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MORE TERMINATING TIPS

› Don't make inappropriate comments about the employee verbally or via email. Be careful about what you write in emails about employees whose performance might warrant termination. Those emails are discoverable in a litigation case.

› Download all the employee's computer information before your meeting in case it's deleted.

› Be prepared to divert email correspondence to a point person so you don't lose continuity with your customers.

› Prevent his or her ability to tap into the company's email or server.

› Don't share the bad news through social media. This will make the company vulnerable.

continued from page 48

This job is no longer a good fit. Today is your last day."

Managers who feel bad about having to fire an employee sometimes will try to soften the blow to the employee during the meeting. Remember to be truthful about the reason for the termination. Be concise and stick to your line.

Finally, collect assigned items such as credit cards, keys, phone, vehicle and computer files. Consider whether the employee will be allowed to collect his belongings from his desk, or whether the company will pack them up and send them to him. If the employee has company files at home, determine how to obtain those files. After the meeting is concluded and all is well, debrief to see how it went. Learn from any mistakes and make needed adjustments.

Remember to show respect and dignity. Employees at all levels deserve to be treated well when their employment is being terminated, whether it's because of performance, behavior or financial reasons. If you're the employer or manager, treat the person, whose life

this news will be dramatically changing, with as much dignity and respect as possible. Handling an employee termination in anything but a professional manner can have serious and costly legal consequences.

Handling this part of your business

correctly, fairly and consistently will make it easier and less painful. **LM**

Arman is co-founder of the Harvest Group, a landscape and business consulting/coaching firm. Reach him at bill@barvestlandscapeconsulting.com.

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HOW-TO



Work effectively with your spouse

BY ROGER MCCARTHY & SUE MCCARTHY

Roger McCarthy and Sue McCarthy met in 2003, got married in 2004 and started working together soon afterward, when Sue “temporarily” joined Roger’s business, McCarthy’s Landscaping & Irrigation, after being laid off from an environmental services company. Eight years later, she’s still there. And she’s been an integral part of the 15-year-old, West Boylston, Mass., firm’s growth. The couple has learned working together isn’t always easy, but it can be rewarding. They offer some tips for other Green Industry husband-wife teams. —MARISA PALMIERI

She says

He says

I’M ITALIAN. So, the most challenging thing for me is to remember he’s the boss. It’s our future, it’s our retirement, so I do have a lot of input, but it’s Roger’s company.

OUR OFFICE IS 500 FEET FROM OUR HOUSE. We look out our back window and there’s the building, trucks and trailers. It got to the point where we were talking about work all the time, so we put some rules into place. While I’m making dinner, we’ll talk about the workday. Once dinner’s on the table, it’s over. In the beginning it was tough to wait to talk about things until tomorrow. It took about two years from when I started working with him before we got to that point. We were trying to improve and get systems in place, so there was a lot to talk about. Once we were on an even keel we said, “This can’t be our life all the time.”

WE NEVER WORK ON A SUNDAY AND RARELY ON SATURDAYS. It took a lot to separate ourselves, but once we did it was better for us as a couple. But it’s still hard, even for me. Once we went away for the weekend and I said, “What do you want to do with that invoice?” He said, “We’ll talk about it Monday.” And I said, “Yes we will.”

I HAVE ONE SON. He’s 27. He’s worked for the company since 2004. Last year he got into a motorcycle accident. He hasn’t been able to work for over a year. It put everything into perspective. We hope he’ll be able to come back next season.

YOU’VE GOT TO WATCH EACH OTHER’S STRESS LEVEL. Roger had a heart attack at 41 years old. He doesn’t smoke. Doesn’t eat bad. It was all stress related. After that he went from working 90 hours a week to maybe 70. We had started not talking about work at home around the same time. Sometimes he has a lot on his plate. He keeps it all on his plate instead of asking for help. I have to say, “Stop. Take a breath. And what can I take off your plate?”

IT’S CHALLENGING TO SEPARATE CHURCH AND STATE. We work together. We live together. We spend a lot of time together.

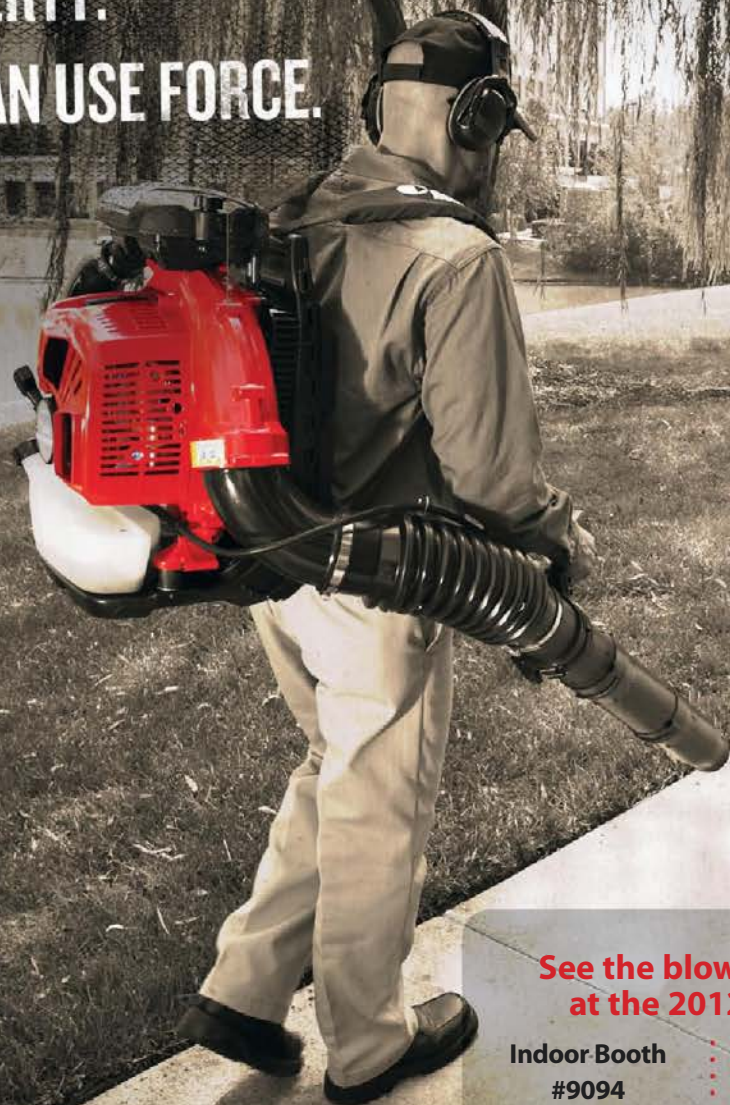
MAKE SURE YOU SEPARATE YOUR TASKS. Set up job descriptions for each person so they know what they’re going to do and don’t step on each other’s toes. The first couple years Sue joined, it was crazy for me to let go of everything and try not to micromanage her, not worry about what she was going to do and how it was going to be done. I’d been doing all the invoicing, billing, setting my own appointments and sometimes back then I was in the field, too. I knew my life would get easier, but having done it for so long with my way of doing it, it was tough to let her take over certain things.

SHE’S ALWAYS GOT MY BACK. I can walk away and not worry that she’s going to let things slip through the cracks. She proved it and my guys proved themselves back in 2006 when I had a heart attack and I was removed completely for a few weeks and part time for a few weeks. I worried about things because it’s just who I am to worry, but the customers really didn’t even know I was out unless someone told them.

WE TRY TO ENJOY EACH OTHER. We don’t work on Sundays. We really limit our Saturdays. Even for our employees, Saturdays are strictly a rain day. Allowing your employees to have two-day weekends, they’ll work harder for you Monday through Friday.

YOUR RELATIONSHIP HAS TO BE STRONG OUTSIDE OF WORK BECAUSE WORK WON’T MAKE IT STRONG. If you don’t have a strong relationship emotionally, spiritually or however you define it, working together won’t make it stronger. It will drive it apart. There are so many pressures on meeting expectations: customers, financial institutions, payroll. You know the old saying, “When money troubles walk through the door, love flies out the window.” It’s the same in a business. **LM**

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HOW-TO

Establish business systems

BY PAUL WOLBERT

As business owners or managers, we've spent years trying to implement the secret of success by attending seminars, reading books and magazines, and listening to CDs about business systems and standards. When we're done with those things, we return to our businesses and are swamped by real life events that pose everyday challenges, and we never get to implement the ideas we just learned about.

All of us have heard advice from others: We need to systemize our businesses and set standards. This is probably the most important project to complete because it will go a long way to ensure short- and long-term success.

Systemization starts with documenting how we do what we do. This task has many names: systems, operations, and policies and procedures manuals. Whatever it's called, the purpose is to capture the collective intelligence or know-how of the business (the why, what, when, where, who and how of what a business does). Hence the business system.

The most important processes to capture are:

SALES, which describes how your business finds prospects, presents quotes and closes sales.

DELIVERY OR FULFILLMENT, which details how your product or service is delivered to your customers.

CUSTOMER SERVICE, which shows how your business stays in contact with your customers over time.

Others' systems might include: advertising and marketing; accounts payable, receivable and payroll; recruiting, hiring, inducting, training and performance; production, routing and scheduling; safety and quality; and administration, reception and record keeping.

To start capturing this information, start with a basic Word document, and write the simple steps that show how your company works through the process. Then expand on each step with a paragraph or two about the important steps involved, so it starts to become specific to your company. Write it as you would say it if you just hired a new salesperson. There is no wrong way to do this.

For each step, continue to identify the steps needed. Example: "How to

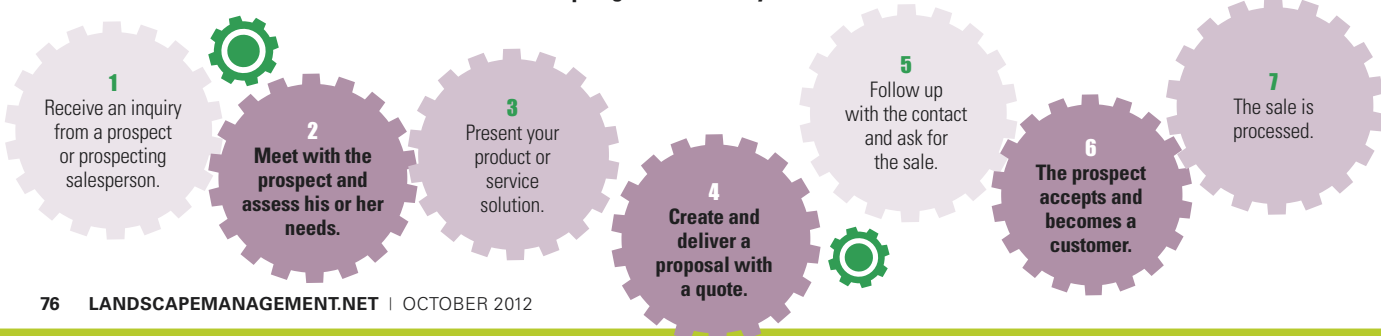
arrange a meeting with a customer" could be the title of a document that might be required to train new employees. Next, expand the detail. Once completed, you might have three, five or more pages that explain the actions required. Don't forget about the rules and guidelines that govern the decisions along the way. The bottom line is you need to make a profit. Typically, when one system ends, another starts. Be careful, and follow the plan.

Measure the effectiveness of your systems. When your systems are working, you'll know because you'll have:

- no customer complaints;
- high customer satisfaction;
- on-time service;
- no team complaints;
- high productivity;
- met goals and objectives; and
- a bottom-line increase.

Now for the test. Ask employees to explain a system. Then compare what they described to you with your interpretation. Additionally, conduct a customer satisfaction survey (you need to know what they're thinking), and ask your customers about their experiences with your business. You want to hear it all—positive and negative.

SALES SYSTEM EXAMPLE Here's a simple, generic sales system.





QUICK TIP

At each step in any system, analyze its effectiveness by looking at the inputs and outputs and measuring the result. In many cases, you'll have to decide what your goals are for the system is delivering.

At each step in any system, analyze its effectiveness by looking at the inputs and outputs and measuring the results. In many cases, you'll have to determine what your goals are for certain steps first to determine if the system is delivering. For example, in the sales system, a goal could be the number of new proposals that end up as contracts. If you have set a standard or goal, you'll be able to measure the result and determine if the system needs to be adjusted.

A business with an up-to-date operations manual will experience higher productivity, because staff will execute tasks properly without continuously asking for clarity. It also will experience better staff accountability and greater customer satisfaction and confidence, resulting in higher sales and increased repeat business. Plus, it's easier to train new employees and cross-train existing employees. The owner also will be able to delegate more because he's not the only one with the important information, and there will be greater control of the flow of information throughout the business.

Be careful with the tasks of writing documents and creating folders, files, forms and checklists, or you may find yourself quickly developing another dilemma: how to organize and deliver the contents logically. In this case, less

is more. There are many tools available, such as software programs, to help you develop a systems manual. Yes, there's an app for that. Look around at the new software on the market.

It's critical to make a plan for the whole project at the start. Research the

available tools and expertise required to evaluate your intended method before jumping in too far. Look for the improvements at the bottom line. **LM**

Wolbert is vice president of U.S. Lawns. Contact him at PWolbert@uslawns.com.



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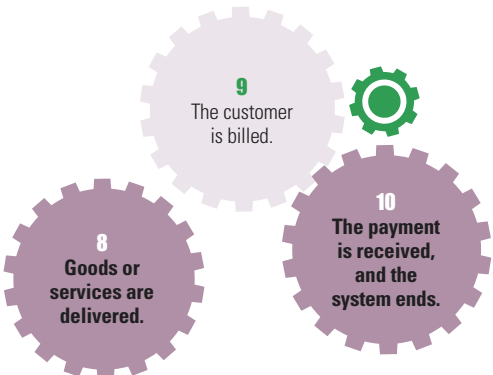
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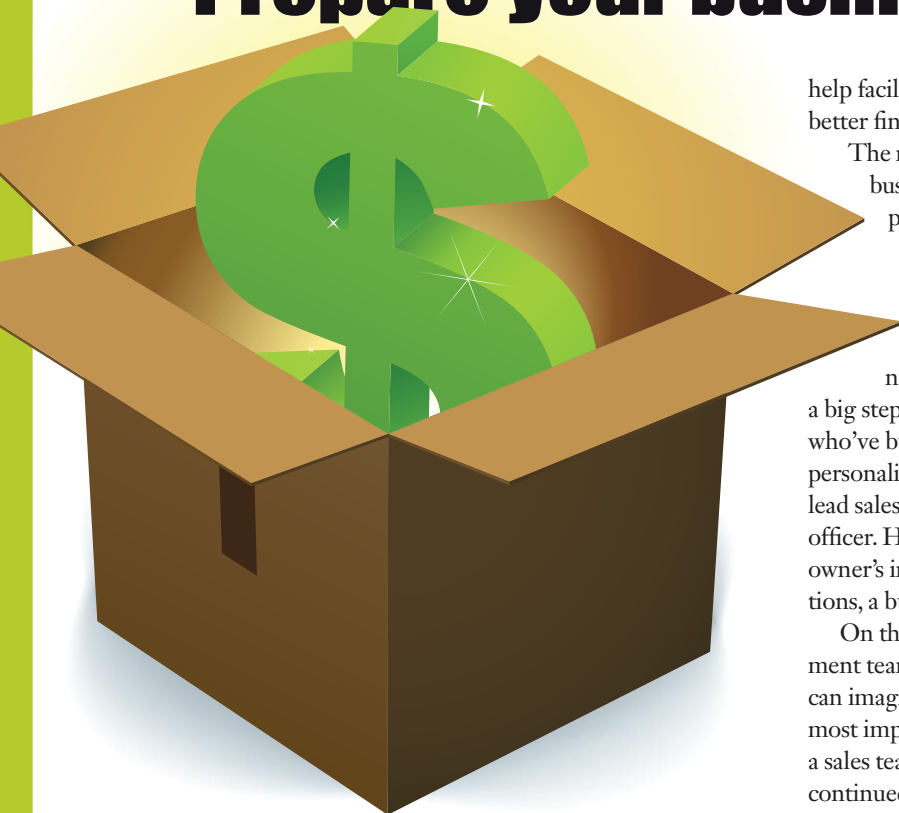
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HOW-TO

Prepare your business for sale



help facilitate a smoother process and likely produce a better financial result when the time comes to sell.

The most important thing to do when preparing a business for sale is keep it growing and operating profitably, generating consistent, positive cash flow.

Team dynamics

Another key issue is structuring the business to thrive without the owner involved. That's a big step for many Green Industry business owners who've built their businesses around the talents, skills and personality of the owner. The business owner often is the lead salesman, operations supervisor and quality control officer. His name is often the name of the business. If the owner's involvement is crucial in terms of sales or operations, a buyer likely will be wary of an acquisition.

On the other hand, if the business has built a management team and has depth in operations and sales, a buyer can imagine taking over the operation and retaining its most important assets—its people and customers. With a sales team and system, a buyer can see a pathway to continued growth and profitability, making the business much more attractive.

BY RON EDMONDS

Preparing a business for sale usually isn't one of a landscape contractor's highest priorities for two reasons: A Green Industry business owner usually doesn't start his business with the goal of selling it, and the complications of a daily business operation often keep business owners from planning for the future effectively.

Nevertheless, business owners have to confront the reality of needing to sell or transfer their business. All owners will sell their business, transfer it to a family member or liquidate their interest, planned or unplanned, during their lifetime or at the time of their death.

Often, the need to sell is triggered by unforeseen circumstances, such as death, disability or divorce, which might add pressure and make effective planning and decision making difficult. Basic steps taken in advance will

An objective look

It's a sound idea to take an objective look at the business and consider what attributes it has that would make it attractive to you if you were a potential buyer. Focus on what you can affect positively in the period before a sale is made.

Identify the areas that will be most attractive to likely buyers and emphasize them. In many cases, buyers will put a premium on recurring revenue, such as contractual maintenance, lawn care and irrigation service revenue. Unless you have significant lead time, it's not practical or a good idea to change the focus of the business completely, but it might be possible to make changes that enhance the recurring revenue components.

Additionally, by implementing effective systems, you might be able to make theoretically nonrecurring revenue

have characteristics of recurring revenue. For example, although design/build projects aren't recurring revenue, if you have an effective system for generating new design/build projects on an ongoing basis, that segment of the business can be attractive still.

Financial focus

Also address the quality and timeliness of financial information. Sit down with your accountant and discuss your financial statements, focusing on what can be done to improve their quality and timeliness. A buyer will be wary when the financial statements he's given are full of errors. If financial reports aren't timely, or it takes a long time to respond to a buyer's questions, buyers often will lose interest.

Look at your balance sheet and consider how much working capital is tied up in the business. Managing the business to minimize working capital (mostly accounts receivable minus accounts payable) often will increase the value of the business, even if working capital stays with the seller. The

continued on page 81

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