

Amazon rating: 4.7 out of 5 stars

By Chris Clifton

OWNER & PRESIDENT

Southview Design, an \$11 million, primarily design/build firm
Minneapolis

About three years ago I read Gino Wickman's book *Traction*.

Wickman is the founder of an organization called EOS Worldwide, a consulting and coaching group focused on helping companies in the \$2 million to \$50 million revenue range achieve and manage growth. *Traction* is the handbook that summarizes EOS's core teachings.

I bought Southview Design in 2009 when it was doing about \$5 million in sales. In spite of the recession, I felt the company had a solid foundation and the potential to grow. Though I've been involved with various businesses over the years, I was looking for tools to help me with this one. A friend gave me a copy of *Traction*, thinking it might provide some insight.

Traction builds on the idea that most businesses get to a point where management becomes frustrated because progress has slowed or stopped altogether. The book identifies six components essential for sustainable growth and profitability:

- **Vision.** Leaders in successful companies not only have compelling visions, they know how to communicate them.
- **People.** It's impossible to build a great company without help. Successful companies get the right people into the right seats.
- **Data.** Wickman advocates use of a "scorecard," a weekly report containing five to 15 high-level, performance-indicating numbers or measurables.
- **Issues.** Issues are the obstacles that must be faced to execute the vision. The good news is that in the history of business, there have only been a handful of different kinds of issues. The same ones come up over and over again. Companies that deal effectively with their issues achieve their visions.
- **Process.** Successful organizations see their way of doing business clearly and work to constantly refine it. Key processes are well documented and followed by all. This is the most neglected of the six key components.



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RECOMMENDED READING

› **Traction.** “Vision without traction is merely hallucination,” Wickman says. The “traction” component deals with action and accountability. The book says organizations should establish three to seven priorities, referred to as “rocks.” These are the organization’s most important priorities that must be accomplished in the next 90 days. This

component also deals with “meeting pulse,” a series of meetings at different levels of the organization, ultimately designed to ensure the company’s vision is achieved.

I found the advice in *Traction* to be simple and practical, based on the real world and not theoretical or faddish. Much of how I run Southview Design is

based on *Traction* ideas and I refer back to it on a regular basis.

Recently, we’ve refocused on the process component. Growth has stirred excitement in the organization, but it’s also added complexity and the need to hire more people. We need to make it easier for everyone to understand how we want them to do business. Right now we are in the midst of redefining and documenting any and every process we can think of.

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Amazon rating: 4.4 out of 5 stars

By Richard Bare

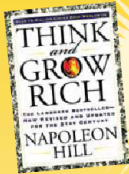
CEO

Arbor-Nomics Turf, a \$7 million, primarily lawn care company Norcross, Ga.

The premise of the book is that we all operate based on long-term assumptions that may not be true, even though they're logical. For instance, one would assume logically that if an employee wrecks a truck a few times, he or she would become a better driver. However, in real life, poor drivers have been proven to be just that, poor drivers. No matter how many times they wreck, they continue to do

Between the ideas gained from *Traction* and other improvements we've made to the business, our results have been good. We reached \$11.2 million in revenue in 2013 and I expect we'll continue to grow.

I recently read Wickman's follow up book *Get A Grip*, written in conjunction with his colleague Mike Paton. It's written in fable format and tells the story of an individual company working its way through the *Traction* process. I thoroughly enjoyed it as well and would recommend either book to anyone looking to grow a small business into a mid-sized one.



See "1-Minute Mentor" on page 52 for contractor Terry Delany's favorite book.

THERE'S POWER...



RICHARD BARE

BARE ALSO RECOMMENDS:
THE E-MYTH BY MICHAEL GERBER AND *HOW TO WIN FRIENDS AND INFLUENCE PEOPLE* BY DALE CARNEGIE



it, because they drive differently. They're distracted, careless, unfocused and cavalier.

I read the book about five years ago when our company was 30 years old. I was 60. I knew from experience the basic tenets of the book were completely correct. I've only read it straight through once, but I refer back to it many times.

After reading the book, I tried to apply its main message to my business: "People don't change that much." Rather than trying to change people, you're better off trying to draw out what's there and what works. I've had many customer service reps who are great at answering the phones, taking notes for call backs and charming customers. But give them accounting/bookkeeping responsibilities and they're terrible. They cannot be trusted with a checkbook. Awhile back a customer service representative asked me, "How can I be overdrawn if I still have checks left?"

We've greatly improved our hiring processes since reading the book. We look for clues as to what makes up a person but also for problems that will surface. For instance, if we're hiring for a spray tech position, we look for excessive tattoos, body piercing, cigarette smoking, souped up personal car, off-beat dress, slouching body language and messy family life, which all are red flags that this person is not a team player and probably won't fit in.

This book is full of leadership ideas for the entrepreneur. I frequently recommend it to others. **LMM**

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BEYOND THE E-MYTH

The *Landscape Management* interview with the author of the legendary book.



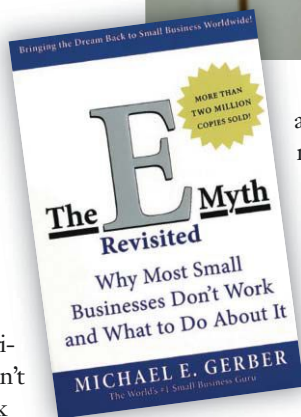
The E-Myth author
Michael Gerber

When I started writing about and for small business owners nine years ago, one phrase I heard pop up time after time was the importance of “working on your business not in your business.” When I finally discovered where it originated—*The E-Myth*—I shouldn’t have been surprised. That book and its descendants often are cited as revelatory by many landscape professionals I’ve spoken with over the years.

So, rather than profiling one landscape professional who’s been influenced by the tenets of *The E-Myth*, we sought and landed an exclusive interview with the author, Michael Gerber, to get his take on why his iconic small business tome is a staple for Green Industry company owners. —*Marisa Palmieri*

LM: You’ve said, “Most small businesses fail because people start them for the wrong reasons...” Remind us: What are the right reasons to start a business?

MG: *The E-Myth*, which has been my mainstay for 40 years, says that people who go into business aren’t entrepreneurs but what I’ve come to call “technicians suffering from an entrepreneurial seizure.” They’re working for someone else



and say, “I want to become my own boss. I can do this for myself,” and they go off to start their own business being the technician, the producer, the guy who does the work. The problem is they don’t understand all of the other parts that

have to work in a business if it’s going to be successful.

So they’re out there doing it, doing it, as I say, but they’re ignoring some of the work they have to do: client acquisition, finance, management, development of people and so forth. Because they don’t know how to do it or they do it sloppily.

The right way to do it is to start it all over again as an entrepreneur and to understand there are three critical roles for any business owner: the entrepreneur, the manager and the technician. The technician is the doer who gets stuff done. If there is no system through which to get stuff done, we just get it done in whatever way we’ve done it. That fails to become a system; it’s my particular way. I rarely know how to teach someone my particular way.

The owner who’s doing it, doing it, doing it ends up having to be there all

the time to make sure it’s being done right. When you have to be there all the time, your business isn’t scalable. It only can grow to the level in which you can be there all the time.

LM: *The E-Myth* was first published in 1986, before the Internet, smartphones and social media. There’s so much information at one’s fingertips today. Do you think these tools make it easier for small business owners today vs. when you first wrote the book?

MG: The reality is it’s neither, simply because the greatest single problem every small business owner has is lack of time. They’re consumed with work. The guy out in the field hasn’t the time to go to the Internet to look something up and he hasn’t the ability to parse down all of the information available on the Internet.

Even before the Internet, I could read everything I wanted to read about management or recruitment or hiring or training, but most of the people in your industry or any industry don’t read anything. Even, in fact, if they were able to read all of the books on every subject, they wouldn’t understand how to apply it.

Social media? So what. The Internet? No way. Well, yes, it’s something where if you were absolutely determined to study and to learn, you have access to every-

thing to study. But how do you discriminate? Access is insufficient without a clear understanding of what I'm looking for. Most of the owners of most of these businesses don't have an understanding of what they're looking for.

LM: What's surprised you most about entrepreneurs after all these years?

MG: I can tell you what surprised me in the beginning. I had the assumption that because they owned a business, they knew how to run a business. They didn't. They didn't understand that business is ultimately a system of work—financial work, technical work. It's a system of management work, marketing work, sales work. But, in fact, many don't understand a system that works is independent of the people who are doing it.

LM: But owners in this industry and many others often say what sets them apart is their people. How do you respond to that?

MG: It's a dumb idea. If everybody says our company is different because of our people, then everybody is saying the same thing, then everybody is wrong. Well, somebody's wrong. You can prove it's wrong by quantifying the impact of what they do. Measure it. It's just an anecdotal statement. Every single technician thinks of themselves as the reason why people come buy their service. They all believe people dependent is the key because they don't know how to do it any other way.

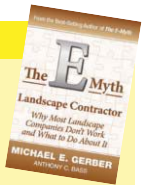
In the case of *The E-Myth*, there's no one who can read that book that can say it isn't true. Every reader who finishes the book knows they just read *the* book. That's not because Michael Gerber is so damn smart. It's because Ray Kroc, the founder of McDonalds, is so damn smart. It's because the founder of Starbucks is. The founder of IBM is. What made them successful and others fail? That's what I communicated in *The E-Myth*. Before that, nobody said

it to independent business owners. Ray Kroc said it to his franchisees. But until he approached the business as a turnkey prototype for scalable growth, the company itself would be incapable of growing. It would come to that ceiling imposed on it by the limitations of the owner. Ultimately, a company can only grow as large as the owner is competent to grow it.

Most guys in your industry work themselves to death. What started as a dream—"I'll become my own boss"—ends as a nightmare. I became my own boss and I'm working for a lunatic. **LM**

» WEB EXTRA

Visit the Web Extras section of LandscapeManagement.net for Gerber's take on "working on the business, not in the business," plus, an excerpt from *The E-Myth Landscape Contractor*, coauthored by landscape industry veteran Tony Bass.



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3/12	Steven Moore , Consultant/Vendor, <i>Weather Reach</i>	Water Management for Design/Build Contractors	

ABOUT THE HOST

Jody Shilan, MLA is an award-winning landscape designer and former landscape design/build contractor, who has sold tens of millions of dollars of design and installation work throughout his career. He now uses his 35+ years of experience to coach other landscape contractors how to easily and dramatically increase their sales by following his unique landscape design/build sales process. He does this through public speaking, private consulting, group workshops and his "exclusive" members-only website www.FromDesign2Build.com.



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PG 36

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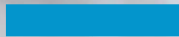
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MARKETWATCH

SERVICE SEGMENT SNAPSHOTS

One firm improved service by recruiting staff from luxury retailer Nordstrom.

PAGE 34



As seen on TV

Georgia-based company works against the clock to deliver a dream backyard on 'Yard Crashers.'

By EMILY SCHAPPACHER

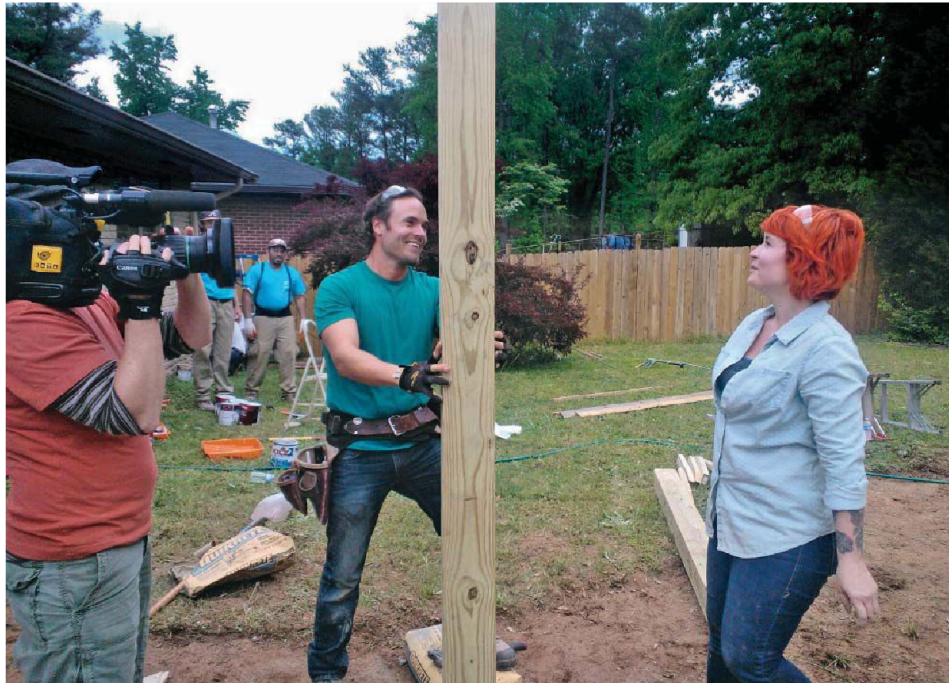
Providing clients the backyard of their dreams is what Oasis Landscapes & Irrigation does best—but doing it in less than 48 hours is a challenge crazy enough only for television. Featured on an episode of the DIY Network's "Yard Crashers," the Oasis crew completed a job that should have taken two to three weeks in less than two days, working against the clock to provide one lucky Atlanta-based couple a customized backyard sanctuary.

"We had no time left over and were all scrambling in the last hour," says Kevin Paulen, president of the Doraville, Ga.-based company. "I think it was a little harder than we expected it to be, but it was every bit as much fun as we thought it would be."

"Yard Crashers" is a landscape renovation show that offers unsuspecting shoppers at home improvement stores the opportunity for professional landscape contractors to renovate their backyards in less than two days. The show's producers contacted Paulen to see if his company was interested in appearing on an episode being filmed in Atlanta last April.

About a month after the initial contact, the producers traveled to Atlanta to interview Paulen and the owners of six other companies to determine which was most qualified for the job. Paulen was notified later the same day that his \$3-million company—which is 80 percent design/build, 20 percent maintenance and serves 90 percent residential clients—had been selected.

"They wanted to make sure we were qualified and capable of pulling off a project in a short period of time and



that we had the skills to do something unique," Paulen says.

Oasis had three months to plan and a \$25,000 budget provided by "Yard Crashers" to work with. Planning ahead, Paulen says, was key to completing the project on time. He and his project manager created a timeline to estimate how long each component of the project would take and worked ahead as much as possible, such as by shaping each piece of stone for the patio and the retaining wall and constructing the water and grill features.

Paulen's team also utilized the time to up the ante on creativity. The homeowner restores classic cars for a living, so Oasis made the water feature and grill out of parts from a 1948 Ford pickup and a 1934 Chevy sedan. The project also included

a decorative redwood sanctuary, privacy plantings, mature trees and blooming annuals.

"The network goes over your plan and lets you know if you bit off more than you can chew," Paulen says. "But if you're going to do something like this, make sure it's planned well and do as much in advance as you can. Also, don't get too overzealous—keep your goals realistic."

CHALLENGES, COSTS ARISE

Despite being organized, unexpected challenges still arose. One of the most difficult parts was working around the film crew, Paulen says. His staff members repeatedly had to stop what

continued on page 32

TUNE IN

"Backyard Hot Rods" is slated to air on DIY Network March 12 at 10:30 a.m. EST and March 29 at 5 p.m. EST.

