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VOL 52, ISSUE 9

Scotts LawnService President Brian Kura has been leading the division since mid-2012.

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Photo by Jerry Mann, jerrymann.com

Landscape Management

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@ShaunKanary: Awesome @LandscapeMgmt - now equipped with my sunscreen, I'm ready for #LawnCareForum in Orlando this Nov! pic.twitter.com/5GmOT2CC3R

@PLANET2005: RT @LandscapeMgmt: Thinking about joining a peer group? Motivation from LM columnist Bruce Wilson on PLANET's blog ow.ly/njGkd

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- More grub Q&A with Ohio State's Dave "the BugDoc" Shetlar, Ph.d. (from page 35).
- Download a sample design/build site visit proposal from Jody Shilan (from page 38).

Dave Shetlar, Ph.d.

PHOTOS: SHAUN KANARY VIA TWITTER; DAVE SHETLAR

EDITOR'S NOTE

MARISA PALMIERI EDITOR

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What you do have

So maybe you're not Scotts LawnService. Maybe you're a small lawn care operator, irrigation company, maintenance contractor or design/build firm. And maybe you saw the cover of this magazine and thought, "It would be easy to get to $250 million backed by a $3 billion parent company."

Let's face it: You probably don't have a 730-acre corporate headquarters, a $50 million global research and development budget and marketing partnerships with brands like Ortho and RoundUp. And I'm guessing there's not a 10-person technical services team creating your agronomic programs.

Put that way, the deck seems to be stacked against small and midsize companies who compete against national firms. In this case, it's not just any national company, but the granddaddy of the lawn and garden industry. It may feel like the battle of David and Goliath, but it doesn't have to. I'm a big fan of the saying, "Start where you are; use what you have; do what you can," sometimes attributed to tennis great Arthur Ashe. With that mindset, think about what you *do* have in comparison and contrast to a competitor like Scotts LawnService.

What you do have, if you compete on the lawn care side of the business, are many of the same challenges as Scotts: a tough regulatory climate, barriers to finding new customers the "old way" and a dearth of quality technicians. What you do have are many of the same opportunities, like the ability to add services, tackle new markets or focus on dominating one market to grow.

What you do have is a client base that wants the same thing as Scotts' customers do: a weed-free lawn. As Scotts LawnService President Brian Kura puts it, "When it comes down to it, the No. 1 reason people join our program and the No. 1 reason people leave is weeds." Sound familiar?

And what you do have is a stake in a market where, as Kura notes, "You're only as good as your people who interact with your customers." For big companies, there are many links in the chain between those at the top and the customer-facing associates. For your company, I'm guessing there aren't many—and, in fact, there may be no links at all. You may be it. You may be just a personal phone call or visit away from interacting with your clients.

So, how close are you to the customer? As close as you once were? As close as you could be? If you're not near the front line, are you confident in the people who are? If the answer's no, you may be losing your competitive advantage.

What you do have is a stake in a market where you're only as good as the people who interact with your customers.

Landscape Management

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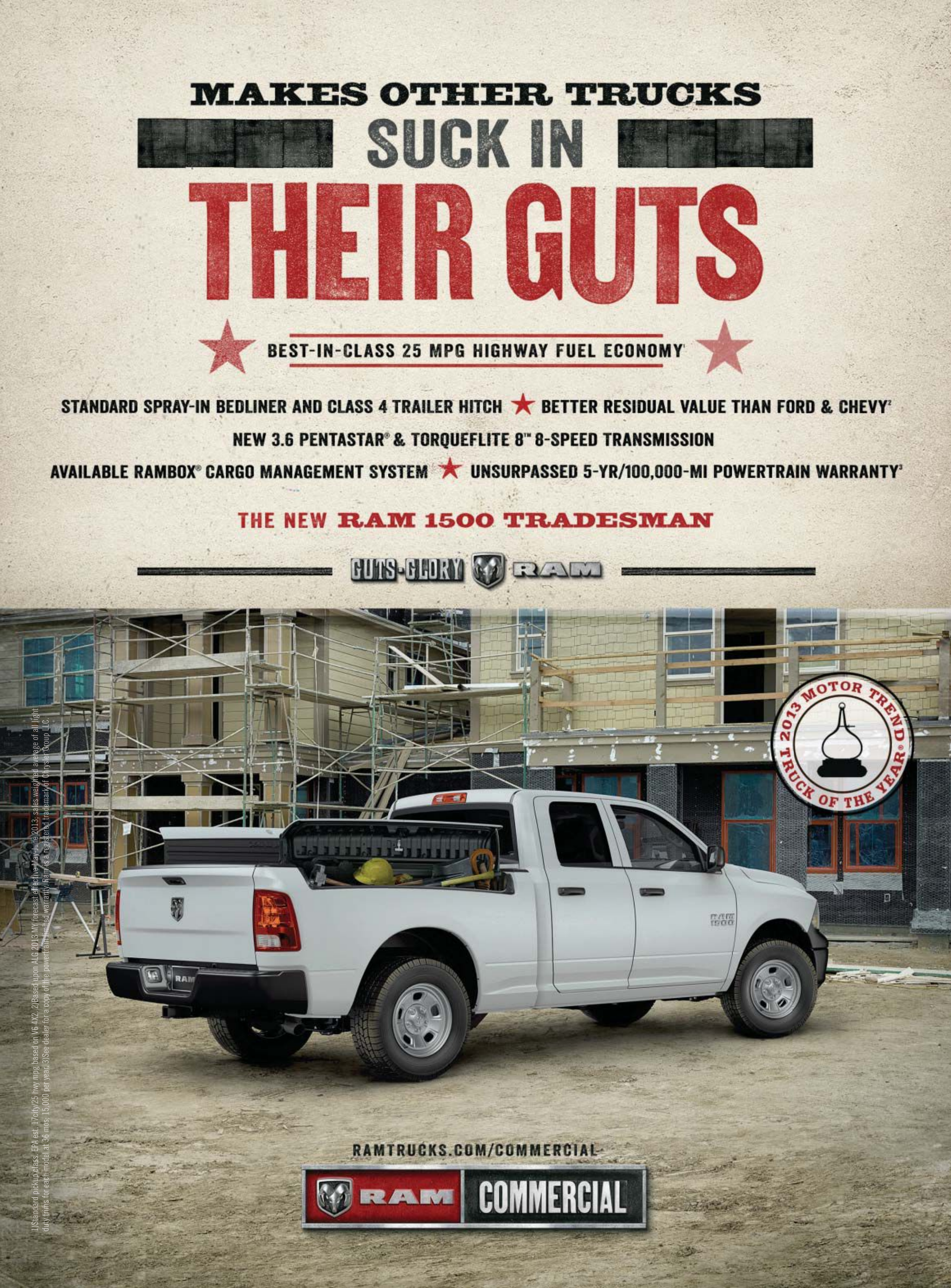
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Immigration, H-2B dominate Day on the Hill discussions

BY **MARISA PALMIERI**

When members of the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) and affiliated organizations visited Washington D.C. on July 23 for the annual Legislative Day on the Hill event, there were four main issues planned for discussion with lawmakers. However, one of those four—immigration reform and the H-2B seasonal guest-worker visa program—was the hottest topic.

PLANET advocates the passage of a comprehensive immigration reform bill that preserves the H-2B program and includes a fair approach to setting H-2B wages. Even before an immigration bill is passed, PLANET's pressing for relief from Department of Labor regulations that make the H-2B program more expensive and complicated to use.

S. 744, the immigration bill passed by the Senate earlier this year is a good sign, said Laurie Flanagan, executive vice president at DCLRS, a lobbying firm for PLANET, during a legislative briefing on July 22. This bill includes many positive tenets, she said, including the creation of a year-round temporary "W" visa program, the reinstatement of the H-2B returning-worker exemption and favorable wage methodology. Still, Flanagan has some concerns with this bill, such as the returning-working exemption expiring after five years.

Flanagan also isn't convinced the House will address immigration in a comprehensive manner—piecemeal provisions are more likely, she said. The House did not take up immigration before the August recess.

Legislative Day on the Hill's timing was good, however, because it came just a week after Rep. Rob Wittman (R-Va.) introduced a favorable H-2B bill (H.R. 2765), addressing wage rules. Participants used it as an opportunity to ask their lawmakers to co-sponsor the legislation. Flanagan described the bill as a standalone measure with the same wage language from S. 744.

The other three issues highlighted during Legislative Day include seeking relief from overregulation, National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permits and establishment of a tick-bourn disease advisory council.

The turnout for Legislative Day was a 60 percent increase over last year, with 193 people meeting with their legislators or staff. PLANET members and members of partner organizations met with legislative office staff from 25 states. Partnering on this year's event were the Tree Care Industry Association, Snow & Ice Management Association and Accredited Snow Contractors Association.

Members of the New Jersey Legislative Day on the Hill contingent: George Futterknecht, Wood Landscapes; Ray Cole, Elite Landscaping; Joe Ehrenreich, Youngs Landscape Management; Dominick Mondi, NJNLA; Jody Shilan, NJLCA; Chris Marino, Xtreme Snow Pros; Thomas Nastasi, Mills Insurance; and Matthew Peterson, Mills Insurance. Cole, vice president of NJNLA, met with offices of seven different congressmen and one senator. He said: "There is a lot they can do to help our industry, which is so important to New Jersey. I was impressed at how interested each office seemed in our issues."

PHOTO: DOMINICK MONDI

On the road

Garden Staters Bob Dobson (left) and Glenn Jacobsen pose for a photo in Washington D.C. in July. When Jacobsen took the helm of the Professional Landcare Network's (PLANET's) board of directors May 1, he joined Dobson as a fellow New Jerseyan serving as president of a national Green Industry association. Dobson is president of Middletown Sprinkler Co. in Port Monmouth, N.J., and current Irrigation Association president. Jacobsen is president of Jacobsen Landscape Design and Construction, based in Midland Park, N.J. The two have even crossed paths on a landscape project in the past, Dobson says.

Field trip PLANET member Joy Diaz of Land Care Inc. in Nevada and her son Joshua visited Sen. Dean Heller (R-Nev) on July 23.

Volunteer time More than 400 volunteers from the Green Industry visited Washington D.C. on July 22 to donate time, materials and the use of their equipment to spruce up Arlington National Cemetery during PLANET's 17th annual Renewal & Remembrance event. Here, Eric Wenger, owner of Complete Lawn Care, Laytonsville, Md., and Caterpillar's National Trade Association Manager Jason Becker load a spreader with lime.

PHOTOS: BOB DOBSON (LEFT); PLANET (TOP RIGHT); LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT (BOTTOM RIGHT)

BESTPRACTICES

BRUCE WILSON | The author, of the Wilson-Oyler Group, is a 30-year industry veteran. Reach him at bwilson@wilson-oyler.com.

12 things high-profit companies do

Don't we all want to be high-profit companies?

Bad habits are obstacles to growth for good companies and good people. Changing behaviors in both is one of the toughest things for a CEO to do. In working across the country with landscape companies of every size, I've noticed that the behaviors and traits of highly successful companies, and their people, look alike.

What they have in common is also what makes them innovative, sustainable and consistently profitable: Their CEOs have mastered the art of change. They're able to move forward and make money despite fluctuations in the market or in their company's life cycle. Here's how:

1. They have clarity about their mission, have a well-defined business model and execute it according to plan. They are disciplined in their daily operations and focused on their type of customer, type of service and method of delivery. More importantly, they build a team of people who are all on the same page.

2. They run companies with interlocking disciplines; sales and marketing goals are linked to operations goals, and everything is driven by strategy. They target customer segments and have defined service models and their operations are built to support the type and level of service that's being sold. Operations at all levels are trained to deliver on the sales promise and reinforce it when given the opportunity.

3. They run lean. They identify sources of value and eliminate sources of waste. They have well-thought-out processes that employees are expected to follow (and they're held accountable if they don't follow them).

4. They encourage innovation. They try new things, unlike many companies in the industry who wait to see if something is going to be successful before jumping on board. This gives them competitive advantages that more cautious companies lack.

5. They recruit and hire carefully to ensure value alignment. Effort is made to avoid potentially sub-standard employees upfront. Decisions on whether to keep underperforming employees are made quickly, terminating those who don't fit within the first 30 days.

6. They have a great impact on their employees' performance. These CEOs are visible, involved and the biggest cheerleaders for their company. They regularly offer recognition for high performance and company successes. Profitable companies have employees who feel appreciated and are involved in decisions affecting their work.

7. Both family-run and corporate-structure CEOs share a commitment to team-driven cultures that demand high performance and are free of blame. Employees can see how their actions contribute to the greater good and direct their energy toward the tasks and outcomes that matter most.

8. They target density as a strategic objective (a rare discipline often lost in the process of growing). At many stages of growth, there's a need to grow sales. Referrals are great but can be counter to the density model. High-profit companies know when to say "no."

9. They emphasize continuous learning and help their employees with career development, encouraging employees to become certified, improve skills and participate in internal training programs.

10. They measure everything: productivity in the field, sales activity, close ratios and unbillable time. Employees have measurable performance targets and receive regular feedback.

11. They plan, budget and hold themselves accountable to their projections for growth and profitability.

12. They precisely manage overhead and make sure it doesn't grow as fast as sales. In less profitable companies, overheads are allowed to drift upward, often growing as fast or faster than sales.

Not all high-profit companies do all of these things, but they do more of these things than less profitable companies do. Less profitable companies either don't do these things or they do the opposite of them—both destructive habits whose results are difficult to reverse. Bad habits, such as complacency and denial, can circumvent important decision making, cost your company money and limit its effectiveness.


You might not be able to hit 60 home runs in one season.
Onetime
1
But you can take out more than 60 weeds in one application.

JEFF HARKNESS | The author is owner-manager of 3PG Consulting. Reach him at jeff@3PGconsulting.com.

Get the best from managers

I've had the recent pleasure of managing a client's account management team for the last six months. I love it, but managing people who are in front of your customer is tough. It takes hard work and patience. The good news is this skill can be learned and refined with experience, but there's a shortage of good management talent operating in this industry. You have to get this right. Your growth and sanity depend on it!

The best companies are making investments in finding, training, motivating and rewarding their talent. This leads to retention and stability. Profits follow. Sounds easy, right? If you're frustrated and challenged by your team's results, consider the following.

Personality profiles. Human behavior is predictable and job descriptions require certain skill sets within your organizational structure. Profiles can be used to gain insight as to how a particular individual works and interacts with others, in their personal life or working life. DISC, Myers-Briggs or Wonderlic are few good providers to check out as a measuring stick for your team. Include yourself. Owners create problems, too! This screening process is a must and you need to make it part of a strategic planning meeting and/or your hiring process. In the classic read *Good to Great* author Jim Collins talks about a simple question "great" companies ask themselves: "Do I have the right people on the bus? Are they sitting in the right seat?" Ask this question of your organization on a regular basis.

Measurable data. Accountability for managers starts with communicating specific goals and metrics that must be met and reported. Each firm has to ask: "How do we define success?" The answer will drive the setup of your standards and metrics. Frequency should include weekly, monthly and quarterly requirements, derived from an annual target. Examples include the number of property visits, revenue per hour targets, budget vs. actual hours, man count, gross profit goals, quality inspections, communication touches (emails, calls, meetings), leads, proposals and closes. You have to meet on a regular basis to discuss and track metrics. The profile information you analyze from above should help you motivate and modify your approach with each manager. You can't treat everyone the same.

Priorities and work habits. Compensation and tenure have nothing to do with work habits and productivity. Too many owners make the mistake of believing they do. You need to help your people prioritize their time and set a weekly schedule. Your profile results on that manager will help you in your approach, but don't assume your people are productive in their daily routine. We consistently see terrible habits and priorities. This includes you owners, as well! So what's the solution? Is it micromanaging? Yes. Better systems and processes? Yes. Focus and determination? Yes. Hard work? Yes. The results here can be tremendous. You may even have to replace someone.

Observation and meetings. You have to make time to observe your people in action and meet to discuss results against goals. This includes a regularly scheduled meeting, phone calls, joint sales calls, joint inspection walks, field crews observations, etc. It can be as simple as taking a manager to lunch to get a feel for stress levels, issues at home, pulse and momentum of the team. Expect to hear concerns. That's a good thing. It allows you to get ahead of problems. I know everyone is busy, but this needs to be a priority. Be constructive in your comments, listen and then take action. Leaders need to lead.

Reward and appreciate. Employees by nature always ask "What's in it for me?" Your answer cannot always be, "Your job and a paycheck!" Get creative to recognize and reward your people. It's not always about an incentive plan, although I like them if designed and tracked correctly. Gift cards, dinner, an event or a day off can go a long way. How about a simple "thank you" in front of their peers? Or, "Job well done!" Show people you care. It might sound corny but it's real, trust me.

Incorporate these approaches into your management process. Be consistent and focus. You will get results.