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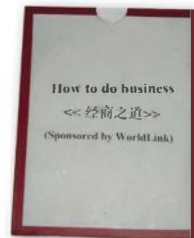
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# Getting more than you give



Drake's 7 Dees focuses on helping neighbors—in its own backyard and abroad. BY MARISA PALMIERI

For Drake Snodgrass, owner and CEO of Drake's 7 Dees, corporate giving has three vital components: employees, community and self-improvement. It's his vision to weave all three together to benefit everyone involved. Thus far, he's had impressive results.

Why is service such a focus for Drake's? "We do it, first of all, because I believe in giving back and helping people," Snodgrass says. "We do find, though, that there's a

huge benefit for our company and the people who are part of our company in doing things for others out of love."

Opportunity to make a difference has presented itself over the last decade and a half, as the Portland, Ore., neighborhood where Drake's has been located for more than 50 years has experienced decline. Once a safe area to raise a family, it has since faced crime, drugs and gang-related activities. Wanting to be a part of the solution, Snodgrass has gotten involved with two nearby organizations, the Good News Community Health Center and the Salvation Army, which are working to provide free or low-cost resources for community members.

"The Good News Community Health Center is having a huge impact on the community," Snodgrass says of the 5-year-old, volunteer-run nonprofit clinic that's provided medical, mental and oral health care for nearly 4,000 uninsured people per year. Patients pay just \$10 per visit. The company helped design and install the clinic's landscaping, and Snodgrass has served on, as



Drake Snodgrass (center in blue) with Chinese business ethics students. Above right: a workbook created by Snodgrass and other ethics instructors.

well as chaired, the board. "We've helped grow it from the beginning to what it is today," he says, adding that the healing garden his firm created for the facility's mental health patients was a particularly special project. Snodgrass also has served on and chaired the board of the Salvation Army of Gresham, Ore. The organization provides services for 60 kids daily.

"Many times we'll do something as a company and we'll pay our people to do it, and they understand the company's donating their time," he says. "But people experience that feeling, and the company gains more in employee dedication and loyalty than it would ever take in wages to help out a nonprofit."

Similarly, Snodgrass says giving back breeds more giving back. "We all do things, whether we like to admit it or not, that are motivated by the feeling you get from doing it," he says. "It's such a great feeling that you do more of it."

For businesses looking for a way to begin a stewardship effort, Snodgrass says you just have to believe it's the right thing to do and find an opportunity. You often gain useful business skills, he adds, such as learning how to run a meeting, observing how people interact and gaining the opportunity to "get the heck out of your own business and come back fresh."

He adds, "It doesn't take much time, and you'll find you get more from giving than you ever give." LM

## AT A GLANCE

**Company:** Drake's 7 Dees  
**Headquarters:** Portland, Ore.  
**CEO:** Drake Snodgrass

### SELECT PROJECT LISTING:

▶ **Good News Community Health Center**—company provides ongoing landscape maintenance and installation services, such as creating a healing garden. As a board member and chair, Snodgrass expanded the volunteer board and purchased a facility.

▶ **Salvation Army of Gresham, Ore.**—as a board member and chair, Snodgrass led a capital campaign that raised more than \$1 million and built a new facility.

▶ **China business ethics mission trips**—from 2005-2008 Snodgrass recruited and led three annual trips of professionals to teach business ethics to multinational corporations' middle management teams and college graduates.

Landscape Management is the media sponsor of the Professional Landscape Network's (PLANET) Community Stewardship Award. We'll feature each of the program's winners January through June. For more information or to read about the other winners, visit [landcarenetwork.org/awards/communityaward](http://landcarenetwork.org/awards/communityaward) or [landscapemanagement.net/givingback](http://landscapemanagement.net/givingback).

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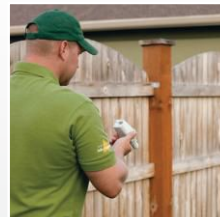
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# A good habit

Knowing there's always someone in need has driven a Florida company to participate in an array of service efforts. BY CASEY PAYTON

**Katy Harrell, vice president** of Southeastern Outdoor Management, believes you don't have to look far to find someone in greater need than yourself. That's why the Panama City, Fla.-based firm makes a habit of volunteering.

One of Southeastern's primary efforts is Habitat for

Humanity. Building a home for a family is the type of project where you get a "direct and immediate sense of reward," Harrell says. "You don't always have the opportunity to see the final result and the impact that your time and service make, but with Habitat for Humanity, you do. It's incredibly gratifying."

Of the many service opportunities Southeastern has been part of, Harrell says the design and installation of a memorial at Surfside Middle School was among the most rewarding. Harrell's mother, the school principal, asked Southeastern to design a courtyard that would celebrate the life of Mary Lynn May, a teacher who lost her battle with cancer. Soon, the plan for the Mary Lynn May Memorial Courtyard was launched. The design included paver step stones, a fountain, plants and benches. And the teachers and students themselves raised the funds to buy the fountain and benches.

"We organized a work day with volunteers and staff to install the courtyard," says

Harrell. "We saw it from concept to completion and were honored to use our talents and resources for such an amazing cause."

In today's day and age, Harrell says she knows many companies are operating with less—less equipment, less manpower and often less revenue.

That reality may make some choose to forego community service work. But there's always a way, she says.

"If you're short on time, then pick a project you can get your spouse and kids involved in so you're not taking away from family time by

doing volunteer work in your free time," she suggests. "Or, if you're a small company, pick a small project. There's always a way you can help."

Southeastern's intent is never to perform stewardship to receive recognition, but rather for the personal satisfaction of knowing it gave to others who are less fortunate, Harrell says. However, the company's discovered that people do take notice, and it can drive new business.

"Twice we've actually received landscape jobs for a new business or residence because one of the organizers had seen us participating in service projects and felt they wanted to do business with a company that was community-service minded," she says. "Most importantly, recognize that whatever you choose doesn't have to be a long-term time or monetary commitment to make a big impact," she says. LM

## AT A GLANCE

**Company:** Southeastern Outdoor Management  
**Headquarters:** Panama City, Fla.  
**President:** David Chapman  
**Vice President:** Katy Harrell

### SELECT PROJECT LISTING:

▶ **Habitat for Humanity**—provides landscape construction drawings, materials, labor and equipment. In 2011-2012 alone, provided resources for three projects and donated plant materials to be sold to raise money for building materials.

▶ **Surfside Middle School**—designed and installed the Mary Lynn May Memorial Courtyard; also provided equipment and labor for football field aeration and school ground plant installation and irrigation services.

▶ **Bay County, Fla., Middle and High Schools**—provides equipment, labor and plant materials for ball field clean-ups.

▶ **R. L. Turner baseball program**—provides equipment, labor and plant materials for ball field clean-ups.



Three Southeastern staff members pitch in at one of the firm's Habitat for Humanity projects last fall.

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## BEST PRACTICES

BRUCE WILSON

The author, of the Wilson-Oyler Group, is a 30-year industry veteran. Reach him at [bwilson@wilson-oyler.com](mailto:bwilson@wilson-oyler.com).

# Coping with uncertainty

**L**andscape business owners find it difficult to plan as changes to familiar tax laws leave strategic decisions in limbo. Owners facing new tax challenges will either need to absorb the costs (which few can do and remain profitable), cut other costs to help offset them, change their business structure to meet different criteria or pass the costs on to their customers. Here's a look at each of those options.

**Cost cutting:** Of these options, the cost-cutting approach is tapped out. Everyone in business over the past four or five years has gotten leaner to maintain viability or is out of business. Profits have been hit hard over the same period, with some companies able to maintain profit levels that are, in most cases, barely satisfactory.

**Restructuring:** Changing a company's operating model and infrastructure—increasing its use of part-time employees, outsourcing and other measures—might work in certain circumstances, but these are not likely to be strategic or long-term solutions for most companies. That leaves the option of passing on some of the costs, if not all of them, to the customer.

**Price increases:** For the most part, prices have not increased much in the last five years—but costs have. And for commercial landscape maintenance customers, it's been a boon for lower-priced services. As property lease rates and property values have decreased, a case could be made that it's the time for a well-planned approach to increase your prices.

If you take the price increase approach, follow these dos and don'ts:

### DON'T

**1. Present a flat percentage increase based on higher costs.** Asking for a 3 percent to 5 percent increase for inflation, cost increases, etc., is not compelling and can result in the client bidding out the work.

**2. Present any request or announcement for a price increase through written correspondence.** When customers read it in writing, they assume it's non-negotiable and may go out to bid.

### DO

**1. Do your homework.** Explain your case well and have the right person deliver the message in person.

**2. Present your increase months ahead** of when you need it so the customer has time to adjust.

**3. Be specific.** For example, if you're claiming an increase for fuel, explain how much, what percentage of your cost is fuel and how exactly it impacts price and cost. Remind your client that fuel affects costs of all materials through shipping and transport; many of the raw materials in landscape are petroleum related.

**4. Reinforce your track record.** Remind the customer that you've done much to lower your cost and their prices over the years you've been under contract. List examples. Do the math and ensure your appeal is fact-based, a true cost—not a number pulled out of thin air.

**5. Reiterate the value of the relationship** and the assertion that you're raising prices only as a last resort.

**6. Give them options.** Value engineer specifications to help them. They're facing some of the same cost issues in their own companies.

**7. Approach the discussion as a partner,** keep your customer's perspective in mind, and make it a win-win.

Sustainable business models, like any well-run machine, require constant recalibration and upkeep to function optimally and profitably. The new palette of economic challenges due to changes in the tax laws offers as much to complain about as it does an opportunity to stay creative, nimble and proactive.

If there's good news in this scenario, it's that your customers—business people like yourself—are experiencing the same hand wringing you are and will share your pain. And who knows, it may make you better partners.

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## THE BENCHMARK

JEFF HARKNESS

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# Plan now for 2014 health care reform

**F**or employers who have adopted a wait-and-see approach with the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA), the time to wait is over. This year is a critical planning year to strategize around cost containment and compliance for 2014. These areas should be a key focus for Green Industry employers to get a hold of before this fall.

Don't panic! I believe employers and employees don't have all the cost and plan design options yet, so this factor will drive decisions. Here are some facts and myth-busting ideas to consider.

First, get a handle on the elements of the legislation so you can formulate a plan to navigate the requirements. Under the law, businesses are considered a "large employer" and thus must provide health insurance to all full-time employees if they have 50 or more full-time employees. Employees are considered full time if they average 30 hours per week or more. As a large employer, you can be subject to penalties for not providing qualified health coverage to your employees at a rate of \$2,000 per year for each employee (minus the first 30).

For example, if you have 70 full-time employees and offer no coverage, you're liable for 70 less the minimum 30 requirement. That's 40 people times \$2,000 for a grand total of \$80,000—clearly a large number. If you have fewer than 50 employees, you get a pass from providing coverage. But beware of strategies like these to minimize head count:

▶ **Breaking up your company** (i.e., each branch or division will be its own company). Don't bother. The IRS is wise to this approach and you'll fail the control group regulations under IRC 414(b), 414(c) and 414(m). If employees of multiple businesses are deemed to fall under a master control group, the aggregate sum of employees will be totaled.

▶ **Reclassifying workers as seasonal employees or part-time workers.** Proceed with caution. The law addresses this loophole. Each month employers will be required to calculate total aggregate part-time service hours and divide the total by 120

hours. This is called the "full-time equivalents" (FTEs). Employers can be deemed large if the sum of full-time employees and FTEs breaks 50.

The key for most employers who are required to provide coverage is to understand plan design, minimum essential benefits and employee contribution limits. Employees cannot contribute more than 9.5 percent of their W-2 wages to total annual premiums.

The families of our production workforce may qualify for government subsidies for health insurance premiums (as will many people with household income below 400 percent of the national poverty level or about \$90,000 of household income) by bypassing the employer plan and going directly to the exchanges to get more affordable coverage.

Why is this important? The \$15-per-hour young foreman may opt out of the employer's plan, keep his or her \$247 per month and elect to get a better deal individually on the exchange with subsidies. The big individual coverage hurdle previously was pre-existing conditions. This is no longer the case under the new law. As long as the employer-sponsored plan has design and benefits that are in compliance with PPACA regulations the employer is not required to pay a penalty for employees who pass on the employer plan and pursue more cost-effective options on the exchange.

Many employees will pass altogether on taking coverage despite the individual mandate to carry health insurance (through your employer or individually). Why? The annual penalty is \$95, which is very little compared to what a monthly plan may cost them. It may become simply an economic decision for some workers.

Lastly, every employer should conduct a financial analysis and plan design offering this spring and summer. Work with your consultant, lawyer and insurance broker to create the right strategy for you and your team. Prepare information to share with your staff members so they're educated on options, both from a benefits and cost perspective. This is too big to screw up. Get it right.



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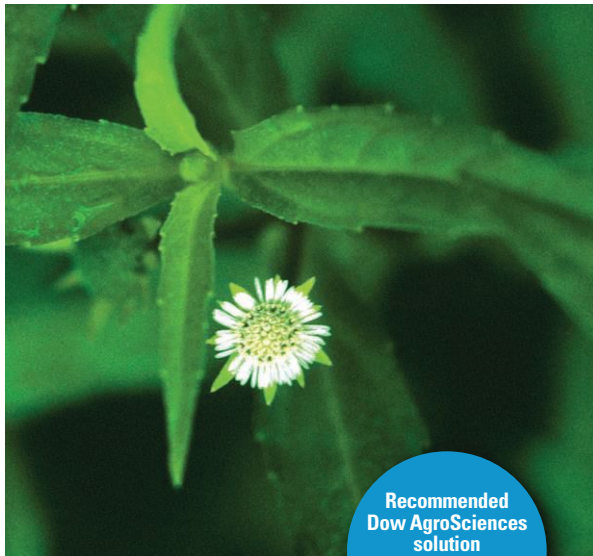
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## ECLIPTA

*Eclipta prostrata*

### IDENTIFICATION TIPS

› This prostrate annual, often called a false daisy, is typically found in the South, lower Midwest and along the East Coast.

› Stems below the cotyledons are light green to purple. Cotyledons are bald, slightly thickened and show a midvein on the lower surface.

› In mature plants, leaves are opposite, elliptic to lanceolate in shape and slightly thickened, with short, appressed hairs on both surfaces.

› Green to reddish-brown stems are freely

branched and can root at the nodes.

› Small white flowers grow on small stalks at the end of stems or leaf axils.

### CONTROL TIPS

› Early control is necessary to prevent rapid Eclipta growth.

› Apply a preemergent herbicide containing isoxaben, followed by 0.5 in. of irrigation.

› A sequential postemergent herbicide may be needed with dense populations. It's most effective when applied to plants less than 2 in. tall.



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## HAIRY GALINSOGA

*Galinsoga ciliata*

### IDENTIFICATION TIPS

› This abundant seed-producing annual is found primarily in the Midwest and on the East and West Coasts.

› Young leaves are opposite and triangular, with slightly toothed margins. Hairy galinsoga is easily mistaken for eclipta as a young seedling, but the presence of hairs helps distinguish it.

› Stems reach 2 ft. in height; they are freely branched, green to maroon in color and covered in hairs.

› Yellow inner flowers are surrounded by white to light pink outer flowers that grow from terminal stems.

### CONTROL TIPS

› Hairy galinsoga can produce many viable seeds. It lacks seed dormancy, and shoots cut during cultivation can root rapidly—even in semi-moist soils.

› Apply a preemergent herbicide containing isoxaben and trifluralin to control hairy galinsoga in the landscape.

\* State restrictions on the sale and use of Snapshot apply.

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