

CREW Chief

SUCCESS GUIDE

Become a Maintenance Leader

Also Inside:

- Taking ownership of your properties
- Tips for better on-site management
- Five ways to reduce wasted time

A Supplement to
PRO
Business success for landscape professionals

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STIHL®

Capitalize on Superior Service



Dear Crew Chief,

You are most likely aware that STIHL products are only retailed through independent servicing dealers. We believe that the servicing dealer offers valuable service before, during and after the sale – service that is vital to our customers' product and brand loyalty and, thus, to the future of our business. As providers in a service industry, you already appreciate the importance of the customer service you provide. In a down economy, offering *superior* customer service is more important than ever to ensure you get your share of new business and that you keep growing your existing business.

Work to instill the importance of customer service in your crews, and be sure they are properly trained to deliver the exceptional customer service that will position you to maximize your business in slow times and thrive into the future. There are many cost-effective opportunities for training your people. We suggest you explore the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) online learning opportunities, as well as using publications such as *Crew Chief Success Guide* as resources for learning. Utilize training resources provided by your local servicing dealer and the manufacturers and distributors that supply them. For example, stihlusa.com offers videos and manuals to aid in training. All of these opportunities are readily accessible and cost efficient in time and money.

One key to success in 2009 is managing each property as if your livelihood depends on it, because it does. Manage costs responsibly and ensure that you and every member of your team are providing superior customer service.

Wishing you continued success,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Keeler'.

John Keeler
National Training Manager
STIHL Inc.

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The best crew chiefs take ownership of their properties, and responsibility for customer satisfaction.
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Focus on these five areas and you can easily find—and eliminate—six minutes of wasted, unbillable time per day.



To download a past volume, please visit greenindustrypros.com/content/crewchiefsuccess.jsp

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

Know Your Role

I recently visited a contractor in the Northeast who was kind enough to share some of the job descriptions he had written for his employees. When it comes to his crew chiefs, several duties are pretty straightforward and easy to grasp for most:

- Demonstrate the ability to run projects with limited supervision
- Organize jobs from start to finish
- Demonstrate the ability to maintain quality while increasing efficiency
- Fill out production and materials worksheets
- Demonstrate and monitor safe work procedures
- Take responsibility for the organization of tools, equipment and supplies
- Act as a contact for the client

This contractor also has a checklist of additional responsibilities for his crew chiefs—some of which aren't always so easy to grasp:

- Teach crew members procedures and production techniques
- Motivate crew members
- Guide crew members in company policy and procedures
- Maintain a professional approach

These four responsibilities, when fully understood and embraced, are what set the best crew leaders apart from the mediocre. And great crew leaders are what set the best landscape companies apart from the run of the mill.

This issue of **Crew Chief Success Guide** will help you come to understand your vitally important role in the success of your company. You'll also pick up some tips for better on-site property management, and then a few more that will help you cut down on your crew's wasted, unbillable time—something that will really make your boss happy!

So check it out. And if you have some tricks of the trade you've come up with—ways to train and motivate employees, be more efficient on the jobsite, improve the customer experience, or whatever—send an email to editor@greenindustrypros.com. Thanks for reading.

Maintenance Leaders

THE BEST CREW CHIEFS TAKE OWNERSHIP OF THEIR PROPERTIES, AND RESPONSIBILITY FOR CUSTOMER SATISFACTION.

The crew chief plays one of the most important roles in any landscape maintenance operation. That individual manages a crew, is responsible for the end product, and represents his or her company on the front line every day of the work week.

What does it take to be an excellent crew leader? "It's more than being able to handle a truck with trailer ... much more," explains Oscar Hernandez, quality assurance manager for Heaviland Enterprises. "We expect our crew chiefs to be leaders. They have the responsibility to make sure

relates company president Tom Heaviland, CLP, CLT. "Crew leaders manage a portfolio of commercial maintenance properties that require mowing, trimming, pruning, and irrigation system checks, among other services. They are in charge of their equipment and prioritize work on site. We want them to take pride in their work, be enthusiastic about their jobs, and keep their truck and equipment organized."

"As a company, one of our biggest responsibilities is to make sure our crew leaders have all the tools they need to get the job done," adds Hernandez. "Once a year, we bring together all the crew

lines of communication open between crew leaders and the field managers who supervise field operations.

Hernandez says there will always be situations that fall out of the normal realm of maintaining a property. Some can be taken care of easily by a crew (e.g., when a client asks the crew to trim a couple of shrubs or otherwise perform a task that isn't too time-consuming). Others will fall outside the scope of maintaining or managing a property. In that case, crew leaders are instructed not to say "no" to the client's request, but instead discuss the situation with a field manager.

"Yes, crew leaders sometimes make mistakes, and that's not bad," Hernandez emphasizes. "Our philosophy is that if you don't make mistakes, you're not making decisions and being a leader. But we don't want to see that same mistake repeated. Instead, we want that poor decision to be a learning experience."

BALANCING BUDGETS & SAFETY

Heaviland's crews are outfitted with a 21-inch push mower, 36-inch mid-size mower, a hedge and string line trimmer, along with a backpack blower.

"We instill the importance of being efficient on site with the equipment, and we drive home safety issues all the time," says Hernandez. "Everyone also stretches in the morning to loosen up before heading out, even though the exercise takes 10 minutes or so out of the day. It's worth it because you cannot put a price tag on being safe.

"The same holds true when crews are on site. Every property has a budget for which crew leaders are held accountable. But being safe is more important

CREW CHIEF RESPONSIBILITY

- **Crew safety** – Being safe is more important than being on time
- **Equipment** – The proper use of equipment will ensure safe and efficient operation
- **Prioritize** – Set priorities for each job
- **Budget** – Accountable for finishing jobs within budgeted hours
- **Decision-making** – Exhibit flexibility on site, always keeping client expectations and the overall look of the property in mind

a job is done right and completed within budget. Beyond that, though, they take responsibility for meeting client expectations, and that ultimately means taking ownership of the property."

RECOGNIZE YOUR IMPORTANT ROLE IN THE COMPANY

Headquartered in Vista, CA, Heaviland Enterprises Inc. operates 30 maintenance crews from three branch locations and one satellite facility.

"Our typical crew is comprised of three people: a crew chief and two gardeners,"

leaders for a day-long training session, the highlight of which is an overview of our company—its vision and mission statement, along with the organization chart.

"We then go over the basics, including reviewing the crew leader job description, so all crew leaders understand thoroughly what the company expects of them. We review a typical property 'punch list,' and then discuss job priorities above and beyond the list—what should be done before leaving every property."

Company-wide, Heaviland Enterprises stresses the importance of keeping the

TIPS FOR BETTER ON-SITE MANAGEMENT

- Each property is different, so understand a customer's likes and dislikes.
- When arriving at a property, get your crews working and then walk the entire property to ensure there are no problem areas (or that previous concerns have been rectified).
- Pay special attention to a property's focal points, e.g., drive, entranceway, and areas around special hardscaping elements such as pools, statues and other high-profile structures.
- Don't continue to struggle with a property if you're not meeting budget or otherwise have a problem that's difficult to solve. Ask your supervisor to do a walk-through with you. Having another pair of eyes look a property over is always helpful.
- Just as you perform a "walk-through" of a property, perform a "walk-around" of your truck and trailer in the morning. Check tires, all lights, horn, trailer hitch and safety chains, brakes—and make sure your equipment is secure.
- Do a more thorough inspection once a week and always report any problems to your supervisor.
- No matter how careful you and your crew members are, mistakes will occur. Make sure to report a broken sprinkler head to your supervisor so a repair crew can be dispatched. If you miss a downed branch or forget to prune a bush, be prepared to return to the property to finish the job. Remember that your performance on a property affects the client and reflects directly on your company.



than finishing a job on time.

Crew leaders are responsible for their crews—and the property. If something needs to be done and it causes a crew to spend extra time, that's agreeable—as long as it doesn't happen every time. Of course, we track the hours to ensure this doesn't happen."

Many of Heaviland Enterprises' crew chiefs were once just crew members. But when you make that jump to "leader" of the pack, expectations naturally change with respect to your

performance—and role within the company.

Hernandez says, "Before being promoted to a crew leader position, we have to see potential within our gardeners; someone who truly cares about the job, shows commitment, and most important of all, is willing to learn. They have to relate well to other crew members and be willing to take leadership responsibility. Again, crew leaders need to care about their crews, and the properties they maintain." ■

STIHL BR 600

The Backpack Blower That Pays for Itself

Porsche Engineering Group GmbH Finds STIHL BR 600 More Fuel Efficient Than Competitors

STIHL BR 600 Backpack Blower

- > Up to 28% more fuel efficient
- > Up to 20% less weight*
- > Up to 12% more air volume power*

Save Money, Increase Your Bottom Line

A study conducted by the Porsche Engineering Group GmbH found that the STIHL BR 600 backpack blower is up to 28% more fuel efficient than competitive models, which can provide significant fuel savings per unit in just two seasons!

These results are pertinent given that the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) found in a recent member survey that one of the top concerns for landscape contractors is the cost of fuel. To calculate savings, go to www.stihlusa.com/fuel_calculator.

Cutting Edge Technologies

The STIHL BR 600 led the competitors' models in the Porsche study, ranking the highest in fuel efficiency. The value-priced STIHL BR 550 was also tested in the Porsche study, and was found to be 16% more fuel efficient than the BR 600.

"Our priority at STIHL is the development of products that provide the best in power and performance, but are also fuel efficient and environmentally responsible. These results



showcase the dedication we put into the products on every level," said John Foster, manager of product compliance at STIHL Inc.

To learn more about STIHL products and the results of the Porsche Engineering Group GmbH test commissioned by STIHL, visit www.stihlusa.com/BR600. For more information on EPA reporting, visit www.epa.org.



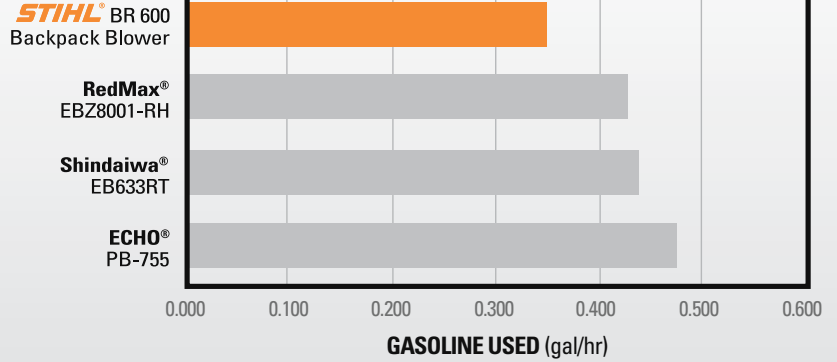
Advertisement

Powered by one of the cleanest-running engines in its class—the STIHL BR 600 Backpack Blower blew away the competition in head-to-head comparison tests. See how it saves you money at the gas pump.

Fuel Savings

- The STIHL BR 600 backpack blower is up to 28% more fuel efficient than competitive models.
- You can realize significant fuel savings per unit in just two seasons. To calculate savings, go to www.stihlusa.com/fuel_calculator.
- The BR 600 is also rated as having some of the lowest emissions in its class per information posted at EPA Web site (October 2008).

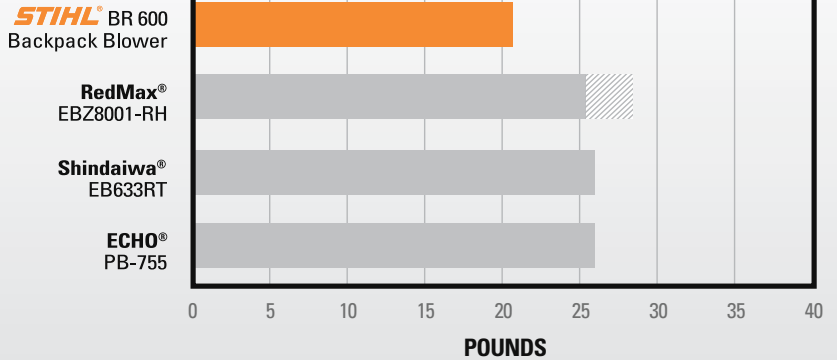
COMPETITIVE FUEL CONSUMPTION COMPARISON



Less Weight

- The BR 600 is up to 20% lighter than competitor brands.
- Specifications from manufacturers' catalogs and Web sites were used to draw this comparison.

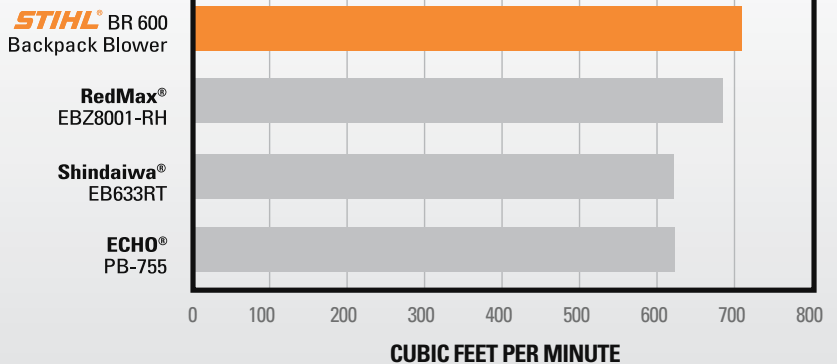
WEIGHT COMPARISON



More Power

- The STIHL BR 600 provides up to 12% more power than competitive models tested.
- Air velocity for all machines is between 199 and 204 mph.

AIR VOLUME POWER



*Weight and air volume comparisons were based upon specifications from manufacturers' Web sites and catalogs. RedMax® published data is without tubes. STIHL, Shindaiwa® and ECHO® weights are with tubes. Air volume measured with tubes. Air velocity for all machines is between 199 and 204 mph). All blowers featured in the comparison have similar air speeds.

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Wanna' Increase Profits?

THEN QUIT WASTING TIME!

Today more than ever, landscapers work in a competitive environment. Careful budgeting and compelling salesmanship are essential in preserving the bottom line. But perhaps even more so is effective time management—especially at the crew level.

Is it possible that a crew can waste six minutes a day? Most contractors would say that's a conservative figure. Tony Bass was a landscape contractor himself. He says today's contractors and crew leaders must focus on strategies to become more productive and quit wasting valuable time. By simply eliminating six minutes of unbillable time per day per employee, the average contractor can add literally thousands to his bottom line.

"It's going to be a struggle these next couple of years for many contractors to remain profitable," Bass points out. "But companies that uncover simple ways to drive out waste can remain competitive and grow their market share."

Here are Tony's Top Five ways to do just that.

1 – TAME THE MORNING CIRCUS

"Every time I consult with a contractor, I see this exact scenario," Bass relates. "It's especially true in the morning when the crews are loading up to head out. The owner is standing in the middle of it all like the ring leader of a circus. He's pointing in all different directions, shouting to the crews, 'load this, then load that,' 'put that over there' ... and so on."

Bass says the morning circus can easily burn up a half-hour. But you can just as easily slice that in half, if not more. As a crew leader, you can help take control of your crew and its organization, and help tame this morning circus. (See page 10.)

2 – TOOL ORGANIZATION

Not only does the morning circus get crews off to a rough start for the day, but it also leads to other productivity-drainers, such as forgotten tools or safety gear. Tool organization in general is an area every landscape company can improve in.

"Having your equipment organized and stored so it can be quickly found is a huge benefit," Bass says. "Think about how you organize your trucks, for example. If your trucks are well-organized so your crews can easily find what they need while out on the job, they will get more done every day."

Tool organization becomes the ultimate payback *if* you can avoid the mistake of forgetting to load tools on the truck in the first place. Having to go back to the shop to grab a forgotten tool is going to cost you way more than six minutes. That's why taming the morning circus and tool organization go hand-in-hand. And once you start to focus on them, you can make the necessary improvements.

3 – RIGHT-SIZING CREWS

When you're scheduling and routing your crews, you have to keep the right number of people on each account. By putting too many people on an account, you don't get the work done much faster, so you're not nearly as efficient.

Having performed time and motion studies over the years, Bass says he's always found that, in the small residential arena, a two-man crew can be more efficient than a three-man crew. Once you get into small commercial properties, that three-man crew is often the most productive.

4 – ROUTING

Routing today, primarily in lawn maintenance and lawn care, is increasingly important these days. There are two simple



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things Bass says you can do right away:

- Keep each crew's route as geographically tight as possible
- Always take right turns so you move through traffic more quickly; pre-plan the route in a circular fashion so you're able to do this—and pray there aren't any detours

Technology is helping contractors take the concept of efficient routing to another level these days. "If you don't have a handheld GPS routing device in



each of your trucks, you're missing out big time," Bass says. "When I was a contractor 10 years ago, we drove around with folded-up maps in the front seat. I would have given just about anything for a GPS device back then."

Bass says the most tech-savvy contractors are now using GPS to monitor and verify the routes crews are taking as they move throughout the day, along with the amount of time being spent on accounts. "One of the worst things you could ever have happen is for time records to be inaccurate—which will make it much more difficult to job cost," Bass points out. "GPS can help you dramatically

improve in this area, while allowing crews to just 'do their thing.'"

5 – INFORMATION HAND-OFF

Bass says it's important to get vital information in writing before heading out into the field—where your crew is supposed to go, what you're supposed to do when you get there, etc. "Getting good, clear, written instructions will help prevent rework, which is about the most expensive area of waste a landscape company will ever encounter," Bass says. "In 2009, verbal descriptions are out. That's not going to cut it." ■

Ex-contractor and trailblazing entrepreneur Tony Bass is now a successful inventor, author, consultant and speaker whose purpose and passion is helping green industry small businesses achieve their fullest potential. For more information, visit superlawntucks.com.

This article was adapted from an online audio interview. To hear it, along with other informative discussions designed to help busy contractors grow their businesses profitably, please visit greenindustrypros.com/procast.

ASK A PRO – HOW A NORTH CAROLINA CONTRACTOR TAMES HIS MORNING CIRCUS

Corey Handley of WAC Corporation in Greenville, NC, a 2008 Pros in Excellence Award winner, has spent a lot of time figuring out ways to tame his morning (and afternoon) circus. Here's what he's done:

"We now maintain a circular pattern to storage yard movement. Our storage building is the centerpiece of the yard and all operations move clockwise around it.


Crews are dispatched at 6:30 a.m. to get ahead of rush hour and return around 4 p.m. to once again avoid rush hour.

Upon arrival each afternoon, the crew stops at the rear of the building and empties trash and litter into the dumpster, and any green debris into a pile for mulching at a later date. The next stop, if needed, is fueling. Onsite fueling has decreased our unbillable time dramatically and allows better

control and monitoring of fuel usage. The third stop brings the crew around front where the next day's schedule and work orders are addressed, along with a visual inspection of the truck and equipment for obvious damage and/or missing equipment. Finally, the truck is placed in the same parking stall each night—ready for the next day. Total turnaround time is approximately 10 minutes per crew.

The following morning, pending no unforeseen problems, crews are on the road in a matter of minutes after clocking in. We employ a mechanic who services and repairs equipment after hours for the next working day. Equipment and trucks are replaced regularly so most are under warranty; major repairs are done at the dealership as we maintain a spare set of maintenance equipment for fill-in use.

Crews are dispatched at 6:30 a.m. to get ahead of rush hour and return around 4 p.m. to once again avoid rush hour."



When you're scheduling and routing your crews, you have to keep the right number of people on each account. By putting too many people on an account, you don't get the work done much faster, so you're not nearly as efficient.



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."

Visit stihlusa.com or text your zip code to STIHL (78445) to find a STIHL Dealer near you.

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STIHL[®]



It's powerful and 28% more fuel efficient. Doesn't seem fair, does it?

As cost control becomes increasingly important to your company's success, STIHL announces powerful money-saving news: the BR 600 backpack blower is up to 28% more fuel efficient than tested competitive models – while delivering up to 12% more air volume. That means huge fuel savings, enough that this machine will literally pay for itself over time. And this isn't STIHL just blowing hot air. The research was

done by the Porsche Engineering Group GmbH. It's further proof of our commitment to develop products that are fuel efficient, environmentally responsible and powerful. So add a few BR 600's to your fleet. It will add plenty to your bottom line.

For details on the Porsche Engineering Group study, and the STIHL BR 600, visit stihlusa.com.

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