

CREW Chief

SUCCESS GUIDE



STRIKING A BALANCE BETWEEN CO-WORKER AND BOSS

Also Inside:

- Proactive property management
- Building crew communication
- Gain an edge with green-friendly equipment
- Handling problem situations

A Supplement to

PRO

Business success for landscape professionals

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Going Green: Right Equipment, Right Training



Dear Crew Supervisor,

Every day, we hear more and more about “going green” and the need to be environmentally responsible. Government and special interest groups continue to pressure the Green Industry with a variety of requirements including moves to ban equipment usage. Here are some steps you can take to keep your crews productive and efficient while lessening your impact on the environment:

Use low-emission, fuel-efficient outdoor power equipment and other environmentally responsible products.

Many manufacturers make claims about emissions and fuel efficiency. Borrow an idea from Bland Landscaping in North Carolina and put the equipment to the test. Bland found that by replacing their entire fleet of older model backpack blowers with one of the new low-emission STIHL models, the fuel savings alone would pay for the changeover in less than two years. (For more details, see the ad on the inside back cover of this issue). Also, investigate other environmentally responsible products, such as highly biodegradable engine oils and bar and chain oil that are available on the market. Finally, keep your equipment in optimal running condition with regular maintenance from your servicing dealer.

Train your crew(s) how to operate the products for best performance.

Always follow the manufacturers’ instruction manuals. What may be best for one product or brand may not be for another. Also, following operating tips like those contained in *A Guide to Safe and Courteous Use of Leaf Blowers* from the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute (OPEI) can counter community complaints about noise and particulates. You can download the file at: <http://www.stihllibrary.com/pdf/LeafBlowerTraining.pdf> or order copies from OPEI online at <http://www.opei.org/order/index.asp> or call 703.549.7600.

Working together we can all be part of socially responsible environmental stewardship.

Wishing you continued success,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Keeler".

John Keeler
National Training Manager
STIHL Inc.

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Throughout the Crew Chief Success Guide, the terms foreman, crew chief and supervisor may be used interchangeably.

To download Vol. 1 of Crew Chief Success Guide, visit promagazine.com

Taking the Point



Gregg Wartgow
Editor-in-Chief

Football season is over now, so bare with me—I'm going to use a basketball analogy. Unless blessed by a Michael Jordan or one-two combo like Kobe and Shaq, few teams will enjoy more than fleeting success without a great point guard. The point guard, who for all you non-basketball fans is the player who dribbles the ball up the court and starts the offense, is an extension of the team's head coach. In landscaping, that's what you are as a crew chief.

You have a monumentally important role to play in your company. Think about it. The majority of the typical landscape company's business is built on referrals. Referrals result from satisfied customers. Satisfied customers result from a job well done. And a job well done largely rests on your shoulders.

Let's assume that, since you've achieved foreman status, you're already a great landscape technician. Perhaps you've even earned a certification or two. That's important because, after all, you are in the landscaping business. Just as important is how you manage, motivate and lead your crew so each and every project is completed on time, within budget and to the customer's satisfaction.

In this issue, speaker and author Patrick McWard describes the balancing act you have to play as friend/co-worker and boss. He talks about how to address certain problem situations that might occur on your crew. He discusses how to proactively manage each property, and how to get each of your crewmembers on board with your vision.

All the company-wide meetings and training don't do a bit of good if your crew fails to execute the things they've learned once they step foot on a property. It's your job as foreman to make sure everyone falls in line and runs the offense. Just like a point guard on the basketball floor, you can't do that without the respect of your team. We trust that this issue, brought to you exclusively by STIHL Inc., will give you a few ideas of how to do just that. ■



Balancing Act

A STRATEGY TO DRIVE PRODUCTIVITY AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION BY BUILDING TRUST WITH YOUR CREW.

Make no mistake, being a landscape foreman is a position of leadership. Leading is not just a job, it's who you are. As a leader you must be action-oriented, concerned with quality, caring, honest, reliable, responsible and inspiring.

You also have a delicate balancing act to play. You're a leader, but also still a worker. You're a boss, but also still a friend. Given your dual role, how do you garner respect from and get the most out of your crew?

According to national speaker and author Patrick McWard, the first step is dispelling any myths regarding effective crew management. McWard has recently developed a series of landscape foremen training workshops for the Illinois Landscape Contractors Association. Some of those myths include:

- A paycheck should be enough motivation for workers
- Kickin' butt will get them to fall back in line
- I'll micromanage my way to the highest quality, because people will slack

off if I don't watch their every move.

Now think about your own employment history. What traits did you admire in some of the people you worked for? Truth be told, most people want to work for a boss who's honest, consistent, and leads by example. The following leadership concepts will help you develop a top-flight crew that will keep performing property after property:

- Show employees respect and acknowledge their skills
- Give up your need to be "liked" and aim for being "respected"

- Let go of your personal ego and make the team ego your priority
- Solicit help as you make the transition
- Address tension early and directly
- Listen and learn
- Be fair and consistent
- Talk about the “team” responsibility
- Treat everyone equally.

DON'T CAUSE A COMMUNICATION SHUTDOWN

Inevitably, you and your crew will go through some challenging times. How a difficult situation is handled separates the good foremen from those destined for mediocrity, if not failure. Communication and trust are vital, so it's important to be aware of certain behaviors that can cause a communication shutdown on your crew:

- Jumping to conclusions without the facts
- Making excuses and blaming others for mistakes
- Yelling and showing disrespect in front of others
- Saying one thing but doing another
- Acting like bad news is the bearer's fault
- Seeing others as inferior
- Inconsistent accountability.

Here are some possible scenarios of “tough situations” you may encounter, and a few tips on how to successfully manage them.

PROBLEM 1: WORK QUALITY HAS BEEN SUFFERING

“Before work quality is even close to becoming an issue, you need to develop real relationships with your crewmates upfront,” McWard points out. “It's called, ‘making deposits in the emotional bank account.’ Sure, you want to give them praise. But you also want to connect on a personal level.”

Then, when there is a problem, you don't have to use ineffective techniques

like “sandwich”—which is basically sandwiching the employee between a note of praise and one of reprimand. For example, “Jack, we really like the work you've been doing. But lately there's been this one issue we've been noticing.”

Sandwiching makes you look weak—like you're taking the easy way out. On the other hand, if you've been making deposits in the emotional bank account, you should be able to approach the employee on a personal level and cut to the chase in a non-confrontational, constructive manner.

“Don't say you're slacking' or you need to do this.' That causes employees to slip into defensive mode.”

“Use *I* statements,” McWard advises. “Don't say ‘you're slacking’ or ‘you need to do this.’ That causes employees to slip into defensive mode. Take them away privately and make *I* statements, like ‘I'm concerned about this, what do you think?’ But if you haven't been making emotional deposits before this situation even presents itself, you're just being autocratic, and they'll likely resent it. There must be a balance.”

Whatever you do, don't avoid the situation, which goes right along with the concept of holding people accountable for their performance and actions. First of all, get all the facts in order. Don't just chalk it up to, “Oh well, Jack must've been out drinking last night.” Listen to what the employee has to say, then lay out what

you need, whether it's better quality, a better effort to get along with another crewmember, a reduction in the number of F-bombs dropped on a property, or whatever.

“It's important to help crewmembers understand how huge professionalism is—and that each of them plays a visible role in it,” McWard says. “All the customer has to do is look out his window to see if you're professional. Go have your coffee at Dunkin' Donuts before you get to the property.”

Regardless of whether or not the work quality issue is related to performance or professionalism, don't be stuck in the past. Focus on “next time” so crewmembers have something to work toward.

PROBLEM 2: A CERTAIN EMPLOYEE SEEMS DISTRACTED BY PERSONAL PROBLEMS

Sometimes poor work quality can be attributed to an employee being out drinking the night before. Sometimes it's because he's working a second job to pay his bills. But how you'd address those two situations is much different than how you'd deal with a crewmember whose wife or parent is in the hospital. “That's why it's so important to seek the facts first,” McWard reminds.

If you determine that one of your crewmembers does have a substance abuse problem, for instance, pause for a second before you do something you'll regret.

“Don't label them as a drunk or party animal or whatever,” McWard warns. “Don't even go there. And don't offer them advice to ‘tone down the partying’ or anything like that. Keep it to job-related behaviors like quality, professionalism and safety. If you open the ‘you party too much’ door, you can get yourself in legal trouble. Don't give advice like you're their friend or big brother. Now's the time to be the boss. Tell them, ‘This

happened on so-and-so's property, and that is absolutely unacceptable."

If you have reason to believe one of your crewmembers does have a serious problem such as substance abuse or an inability to control his temper, McWard says this is also a good time to involve your supervisor, or even the

owner of the company, in addressing the situation.

PROBLEM 3: TWO CREW MEMBERS AREN'T GETTING ALONG

Whether you're on a landscaping crew or the board of directors at a large publicly held corporation, certain team members

sometimes have a hard time working together. It might be a simple personality conflict, or perhaps something more substantial. Whatever the case, it's the team leader's job to make sure the conflict does not affect total team performance.

"Talk to each person individually, and then bring them together to chat with you," McWard says. Again, use *I* statements such as, "I'm sensing some tension here," or "I can see something's going on here," or "It seems to me that you and Bill are not enjoying working together."

"Just be sure to put the statement in your own language so it feels like a casual conversation," McWard says. "Let them know the consequences of their actions on the rest of the team, profits, customer satisfaction and your role as the leader. Bring it back to the objectives of your crew, and tie that to their individual job performance. They don't have to like each other—but they absolutely have to respect each other and work together, so you need a behavioral change from both of them."

After this discussion, it's a good idea to suggest meeting again in a couple weeks to see how things are going. Also let them know the consequences of their inability to change. "Don't sound like a drill sergeant," McWard cautions. "The Mike Ditka coaching approach may not work. You may need to be more like NBA coach Phil Jackson, who works with different personalities in different ways to get the most out of his team."

PROACTIVE PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

You're a crew chief now, and managing problem situations among staff goes with the territory. It's also your job to proactively manage each property to meet both production and customer satisfaction goals. Pause and take a look at each property. Develop a vision for how the work will flow so the end result is perfect. The key is communication that sticks.



HOW TO MAKE PEOPLE ABSOLUTELY HATE YOU

- Talk only about yourself
- Always are right no matter what, never admitting a mistake
- Talk only about your interests
- Cut people off frequently without apology
- Show lack of interest and sensitivity to others
- Frown a lot and look puzzled
- Criticize others and complain a lot
- Never take responsibility for yourself

"People need to hear things repeatedly, and your crewmembers are no exception," McWard points out. "Every conversation you have with your people should include specifics on what you want done. Remind them how the work should flow, how the edging should be done, and so on. Try to come up with a half dozen bullet points describing your vision and workflow. Write them down and commit them to memory."

Try to anticipate what the customer wants. Understand who your customer is and what makes him or her tick. Stay in contact with the account manager,

because he's the best person to help you gain an understanding. Once you do, share it with your crewmembers.

Reward your guys for doing a good job. "Some foremen will buy sodas or coffee, often out of their own pocket," McWard says. "There are also many intangibles to get people motivated and stay with a job. They want respect and praise. They want their opinion to count. And they want an important role in product quality."

Ironic ... that's exactly what you want—from both yourself and your crewmembers. In many ways, you are still very much like them. You're also their boss.

You have a balancing act to play. When you do so effectively, you'll build trust among your crew, fuel their productivity, and start delivering a consistent quality you, your team and the entire company will benefit from. ■



Patrick McWard is the author of two books including his latest, "Radical Attraction." An award winning speaker, he has

presented to over 1,200 audiences. He works with business owners who want to attract the right customers and grow their business the right way. Patrick just recently created Radical Attraction Business Growth™, a new and unique approach to growing your business and getting more of what you want in your life. Visit him at www.patmcward.com or call 773-728-9309 for more information.



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** according to current data posted on the EPA Web site as of November 2007*

*** as measured per ANSI B175.2*

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MS 441 STIHL Magnum™

The low-emission MS 441 STIHL Magnum™ chain saw features a new highly-effective prefiltration system, innovative anti-vibration system and advanced combustion technology that delivers more power and higher torque over a wider RPM range than the MS 440 – all with a 30% increase in engine lifespan. Plus, with 60% less vibration than the MS 440, the MS 441 offers smoother cuts, reduced operator fatigue and added control for your crew members.

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of Orange



LOW-EMISSION MULTI-TASK TOOL

STIHL KM 130 R

Delivers Versatility

The STIHL KombiSystem is a family of multi-task tools comprised of a STIHL Kombi-Motor (KM) and numerous KombiSystem attachments. Powered by a larger-displacement, lower-emission engine than the KM 90 R or KM 110 R, the KM 130 R Kombi-Motor offers the cleanest-running engine in its class, according to current data posted at the EPA Web site as of November 2007. The KombiSystem tools offer great flexibility for tasks such as blowing, trimming, edging, pruning, hedge trimming, sweeping, cultivating, and more. This system saves on cost, as well as storage and transportation space.

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FULLY SYNTHETIC, BIODEGRADABLE 2-CYCLE ENGINE OIL

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LOW-EMISSION GRASS TRIMMER

STIHL FS 130 R – Cleanest in its class*

The STIHL FS 130 R grass trimmer is powered by a 36.3 cc, low-emission engine delivering 73% lower emissions than EPA requirements. This larger engine offers 40% more power with only 8 ounces more weight than the STIHL FS 110 R.

** according to current data posted on the EPA Web site as of November 2007*

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Confront Your Way to Success

By Joe Takash

One of the biggest challenges in business today is one that even senior executives and CEOs experience on regular basis: the lack of skills necessary for productive confrontation. Most employees don't know how to manage their boss, and often work from a position of fear of resentment. Similarly, many managers will not confront administrative assistants who are short, and even rude, to clients.

The good news is that most people would like to be better at having difficult conversations, but they simply don't know how to do it. The following are seven steps necessary for confronting others in a way that creates stronger relationships and increased productivity.

1. Change the name and your attitude. Too many people look at difficult conversations as negative and counter-productive. Hence, they avoid and dance around them as often as possible. Instead of thinking of it as a difficult conversation, use the term "productive confrontation." Knowing that the intended result is to help, not hurt, will give you the courage to step up and approach others to make a change.

2. Gather input from credible sources. Seek counsel from those you know are going to be honest with you about your view of the situation and your planned approach. Gaining different perspectives allows you to build a confident, rational approach that can benefit you and the party you confront.

3. Put it on paper. Before the meeting, prepare a bullet-pointed structure, not a script, in writing. Be sure that it allows you to communicate your viewpoint in a logical order that is easy to understand



and follow for the other person.

4. Be succinct, then listen. Be sure to state your intentions upfront, followed by what you hope the resolution will be. Be direct and friendly by looking the other party in the eyes, and speak with a confident, polite tone. Once you've made your original point(s), practice silence and be a fully engaged listener. Valuing the perspective of the other person will bring you a step closer to a productive outcome.

5. Be as clinical as possible. Whether you're intimidated, angered, hurt or resentful, try to consider the impact of how both parties will feel and focus on how everyone can benefit.

6. Agree on a resolution. At the conclusion of the meeting, check in to see how your message was received by the other person, then discuss what the next step should be for application and follow-up. This agreement can be documented, and serve as a strategic roadmap for a stronger working relationship going forward.

7. Express appreciation. Even if you agree to disagree with the other party, showing gratitude via a verbal thank you, short note or follow-up voicemail shows outstanding character and leadership. It's also more difficult for others to harbor negative feelings toward you when you show them respect and courtesy. ■

Joe Takash, founder of Victory Consulting, is a business consultant and keynote speaker who specializes in leadership, motivation and selling skills. He helps clients like American Express, Prudential and General Motors build morale, results and profits through relationships. A syndicated columnist, Joe has been featured in Entrepreneur, Selling Power and Business 2.0. His forthcoming book from Wiley, "It's Not Who You Know, It's How You Know Them," will be out in 2008. Call 888-918-3999 or visit joetakash.com.



Kurt and Matt Bland
Bland Landscaping
Apex, NC

“Our most effective cost-cutting measure was buying 58 new blowers.”

Sometimes you have to spend money to save money. That’s what Bland Landscaping did by replacing their entire fleet of blowers with 58 new STIHL BR 550’s. “Our philosophy is to always do the right thing,” Kurt says, “and that includes environmentally. We heard the fuel efficiency claims of the BR 550 and we ran our own tests. They were 40 percent more efficient than our other machines and we calculated

we’d save enough on gas to pay for the new blowers in less than two years.” Fuel efficiency, low emissions – any other benefits, Matt? “The entire line of blowers is really powerful. And, my crews can work longer before refueling. We’re doing more work, saving money and we’re doing it clean.”

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