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3 Shift from micromanager to coach.

The owner of a developing firm drives its actions and profitability. It's through this micromanagement that the company succeeds. But this same management style may hold the company back from further success.

Delegate more by letting go and allowing others to decide. Also, become a coach to your people, supporting them in their decision making.

If you went into business at a young age, you may not have had a boss to be a good role model to you. But you've likely experienced a good coach through sports programs. The best coaches are interested in building up individual athletes and winning teams. Here are a few critical characteristics of winning coaches.

EDUCATOR. Winning coaches teach not just technical aspects of the job, but morals, hard work and teamwork. They also ensure their workers learn the skills they need to excel without obsessing that employees may take these skills elsewhere. It's better to have your employees be well educated and leave you than to be under educated and stay on your payroll. Be committed to their growth, and they will commit to your company's growth.

LIFELONG LEARNER. Leaders are readers—they go to education events, read and listen to books. You must be willing to stretch yourself to stretch the minds of others.

PASSIONATE, POSITIVE. You must bring this attitude to work every day. How would your employees rate your attitude, on a scale of zero to 10? Ask them for feedback. You are the thermometer by which they reset their own internal thermometer each day when they come to work.

OPEN YET DECISIVE. You must be open to input and engage your people to be part of your firm's success. On the other hand, you must not linger in doubt.

HONEST AND RELIABLE. The best employees want to work for someone who's trustworthy and reliable. That means being willing to take short-term hits (e.g. rip out a walkway and rebuild it to meet specs) to do the right things and build an honest reputation.

4 Shift from generous to
VHOÀVK·ZLWKÀRXU4LPH-

Many contractors spend their time doing low-level tasks, and running around supporting their crews or taking their calls. This can be a huge time drain that keeps you from doing more profitable tasks. Getting out of this rut can be as simple as protecting a two-hour chunk of time each day to focus on strategic activities. Instead of

an open-door policy, consider a closed-door policy where you aren't to be disturbed between 10 a.m. and noon.

Start by delegating more. Meet with your employees and ask them what tasks you should be delegating to them, so that you can focus on more important business building. Create your own list of 10 things and then compare with the list they come up with. You will be surprised what they volunteer to take on.

5 Shift from 'all hands on deck' to
FOHDU4JROHV·DQG·DFFRXQWDELQIN-

All-for-one and one-for-all is how you first grew your business. But there comes a time when you have to instill more clarity and accountability into your culture. The following five steps will help create an accountability culture.

WRITE DOWN THE "MEASURABLE" GOALS EMPLOYEES ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR. Make sure they first buy-in to the goals. Spend your time upfront creating buy-in, and accountability will come easily.

CREATE RELATIONSHIP CONTRACTS. Identify what key employees should be doing for each other day-to-day. Most owners focus on what the person does for the company or boss, but they fail to write down what the boss does for the employee, and more importantly, what employees do for each other.

DON'T TOLERATE BAD PERFORMANCE. Give consistent and increasing feedback when people aren't performing. Give them three chances on critical activities. They may be in the wrong position or you may have a "systems" problem. When you meet with your employees, including during reviews, be prepared to take a hard look at your systems and be willing to make changes.

WEED OUT EMPLOYEES WHO DON'T SHARE YOUR VALUES. You may say, "It's hard to find employees, so I put up with their bad behavior." But if you don't let them go, you will find it hard to retain top employees because you've lowered your standards.

WALK THE TALK. You can't hold others to standards you are unwilling to meet yourself. You have to follow the company rules and behave with the same attitude and character you expect from them.

6 Shift from rainmaker to sales manager.

The owner cannot be the sole salesperson, and at some point he or she will want or need to step out entirely. Either way, form a sales team now. Ideally a team should have three salespeople to create internal competition and a spirit toward winning and cross sell-



ing. Develop a system for tracking weekly success. The sales leader should track more than sales. The leader should be tracking pipeline activities; there are two kinds:

LEADING INDICATORS: new contacts at association meetings, lunch and learns, other warm leads, additions to your email list; and
LAGGING INDICATORS: prospect calls, prospect meetings, proposals given, etc.

The key in this transition is the owner shifts from sole rainmaker to sales manager.

7 Shift from the owner's brain knowing everything to having systems that guide growth.

There's a common belief that putting systems in place allows you to move around employees like chess pieces so you don't have to rely on people. It's not true. Great companies are built on good people running good systems. You will fail with poor systems, and you will fail with poor people. You need both.

QUICK TIP

Ask employees what tasks you should be delegating to them so that you can focus on more important business building. You will be surprised what they volunteer to take on.

8 Shift from working to taking time off.

Here's the Litmus test: Can you go on vacation without the company coming to a stop?

If not, start taking time off in chunks, identify what falls through the cracks, set up systems to handle it and empower your staff to make decisions.

Many contractors are afraid to take time off because they don't feel they deserve it.

I'm here to say that not only do you deserve it, but it's very important to building up the competence and trust required of your staff. They cannot feel empowered if you are always around.

Soon, you'll discover the definition of true wealth: discretionary time. **LM**

Scott, an author and consultant, facilitates peer groups for landscape business owners who want to transform and profitably grow their business. Reach him via gettheleadersedge.com or jeff@jeffreyscott.biz.

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HOW-TO

Avoid customer service problems



BY KEN THOMAS

In 2006, I learned a valuable lesson about customer service. My company had recently completed a beautiful project for a wonderful client who happened to be a 9/11 widow. She was quite pleased with her new backyard patio and waterfall until she was hit with a flood that washed through her yard, overwhelmed the development's storm drains and flooded her finished basement. She called us in a panic, and we responded by helping her stop the water and clean the basement.

But I was surprised when the client blamed our company for the flooding, even though we had nothing to do with the storm drains or epic storm. As a seasoned businessman, I pushed back when challenged and explained, in my most gracious southern manner, this wasn't a problem caused by our company. I felt confident that my logical and accurate explanation of why her basement flooded would sink in and she'd appreciate all we'd done to help her.

The next day I received a phone call from her lawyer, who started the call by asking me, "Do you want to become famous on the news?" He said my client would be contacting a local news station's consumer advocacy reporter to tell him her story about how a big landscape company took advantage of a poor, helpless widow. So, at a considerable expense to our company, we did whatever it took to make sure that didn't happen. But did we do the right thing?

While not all customer-service problems are this severe, they all have the ability to cost you money and hurt your reputation if not handled properly. Behind every client problem, I try to remember one thing: This is a relationship business. Most of our business comes from referrals. Every year we're in business, our base of satisfied clients grows, creating a larger circle of positive influence for additional business. There's a huge advantage to making sure every client we deal with has a positive experience.

Many times our clients have legitimate issues with the way we conduct business or the product or services we provide. It's important to deal with those issues quickly and efficiently. The best response is to apologize, listen and empathize; fix the problem quickly and fairly; keep your promises and follow up. Every now and then we get that client from hell who just doesn't get it, and it's our natural response to draw a line to protect our margin or be right.

Customer service breakdowns often involve customer expectations and our processes. Here's what I've learned:

COMMUNICATE CLEARLY. Don't over promise to close a sale. Slow down and get everything in writing. Many uncomfortable client experiences can be avoided by being thorough about your scope of work and payment terms upfront.

GET A SIGNATURE ON EVERY CONTRACT AND CHANGE ORDER. It's good business, and

most reasonable clients understand. If someone won't sign a contract or change order, it should be a red flag. Email approvals are OK as long as the paper trail is clear about what they're approving.

ADMIT MISTAKES. When you or your team make a mistake, don't cover it up. Own up to it and make it right quickly.

DON'T BE PENNY-WISE AND POUND-FOOLISH. You did everything right, and the client expects additional work or plants. Don't nickel and dime him. Weigh the cost against the future damage to the relationship and make a value-based decision. If this is a reoccurring problem, get to the root of it.

FIX THE PERSON, THEN THE PROBLEM. Address the emotional state of the client first. Once they believe you care, they're more interested in solutions.

DROP ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS. Sometimes it's best to move on when you're dealing with an unreasonable client. At some point, you have to determine what's good for the client and your company.

Effective service recovery doesn't happen accidentally. It's a well-thought out and executed process with the objective of delivering a positive experience to every client. Hopefully, these tips will help you avoid some client-related problems, build your base of referrals and keep you from becoming "famous on the news." **LM**

Thomas, founder of Envisor Consulting, has owned three of Atlanta's most successful landscape companies. Reach him at kentthomas@envisorco.com.



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HOW-TO

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BY SONIA DIAZ

It's no secret the Hispanic workforce has become an integral part of success for many lawn care and landscape companies. A recent study published by the U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce declared the lawn care and landscape industry as key to the economic and entrepreneurial development of the Hispanic community in the U.S., and the numbers are staggering. Latinos represent 35.2 percent of the industry's workforce—more than twice the national average for Latinos in all other industries combined.

While it's clear that Latinos are a vital part of the industry, it's not as clear how we can best prepare them today so that they will be ready to fearlessly lead into tomorrow. Many companies and organizations in the industry have already begun to teach, train and invest in their Hispanic staff with the goal of preparing them for senior level positions.

CoCal Landscape in Denver, owned by Jesus "Chuy" Medrano, president of the National Hispanic Landscape Alliance, is one of those companies. Let's look at some of its best practices when cultivating Hispanic talent.

Mentoring programs

"Cross-train the best guys. Have the irrigation techs show the new guys the way to run the controllers. Have the supervisors ride with the foreman. Show them the way little by little and you will soon have an efficient and well-organized workforce."

—MARK YAW, LANDSCAPE PROJECT MANAGER, COCAL LANDSCAPE

The one factor that keeps most of us motivated at our own jobs is the possibility of being able to expand and grow in our roles. These expectations and hopes are no different for your site crews, regardless of their ethnicity. For companies with a particularly high number of Hispanic



CoCal Landscape owner "Chuy" Medrano networks at a National Hispanic Landscape Alliance reception.

employees, their future success, and maybe even their survival, depends on being able to move some of these employees into leadership roles. While some leaders will emerge naturally, it's important to realize that making a conscious effort to educate and promote Latino talent is crucial. Mentoring programs allow workers to get a broader perspective of what it takes to run the business while providing employees with

the feeling that the company has taken a vested interest in their growth.

When mentoring, employers should pick those employees who have shown the most potential and highest level of performance, as not all employees are cut out to be leaders.

If incorporating a mentoring program is not possible, simply allowing your best talent to cross-train with others on the job can really make a difference.

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"I get by with little Spanish and I think it's because the guys know I am trying to help them do their job and they want to help me." —STACY PARCELL, LEAD DESIGNER, COCAL LANDSCAPE

While Hispanics are increasingly playing a vital role in our economy, the language barrier continues to be a big challenge for many employers. Learning English is one of the most overwhelming challenges for this workforce.

Instead of seeing the language barrier as an obstacle, employers should consider it an opportunity to build a closer relationship with their crews. Simple interactions such as asking them to teach you key Spanish words and phrases will not only help you communicate with them better, it also will make learning English words less intimidating for them.

When possible, employers should have their most important employee documents translated into Spanish, such as health benefits and employee handbooks. Some



QUICK TIP Create an environment where Hispanic employees feel their ideas and initiatives are valued, whether it's through brainstorming sessions, providing personal and professional growth opportunities or simply asking for their feedback.

companies also provide in-house English as a Second Language classes for their employees. By making these efforts, employers will find that two-way communication works to their advantage.

Cultural awareness

“Company owners need to demonstrate an interest in Hispanic workers’ capacity, listen and maybe implement their suggestions and opinions. I believe if you let someone know what’s expected of them, but also give them the space to fulfill those expectations, it’s a great way of growing the company because they become an integral part of its operations.” —MARI MEDRANO, HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGER, COCAL LANDSCAPE

One of the biggest challenges employers face when dealing with Hispanic employees for higher-level positions is the lack of cultural understanding. Adding to the complexity of the relationship are the cultural nuances among Latinos themselves. Rather than focusing on what makes them different, it’s important to understand what brings them together. As we already

know, one thing they all share is that they are dedicated, loyal and extremely hard working. Hispanics feel their jobs are a reflection of themselves. They pay close attention to detail, as if the client’s property were their own.

Yet, what we don’t realize is the workforce in Latin American countries tends to be much more hierarchical and cultivates a belief that a worker cannot grow within the company, despite showing leadership abilities and improving his skills. Additionally, Hispanic culture carries a deeply rooted respect for authority, and as a result many Hispanic workers will not voluntarily offer feedback or ideas for fear of “challenging” their superiors. By creating an environment where Hispanic employees feel their ideas and initiatives are valued, whether it’s through brainstorming sessions, providing personal and professional growth opportunities or simply asking for their feedback, they will feel as if they are part of the team and will be more likely to excel. **LM**

Diaz is a senior account executive at Balsera Communications, where she works with the National Hispanic Landscape Alliance. Reach her at sonia@balseracommunications.com.

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HOW-TO

Sell sincerely

BY BILL BEMUS

I remember a conversation I had with a friend who worked as a project manager for a large commercial real estate development company. The name of a particular landscape company came up and my friend became apoplectic: “Oh! Those guys suck! I just had them on one of my projects. Hate ‘em! They were a pain in the ass every step of the way! I will never use them again...ever...unless they’re the low bidder.”

The recollection of that exchange always puts a smile on my face, especially when it’s juxtaposed with the concept of “relationship selling.” Is it really effective?

I am certainly no sales or marketing guru, but I have hired, read and listened to a lot of them—and I mean a *lot*—over the years, and almost all have touted relationship selling. In its basic form, you foster a relationship with a procurer of products or services (the products or services you happen to be offering) and then attempt to leverage or presume upon that friendship to sway the outcome of the sales process in your direction. A variant of relationship selling is “consultative selling.” How it works: You use your vaunted expertise to help an overworked and under-informed procurer make a purchasing decision. By providing this advice, you become a valued “team member” and your selfless service will be rewarded with the sale.

These approaches to selling never worked for me in the past.

They always seemed insincere. And given the realities of today’s business climate, they seem even more out of touch, especially in a B2B setting. Today’s business buyer, whether it’s a property manager, facilities manager, purchasing agent or government employee, does not have enough hours in the day to finish what he or she has to do as it is. They certainly don’t have time to cultivate new relationships with all of their prospective vendors. And their performance is not going to be judged by their superiors on the personality strength of the vendors they provide. They will be evaluated on the price they pay relative to the value delivered.

If you’re fortunate enough to be proposing on a project and have any kind of online presence, it is likely that the decision maker knows something about your company and service offerings already. You don’t need to waste a lot of their time introducing yourself. This also pertains to their technical questions. With the Internet and Google, nearly all of the information is there for anyone to find; they don’t need you for that anymore.

What, then, is a winning strategy for effective selling? All of us are consumers and buyers of myriad products and services. If you’re reading this, chances are you are an owner or operator of a company and are called upon by salespeople yourself. What motivates you to buy from one supplier or vendor over another? How would *you* sell to *you*? The following are tips that would help you sell something to me:



- 1 DON'T WASTE MY TIME.** We are not going to be friends, at least not at first. I don't need to be flattered nor have my ego stroked.
- 2 GET TO THE BOTTOM LINE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.** What is this going to cost and what's included? And I don't like surprises.
- 3 BE BLATANTLY HONEST.** Tell me what you do well, but I will be more impressed if you tell me what you don't do well. Don't ever tell me you do it all well.
- 4 DON'T PRESSURE ME.** I'm not going to make my decision today. I'm going to sleep on it. Follow up, but not too much.
- 5 DON'T EVER CALL AND SAY YOU JUST NEED 15 MINUTES OF MY TIME.** I know it will take at least an hour to get rid of you. (Refer to Nos. 1 and 3.)

Let me conclude on a positive note. If you're fortunate enough to garner a sale, here's your opportunity to engage in true relationship selling. It used to be called “customer loyalty” and it's still out there. It's a simple concept: Focus on delivering great service at a fair price and you will enjoy long-term relationships with your customers, who may even become your friends. That's a truly satisfying event. **LM**

Bemus is the owner of Bemus Landscape, based in San Clemente, Calif.

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HOW-TO

Prevent EXVLQHVVDLOXUH

BY FRANK ROSS

As consultants, we're constantly asked "What are the reasons companies succeed?" or "What do other companies do to make more money?" Recently, I received an unusual question: "What are the top 10 reasons companies fail?" Typically, consultants are optimists and think about why businesses succeed, so fielding this question is outside the normal response zone, but here goes.

1 /DFNRIFDVKÁRZ
Poor cash flow is probably 90 percent of the reason companies fold. Everything makes up the other 10 percent. You can lose money every year you're in business, but as long as you have positive cash flow and can pay the bills, you can live to fight another day. The first day you're unable to pay your bills or meet a payroll, vendors can shut you down and employees will leave.

There are an infinite number of reasons companies don't have adequate cash flow (most of them created by management), but there's one that resonates above all. We don't do a sound job collecting the money we're owed because we don't like asking for it.

Here's a tip—make collections a responsibility of the sales process. Customers are at the highest level of euphoria at the time of the sale. You've created a vision in their minds—it's a beautiful garden or a proposed low price. Either way, at that moment, they're as happy as they'll ever be. This is when you set the terms about how you'll bill the job and how you expect to be paid. Don't expect customers to know how to pay you. Get a commitment from them, and follow that commitment through to the completion of the job.



2 Drive-by estimating systems
I constantly meet folks who'll price a job by driving by a site and rationalize doing so because the job is similar to other ones. This method doesn't always work. There's a reason the Small Business Administration ranks construction as the second most risky business behind restaurants. Every job must have a quantity takeoff and extension, be marked up for overhead and marked up with a profit. For every job, know how much profit you have and how low you can go before you bid. It's a time-consuming process, but one that's focused on eliminating losers.

3 No job tracking
Once you earn a job, track your performance to ensure you're harvesting the margin (overhead and profit) you put on the job when you sold it. If there was a way to verify this statistic, we'd discover fewer than 25 percent of contractors have job-tracking systems that work. If you don't know how a job is performing, you have two problems. One, without a tracking system, you can't spot problems in the job before they manifest. Two, you can't verify that your estimating standards to price work are correct.

4 1RÁQDQFLDQWHSRUMLOJË\SURÁWFWHOWHU
Few of us perform only one type of work. We're normally involved in installation, maintenance, enhancements and retail. Every type of work you perform has different cost and overhead structures. If you don't know performance by profit center, how can you control