — and their solutions — I want to warn you that they don't involve the latest fads in business. Instead, they involve basic principles of managing a business. I know this sounds boring. However, in most industries, everyone is looking for the magic bullet. Everyone is chasing the latest gimmick. Nobody wants to discuss the basics, even though the fundamentals are what really matter. The color of the car is meaningless if all four tires are flat.

## PROBLEM #1: ACCOUNTABILITY

Somewhere along the way, Mike stopped holding people accountable. It wasn't a conscious decision. However, three factors were working against him. First, it took a lot of effort to follow through and hold his people accountable. Second, he didn't

like to be held accountable himself, and he didn't want to appear hypocritical. Third, he was afraid of losing good people. He was a nice guy and didn't want to come down on his employees.

Mike knew that he had allowed this culture to exist, but he didn't know what to do about it. The reality was that he had actually lost some great people who were frustrated working in this environment. Of course, the mediocre people were more than content, making matters even worse. Once Mike realized this fact, he changed his tune.

Accountability starts at the top. With Mike on board, we implemented a number of tools, including the establishment of team goals and incentives. We built scorecards for each team to monitor results, and we began to document commitments made at team meetings. Once everyone knew what their goals and incentives were, things started to come together. Teams formed. Projects started moving. Sales results increased.

## PROBLEM #2: ORGANIZATION

Like most of my clients, Mike's organizational house was not in order when we first met. Lines of reporting were murky at best; the general design was flawed to begin with, and it did not support the company's strategy.

It wasn't Mike's fault. He had a bachelor's of

science degree from a major university in agronomy, not a business degree. His lack of knowledge in this area was immediately evident.

Working through Mike's leadership team, we changed the design of his organizational structure, clarified 100% of the reporting relationships, and established teams at every level. Along the way, we had to make some personnel changes and clarify new roles. Not everyone survived unblemished.

## LESSONS LEARNED

With this new organizational design and the clarification of roles in place, morale improved dramatically and productivity soared. Mike commented that he had not seen such energy since the earliest days of his company.

Accountability and good organizational design are two basic building blocks of a healthy company. There are many others equally important as these. Unfortunately, business owners are easily distracted. Focusing on "unexciting" things like accountability is not on the top of their list, even when it should be. This is why an outside advisor is so critical — to bring clarity to what's really important, and to help the company address these issues.

What about you? What are you going to do this year to improve your business? How are you going to step outside of your business and look at it objectively when you're in the trenches every day? I have two pieces of advice:

First, don't be afraid to open up to an outside advisor. Mike overcame his fear and picked up the phone that fateful Monday. This took both guts and a

financial commitment. His business — and his life — will never be the same.

I had the same experience as Mike. The health of my landscape business improved dramatically when we engaged an experienced business advisor. I'm a believer in getting advice from outsiders with an objective perspective. In fact, I have my own business coach.

Second, focus on the basics before chasing the latest fad. Business fundamentals haven't changed in hundreds of years. This requires knowledge, focus and determination. Do you have what it takes on your own? I know I don't. *L.M.*

*Phil Harwood is the founder of Pro-Motion Consulting, a strategic management consulting firm with clients throughout North America. Phil may be reached at 248/756-8035 or at [philharwood@pro-motionconsultingllc.com](mailto:philharwood@pro-motionconsultingllc.com).*

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# How BOSS LM Software Helped Klausing Group Achieve Their Highest Profits Ever.

## The Klausing Group

Located in Lexington, Kentucky, Klausing Group focuses on the commercial market by offering comprehensive ground management services. Roscoe Klausing, President, believes that every office park, property management or industrial client that hires Klausing entrusts that decision to a person who views their responsibility as getting the job done right. This is right in tune with the Klausing Group's promise: We make you and your property look great.

## Looking For Solutions

About six years ago, the Klausing management team decided that to better serve their clients, Klausing would implement an enterprise business management software solution.

## The Lessons Of Poor Software

"The software was just not user friendly and support was poor and expensive, which made us reluctant to use it," Roscoe said. Worse still, he couldn't trust the information he was relying on to make day-to-day decisions. Roscoe still laments loss of a \$350K account because the job costing information he relied on from his enterprise system led him to submit an unreasonably high renewal bid.

## BOSS LM To The Rescue

Still believing in the hope of an enterprise tool, Roscoe found BOSS LM business management software from The Integra Group.

## Up & Running Fast

With Klausing Group's enterprise experience, the transition to BOSS LM was swift and the system went live in less than two months. Klausing Group found the methodical fit-gap approach used by Integra Group very appealing.

## The Powerful Fit-Gap Process

Roscoe commented that, "...the fit-gap process was extremely valuable because we were able to pinpoint specific operational procedures needing attention before implementing BOSS." The results are real time and the management team now uses information they can trust.

## Employee & Other Advantages

The new user friendly system means every employee managing data vital to operational success enters that data themselves. Quarterly account-by-account audits use to take Klausing 1-2 days. With BOSS, data feeds seamlessly to the Accounting System and the CPA is done before lunch on the first day.

## Spectacular Support

"...support from The Integra Group has been spectacular. I have no other supplier that has developed such a partnership-oriented relationship."

## BOSS LM Produces Profits

A year after implementing BOSS LM, Roscoe says, "...our profits are the best they have ever been and I attribute much of that result to BOSS LM."

## Favorite Feature Is In The Cloud

And, Roscoe wouldn't let you go without telling you what he sees as the single biggest BOSS LM feature—Web-based functionality. "I can access the system wherever I am through the web and still be in touch." Straight from his iPhone, Roscoe stays abreast of critical issues with a real-time view into the business. His BOSS system helps him achieve total control of his business.

Roscoe would ask, can your software do that?

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# THE CATA LIST FOR TAKING EFFECTIVE ACTION

Powerful actions have the ability to initiate powerful results. BY **JOELLE JAY, PH.D.**

**W**hat distinguishes the mediocre leader with so-so results from the effective leader who makes a big impact every time? The answer is the ability to take effective action.

There's a big difference between taking action and taking *effective* action. Most leaders are fairly good at taking action. They make lists and check items off those lists everyday. To be truly effective, you've got to be more strategic about the items that go on that list. Instead of just putting down every small action that will move you to your vision step by step, you've got to choose one or two high-impact actions that launch you forward in leaps and bounds. This approach helps you turn motion to momentum.

To illustrate this, we can think of a concept from chemistry: the catalyst. In the sciences, a catalyst is a substance that increases the rate of a chemical reaction without being consumed in the process. For you, a catalyst is an action that dramatically increases the rate at which you

achieve your vision, without consuming you. The goal for leaders who want to be their most effective and get the best possible results is to look for the catalysts in their action plans – those powerful actions that have the ability to initiate powerful, even transformational results.

You can get the potency of a catalyst by using an action plan appropriately called the CATA List. The CATA List is a chart divided into four categories:

1. Catalysts
2. Achievements
3. Tasks
4. Avoidances

These categories help you sort interminable lists of “To-Dos” to find the ones that pack the biggest punch.

## CATALYSTS

To find your catalysts, ask yourself, “What is the one thing you could do that would have the greatest impact on your vision?”

Any item you call a “catalyst” must be an action that drives all the rest, either because it causes the rest of the actions to happen; it frees you to put your time where you want it; or it unlocks a barrier to action. The main criterion for your catalyst is that you know this one piece will do more than any other to advance you in the direction of your vision. If you're writing a speech, a catalyst might be to stand up and practice. If you're leading a company, a catalyst might be to communicate the strategic direction. You can see how easily catalysts get crowded out by more pressing issues. Indeed, even though your catalysts have the most value, if you're not careful they can easily get pushed aside.

To find your catalysts, think about what action you would take if you could find uninterrupted quality time because you know it would make the biggest difference in your ability to attain your vision.





## ACHIEVEMENTS

The next category includes actions you classify as important...really important. They may not have the transformational effect of your catalysts, but they are the kinds of achievements that matter on a day-to-day basis. These achievements typically take center stage in your life. They tend to be:

- › daily actions
- › key relationships
- › priority projects
- › deadlines

As a rule, working on achievements makes for a very productive day.

## TASKS

You use the “tasks” category for the actions you’d like to take but can’t justify as truly critical. Yes, they are things that may have to get done, but they don’t have nearly the impact as your catalysts

and achievements.

Tasks are big time consumers such as long meetings, some networking, or obsessive perfecting of non-essential details. You might feel a little twinge when you admit these tasks are less-than-important, because you may want to do them. And you may get to. But only after the more valuable things are done.

## AVOIDANCES

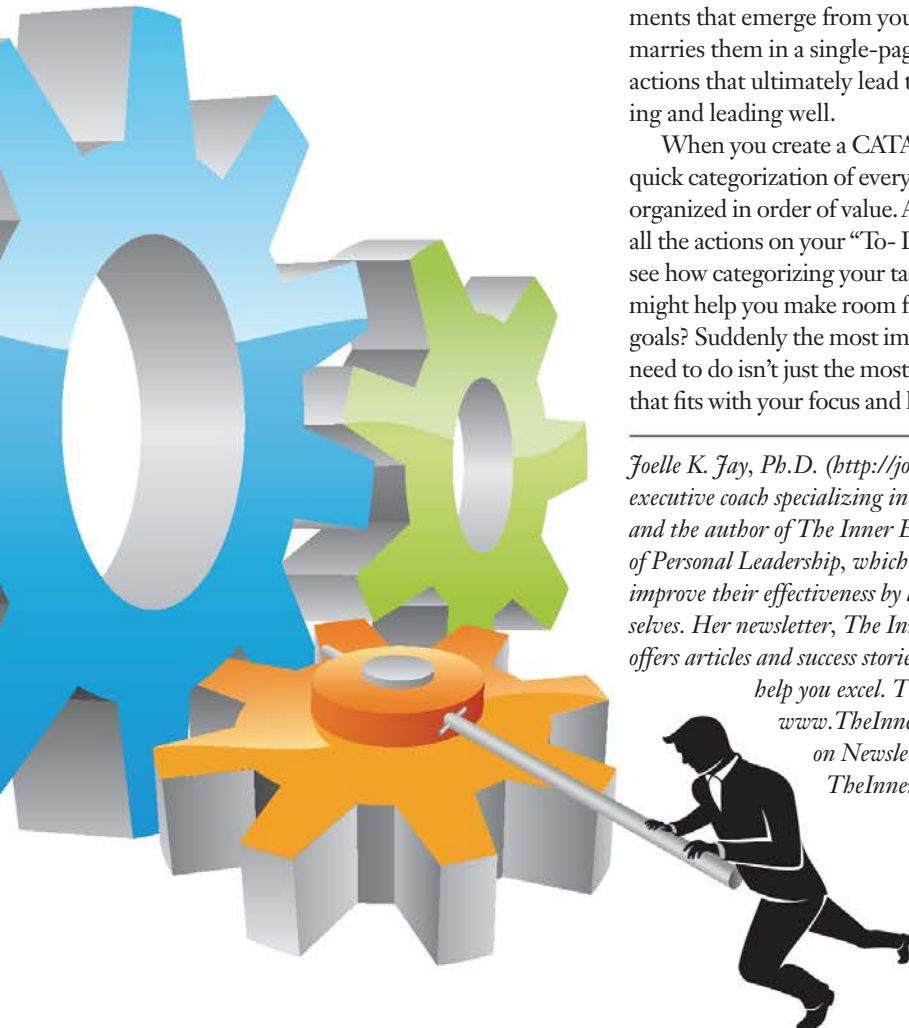
The items in this category take more energy than they deserve. When you’re trying to rid your action plan of excess, cut the fat by forcing yourself to put at least 25 percent of your “To-Dos” onto this list. Look for actions that take a lot of time with little return. The “avoidances” list is a place to throw off extra baggage. Letting some actions go undone allows you to be more available for the things that really matter.

As a whole, the CATA List takes the commitments that emerge from your focus areas and marries them in a single-page, concrete list of actions that ultimately lead to your vision for living and leading well.

When you create a CATA List, you have a quick categorization of everything you need to do, organized in order of value. As you think about all the actions on your “To-Do” list now, can you see how categorizing your tasks in order of value might help you make room for working on your goals? Suddenly the most important thing you need to do isn’t just the most pressing; it’s the one that fits with your focus and leads to your vision. **LM**

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# GIVE EMPLOYEES



How to develop employees to think, act and care as you do. BY JEFFREY SCOTT

**M**any companies today are leaving money on the table. Profits are falling through the cracks. Your employees are key to solving this issue. The question is: How do you motivate your employees to do their very best, and take the extra steps needed to increase profitability?

Fear doesn't work as a consistent motivator. A bit of it is actually helpful to keep you on your

toes, but extended periods of fear cause stress, burnout and lower peak performance.

The opposite of fear, entitlement, also doesn't work. Entitlement thinking is what has gotten our country into trouble.

But there is a viable third way: Encourage employees to think and act like an owner. Ownership thinking is a proven way to recruit, train, manage and incentivize your employees. (See sidebar, page 94.)

Remember, "Do as I say" only gets you so far. While it is critical to have operational systems and good equipment in place for an employee to succeed, all of your employees already own the most important piece of equipment needed for success: their brains. Your job is to engage employees, so that they engage their brains and bodies in the fight for profits.