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(From left) Daryl Nutt, VP and CFO; Matt Evans, arborist; Larry Ryan, president; Tim Jorns, field trainer; and Clarke Fry, turf manager, huddle up as employee-owners of Ryan Lawn & Tree.

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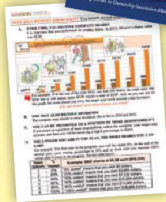
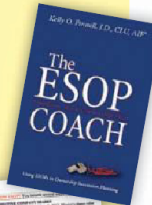
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MORE ON ESOPS (FROM COVER STORY):

- » Dig into the first chapter of *The ESOP Coach*, authored by Kelly Finnell.
- » Is your company financially apt for an ESOP? See an example feasibility analysis from CCG Advisors.
- » Peruse some of Mission Landscape's ESOP newsletters.
- » View a roster of experts to assemble to create an ESOP.



PLUS:

- » Norman Goldenberg opines on why big firms get a bad rap and the No. 1 hurdle in lawn care (from page 48).
- » Get role and salary benchmarks from LandOpt for a \$1 million company (from page 25).

SEEN ON TWITTER

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@ASOMTitusville: RT DYK? A single grass plant can have more than 300 miles of roots? #LawnCareMonth pic.twitter.com/dWby6nqEe0

@777Collins: "@LandscapeMgmt: When do you disclose design fees? @jshilan weighs in. buff.ly/1myixjF" upfront. #always

@GravellyMowers: RT "In its sales workshop, @Ariens warns students: 'If you don't like to hear no, sales is not for you. Shrug it off, keep chugging.'" #PLANETSCD



Facebook Feature QUESTION OF THE WEEK

What new piece of equipment, product or service are you implementing this year?

- » **Adam Linnemann:** Five new propane-powered John Deere mowers. First in Southern Illinois to make the switch.
- » **Eddie Susshine:** Incorporating food production into traditional flowerbeds.
- » **Jeff Grizzle:** We replaced one of our John Deere 2653s with a Toro Reelmaster 3100. We are very satisfied with that choice.

PHOTO: PLANET

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EDITOR'S NOTE

MARISA PALMIERI EDITOR

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'That's not my job'

This column's headline is a phrase I've cringed at since my first experience as a manager. For several years, starting at age 17, I supervised a staff of about 10 other teenagers at a time as a Dairy Queen shift manager.

I'd started working there three years earlier. It was my first job and, as such, it was my introductory experience with customer service (don't mess with someone's special Blizzard requests), quality control (I bet I can still make a perfect "Q" on top of a soft-serve cone) and slackers. What do you expect? It's a bunch of teens working at their first jobs. Some of them are going to be loafers.

When I graduated from "table girl" to ice-cream maker/cake decorator to manager of my peers, I amassed a list of employee/co-worker pet peeves, of which I'm sure you have your own.

The statement "That's not my job" quickly climbed to the top of mine.

I thought of my DQ days and that phrase in particular three times recently.

1. The first was when I read *Landscape Management* blogger and Green Industry consultant Phil Harwood's blog post, "High Performance: The absolute best way to find good people" (buff.ly/1mstQdp).

"Most organizations are made up of some good people, some not-so-good people and a few great people," Harwood says. "I'm sure you know who's who in your organization. It's usually obvious." Harwood is right, and, of course, that was true of an ice cream shop staffed primarily by teenyboppers. The point is not only did the owner and managers know "who's who," but

the employees knew, too. And there was nothing more demotivating for the good and great employees than to be scheduled alongside those with the "that's not my job" attitude. They dragged everyone down. The quicker we weeded out those kids, the better it was for everyone.

2. The second time I thought about my least favorite phrase was just as the *Landscape Management* editorial team was mulling over design mock-ups for this magazine's cover. We had a slew of options featuring stock art illustrations, but we weren't satisfied with them and it was too late to commission a freelance photographer to do a photo shoot.

What to do?

We realized a co-worker lives within 30 miles of Ryan Lawn & Tree, one of the firms featured in our cover story, "Ownership pride." And this colleague—Seth Jones, editor-in-chief of our sister brand *Golfdom*—just so happens to be great behind a camera, although that's patently *not* his job.

After one phone call Seth was not only on board to take photos for us but was genuinely enthusiastic about it. Forty-eight hours later we had in our hands the photo you see on the cover—and about 200 others to choose from. Suffice it to say, we owe him one. How's that for "that's not my job?"

3. Finally, after reading and rereading this month's cover story, I can imagine there's probably nothing better about working at a company with an employee stock ownership plan than the absence of the "that's not my job" mentality. When everyone's an owner, everything is everyone's job.

Landscape Management

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2014 PLANET SCD creates friendly competition in Colorado

BY SARAH PFLEDDERER

Their wardrobes wavered from business casual to school spirit fanatical, which perhaps was a reflection of the students' differing outlooks on the event—one being that they were there to nab employment, and the other that they were attending with hopes to crush the competition.

Garb aside, the 800 students who attended the 38th annual Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) Student Career Days (SCD), held March 20-23 at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, Colo., had a devotion to the Green Industry. This fact was evident when the mass of students, comprised of 65 colleges and two high school FFA chapters, partook in the cheer contest at the opening ceremony.

Verses such as "Pour some soil on me" and "Who you gonna call?...Plantscapers!" bounced off the auditorium walls as horns, cowbells, guitars, harmonicas and drums added some accompaniment to the chants. But it was Iowa State University that received the first competitive award, the \$1,000 best cheer award from John Deere, for its remix to Sir Mix-A-Lot's lyrics "I like big butts," singing "I like big plants."

Students geared up for most of the competitive events March 20, attending workshops on their respective competitions or interests. Topics ranged from leadership to arboriculture and backhoe operation, to name a few, and those were held as part of the Career Development Series (CDS). The more CDS events students attended, the greater the opportunity for them to receive the CDS award at the closing ceremony March 23.

Also held at SCD was a PLANET Academic Excellence Foundation (AEF) ceremony on March 20, where scholarships, starting at \$1,000, were presenting to students from AEF ambassador companies. The presentation of the \$3,000 President's Scholarship rounded out the event. It was awarded to Jamie Helbig of Cincinnati State Technical and Community College.

It was the next morning, March 21, when SCD attendees piled into Fort Collins' Lincoln Center Theater for the opening ceremony. In addition to the cheer competition, Glenn Jacobsen, PLANET president and president of Jacobsen Landscape Design & Construction, unveiled the creation of the PLANET New Graduate membership. The membership offers discounts on training materials, a free resume-posting service and PLANET member rebates within the Green Industry.



Eric Schneider of Hunter hosts an irrigation workshop at SCD.

The \$75 enrollment fee was knocked down to \$50 for students who enrolled at SCD, Jacobsen said.

Also unveiled at the ceremony was the winner of the Husqvarna T-shirt design contest. The honor went to Amy Openshaw of Brigham Young University-Idaho (BYU-Idaho).

Midmorning, students were shuttled back to campus for a career fair, in which nearly 75 companies set up booths for—a 44 percent increase over last year. Additionally, the number of SCD sponsors nearly doubled this year.

And while the sun shined throughout the week, snow swung into Fort Collins just in time for the competitive events March 22. Landscape companies and manufacturer attendees sponsored the 28 events, which hit on job components such as compact excavator operation, irrigation troubleshooting, small engine repair and plant problem diagnosis.

BYU-Provo took first place in the overall competitive events, winning \$5,000 from STIHL. BYU-Idaho followed up in second, and Michigan State University stood in third. In the overall results for individual students, Hayden Angelotta of Cuyahoga Community College topped the list; Matt Case of Alamance Community College settled into second; and Jeff Elshoff of Michigan State University came in third.

The 2015 SCD will be held at North Carolina State University in Raleigh, N.C.

Visit buff.ly/1pGrm8v for an overview of the Come Alive Outside Design Challenge, which select schools participated in the day before SCD.

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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.

Don't unravel under spring pressure

Spring comes every year, and with it a seasonal surge that brings stress to landscape contracting businesses. No matter how much companies prepare for the inevitable, operations may unravel under pressure. Work teams and managers become overwhelmed.

In less disciplined organizations, spring makes everyone a firefighter. Some companies never escape the spiral. Overtime gets out of control, but employees love it, get used to it and don't want to give it up.

The worst part is it happens so fast. By the time you see the financial impact of reactive behaviors, it's too late to do anything about it. It's like getting blown out in the first half of a football game. It's often difficult, if not impossible, to reverse course.

If spring has your company stressed and reducing operational effectiveness, here are 10 best practices to move your organization permanently away from firefighting mode.

1. Understand the difference between routine and nonroutine work. Routine is weekly maintenance, while nonroutine includes things like post-winter cleanups, mulching, color plantings, etc. Nonroutine things, if allowed to pile up, lead to overtime problems. Therefore they should be scheduled so they don't overlap. Try to avoid pulling nonroutine work from teams assigned

to routine maintenance. It may cause them to get behind.

2. With routine maintenance, be careful not to let the routine get broken.

3. Supervisors should observe work crews and make sure they are sequencing jobs properly, not performing work that does not need to be done and/or wasting hours. Work crews are habit based and often do tasks out of custom, such as edging when it's not needed.

4. String trimmers are time wasters. Workers tend to over-detail jobs. Crews shouldn't trim an area until they mow it. That way they only have to trim what the mowers do not reach. If they trim first, they over compensate to make sure they've trimmed enough.

5. If your crews are scheduled to work in inclement weather make sure scheduled tasks can be done effectively in the rain.

6. Delegate. Look at your to-do list and look for tasks that can be done by others.

7. Slower can be faster. Sometimes you go so fast trying to keep up that you lose sight of the big picture. Prioritize so you don't miss what's important.

8. Important, not urgent, things usually have the most impact on your company. Look at a problem to understand why it occurred and what you can do to prevent it from happening again. If you discover a disproportionate amount of urgent tasks, it could require a process change or training to regain equilibrium.

9. Rely on your team. When you start falling behind, don't be afraid to ask for help. Senior managers are there to help you be successful.

10. Monitor your progress and benchmark it. This will help you look for signs of trouble and avoid a downward spiral.

The key is to take action to improve the situation. If you follow some of these best practices, you will be better able to manage what's always an intense time of year. Start spring right and the rest of the year will be more rewarding.

When you start falling behind, don't be afraid to ask for help. Senior managers are there to help you be successful.

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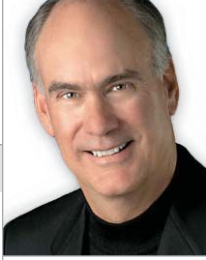


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THE BENCHMARK

FRANK ROSS

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A year of opportunity

nvariably, all of us sages are queried with: “You’ve been around the country. You see things. So, what kind of year is 2014 going to be?” Like we know...

We do have opinions, though, and mine is very upbeat. I make it a priority to stay on top of industry benchmarks and information sources, not the least of which are the *The Wall Street Journal*, *Engineering News-Record*, Kiplinger, investment newsletters and the like. Together, with what we experience around the country, I like what I see for us contractors in 2014.

Allow me to bore you with a few statistics:

- ▶ Coming out of 2013, commercial building was up 24 percent;
- ▶ Home values rose 14 percent in 2013;
- ▶ Housing starts are projected to rival those of 2006;
- ▶ Unemployment hovers between 6.5 percent and 7 percent, with a falling trend; and
- ▶ Most economists agree the gross domestic product will grow by nearly 3 percent in 2014.

I’m not ready to say the economy is robust, not quite yet, anyway. We have our challenges. Think of labor shortages, upward pressure on the minimum wage, pricing that has yet to recognize the rising cost of doing business, the Affordable Care Act’s company mandate (which takes effect in 2015) and inflation still measures less than 2 percent, which is a sign of a struggling economy

I’m sure, like you, I can flip-flop back and forth on the various bell cows affecting our economy—good, bad, whatever. The point is, for the first time in a long while, 2014 offers a year of opportunity not seen in many years. The winds of advantage are in our favor.

So, how do we handle the challenge? For one thing, we don’t sit back and think for a moment good things are going to happen simply because we’re nice guys. No. Rather, we enlist the proven, age-old five-step process for success:

▶ **Plan.** We need a plan of attack for the year. It could be our vision, our budget or our ideas molded cohesively into a meaningful direction. This plan

will identify the results and will offer step-by-step actions to be accomplished in the journey to achieve the goal.

▶ **Involve our people.** Who are any of us without our people? I would argue our employees are our greatest assets, and without them our goals would simply be a fleeting dream. Deliver our plan to our people. Create assignments. Establish timeliness. Coach. And, hold each one of our team members accountable to fair and measurable goals.

▶ **Execute.** As the leader of our team, we must lay out a plan for execution: Who will do what, with whom and when? It’s a natural process. We set the goals, we issue assignments, we provide the instructions, and our people will follow our lead.

▶ **Track.** What’s a plan without a tracking system to see where we are and to anticipate where we’re going at any given moment? If we don’t have one, we must create the system to track the results of our vision as we move along. Determine where the faults are so they can be improved and identify the wins so they can be embellished. Celebrate the wins and fix the “owies.”

▶ **Discuss the results and replan.** Here’s that people thing again. Daily/weekly we want to discuss where we are and the in-course adjustments we wish to make. If a portion of the plan is not working, correct it. If it cannot be corrected, work around it. The critical element is not to lose track of our ultimate goal. I recall the old saying, “It’s hard to remember the goal is to drain the swamp when you’re up to your ass in alligators.” It’s cute and says it all: Do not lose focus.

This is the first year in some time where outside forces are minimized. We’re in control of our destiny. Oh yes, we will have hurdles to clear, no question, but for the most part those hurdles are in our control. The recipe is simple—plan, involve, execute, track and replan. We all can do this. The opportunity is there for each of us to make 2014 the best year in recent history.

Cartoonist Walt Kelly said it best in a Pogo poster and comic strip. “We have met the enemy and he is us.” This is our year to win—make it so!