

LEADERS in Landscape

Providing You With the Tools to be the Best Landscape Contractor in the Industry

WINTER 2008



MASTER YOUR GREAT
BUSINESS
with Husqvarna

**Time is of the
ESSENCE**

Business Shape-Up Tips
for the New Year

**Get Customers to be
your Best Salespeople**

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**MASTER YOUR GREAT
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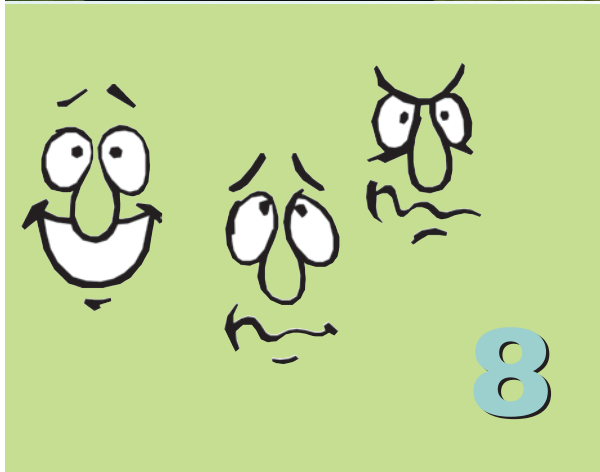
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President to President



Are Your Customers Satisfied? Here's a great way to find out.

All company leaders want and need to know that the company they've built provides a service that customers love, and can't live without. It's not only essential to our bottom line, it's essential to our own satisfaction.

I believe that from this burning desire, the Customer Satisfaction Survey was born. Do they love us?

Hope so. If they don't, let's find out what's missing, and we're going to do something about it.

From there, surveys take shape. They start with the customer in mind ... just a few multiple choice answers and send them on their way. But this is a rare opportunity to get into the mind of our most valuable audience. We must take full advantage of the moment! Soon the questionnaire grows. Five questions become 20; multiple choice gives way to complex, open-ended questions.

I want to tell you, as much as common sense tells us to minimize, the pull to learn every nuance of customer desires is intense — and you can chalk it up to the make-up of an entrepreneur. We are not alone ... there is a large contingent of us who want to figure out what makes our customers tick!

In our quest to "Simplify!", we've found a much more streamlined system. It turns out, all you have to ask is ONE question to get a true gauge of where you stand in customers' minds. It's quite simple, according to the book *"The Ultimate Question: Driving Good Profits and True Growth"* by Fred Reichheld.

What is the ONE question? I'll tell you what it is for my company:

"Would you recommend a friend to take on the Husqvarna line?"

The answer takes two seconds, but the results are transformational. The customer answers on a scale from 1 to 10, with 10 indicating the customer "would definitely recommend Husqvarna to a friend."

Granted, asking one or two follow-up questions will reveal details. But keep it simple. Our follow-up question is just one word: "Why?"

Last year, we began randomly sampling our customers and asked those very questions. We learned volumes. I will tell you that we got a pretty good score, but as they say in the book, *"Good to Great,"* good is the enemy of great. However, follow-up surveys show distinct improvement. It's gratifying to be able to see the results of our efforts in such a tangible way.

This survey is an ideal tool to achieve greatness. After the first round of surveys, we not only had a benchmark of what works and what doesn't, we were also able to focus our efforts on celebrating the best of our business, and targeting the things that needed improvement.

The specific areas that need attention vary with each company, but one thing is universal: Researching the desires and needs of your biggest critics — and then doing something about it — will take your company to the next level. If you want to know more about the process, see *"Get Your Customers to be Your Best Salespeople,"* on page 8.

I challenge you to try this with your customers. It may be the smartest thing you've ever done for the success of your company.

Yours for Success,

Dave Zerfoss, President ~ Husqvarna Forest & Garden Co.

Dave's bookshelf

The Ultimate Question: Driving Good Profits and True Growth

By Fred Reichheld

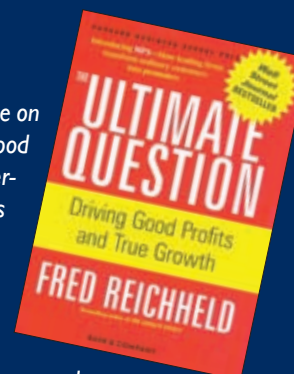
This book was a Wall Street Journal bestseller, and I had to see what all the hype was about. After all, the author already showed his prowess with the book, "The Loyalty Effect." He knows how to get into the minds of customers and determine what keeps customers coming back.

In "The Ultimate Question," Reichheld makes us understand that, as complex as the customer relationship is, it all comes down to one question. From this question, we can classify our customers into three camps; Promoters, Passives and Detractors — and the power and impact each one has on our businesses (for a full explanation, see "Get Your Customers to be Your Best Salespeople," on page 8). The concept is enlightening. His suppositions also push our comfort level, and make us question how well we know our customers.

I've never doubted the impact of customer influence on any business. To learn more about them — the good and the bad — is really one of the most powerful experiences you can have. Why? Not only does it show you in clear terms where you stand, the process gives you the power to change, tweak, educate and learn. You, your business and your customers become better in the process.

I recommend this book, but even more so, I recommend going through the exercise of The Ultimate Question. You will be amazed at the results.

— D.Z.





Fall cleanup and winter snow removal keep
Lawns by Yorkshire busy year-round.

Time is of the Essence

A New Jersey contractor uses the latest technology and a stable of advisors to make every minute count ... because you never know how long you've got.

Most landscape professionals are true entrepreneurs. And the majority would call themselves Type A personalities ... driven, passionate to the point of obsession, with a penchant toward micro-management and a mind that doesn't shut off 24/7.

However, for a little perspective, you must meet Steven Jomides, president of Lawns by Yorkshire in Westwood, New Jersey. He is, indeed, the epitome of the Type A phenomenon. Not only does Jomides admit it, he credits his company's success to the all-consuming character trait.

"The business is developed from my personality," says Jomides. "I'm an extreme Type A. For me, the business never ends. I'm always Lawns by Yorkshire."

Early lessons

A familiar tale, Jomides' landscape career began in high-school. Mowing for a friend in the business, Jomides thought this was a gravy job. "I thought it was great," he says, being able to work outdoors in the fresh air. "I was making \$3+ an hour, with much of that spent on breakfast and lunch."

Looking to exploit his talents further, he took a higher paying job (a whopping \$4 an hour) with another landscaper. Reality came like a slap in the face. After a grueling week working on a project where his job was transporting crushed blue stone up a steep hill, he was told that, while his quality of work was consistent, he was too slow to be earning \$4 an hour.

Crushed by that remark, he left the business and took another, less labor-

... another point that will ring familiar to many in the business.

In the years ahead, Jomides had some success, though he was distracted through much of it. He faced two devastating events in his life that caused him to snap into focus. He lost both his parents within two years of each other. He did everything he could to care for them, and watched them each lose their battle. Both died of cancer. Both were in their 50s.

"The business is developed from my personality," says Jomides. "I'm an extreme Type A. For me, the business never ends. I'm always Lawns by Yorkshire."

intensive career path for the next five years. But the budding Type A personality inside him wouldn't accept defeat.

In 1984, Jomides borrowed \$15,000 from his Dad and was determined to make a go of his own lawn maintenance business. The fact that he didn't have any knowledge about running a business didn't stop him

Jomides realized that time was precious. This would become the underlying theme throughout his life from this point forward.

Time is of the essence

In the landscape business, time is also precious. Increasing productivity and

Contractor Profile

reducing down-time are essential to success. Jomides spends virtually every waking hour finding ways to become more efficient in any and all operations with his company. Just a few examples:

The quest to go paperless. Realizing the time, space and manpower necessary to manage paperwork, Lawns by Yorkshire is aggressively becoming a paperless operation. Anything that can be managed via e-mail and Internet is, and when paperwork does make its way through the office, it is usually scanned and saved electronically. Jomides considers it a personal victory every time they can eliminate a file cabinet.

"I'm obsessed with technology," says Jomides. "Anything we can use to make communications, operations and logistics more efficient, I consider a wise investment."

Using video to predict workload. Snow removal is a significant chunk of business for Lawns by Yorkshire. The company is ranked 49th in snow removal business according to *Snow Business Magazine*.

In the "time is precious" category, Jomides doesn't want his team wasting windshield time just to monitor some of the outlying accounts when snow is predicted. So, video cameras were set up at several key locations, giving the home office a firsthand view when the snow starts, how much accumulation occurs, and when crews need to be deployed.

The cameras can be adjusted by remote from the office, and gives operations manager Adam Isaac full control. Twelve different sites (including some company-owned sites like the equipment yard) are under constant surveillance.

GPS ... and a lot more. Also facing Isaac's desk is a large flat screen monitor that maps and monitors all the movements of every crew at all times. He knows if they are on schedule, how fast they are driving and every stop they make. "It gives me the ability to manage the day for every crew, and make last minute adjustments



A sophisticated video monitoring and GPS system allows Lawns by Yorkshire to keep tabs on customer sites and crews in the field. Steve Jomides (left) and Adam Isaac (right) discuss strategy for an upcoming snowfall.

with just a phone call," says Isaac. "Them just knowing we are monitoring everyone increases productivity."

Taking the office on the road. Jomides not only carries a smart phone that gives him access to e-mail, etc., but he's added a voice recognition system to it, so his messages can be read to him while on the road. The hands free element allows him to stay on top of any issues throughout the day while he's driving to appointments.

Simplifying equipment vendors. The latest technology doesn't stop in the office ... it's a productivity tool in the field too. Lawns by Yorkshire makes large volume Husqvarna equipment purchases. "The equipment is top-notch," says Jomides. "But that's not the main reason we are building our fleet with Husqvarna.

"We're doing it because the great customer service makes us more efficient. We can take care of everything from issues to orders by calling one phone number, just by reducing the number of manufacturers we work with. And having the confidence level that they will fulfill our needs frees us from constant follow-up."

The constant quest for perfection

A common trait of Type A personalities is the unending quest for perfection ... and often harsh self-criticism. Jomides is no different, though he tries to use this tendency to his — and his company's — advantage.

Between his quest for knowledge and his analysis of weaknesses, Jomides learned to surround himself with people who can enhance the best traits and overcome the worst not only in business, but in life.

"I surround myself with great people," says Jomides. "I keep learning every day. I'm like a sponge. I take a little from all of them into my head, and base decisions on a combination of all of their strengths."

"He keeps growing professionally and personally," says Judy Guido of Guido and Associates, a consultant to Lawns by Yorkshire. "He develops relationships with best-in-class people in every facet of life. He purposefully aligns himself with high-profile people to keep growing and evolving."

Contractor Profile

Regarding the challenges of being in the green industry, Jomides became involved in the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET). "Until I got involved in PLANET, I didn't know about being in the green industry," says Jomides. "There is a wealth of expertise to tap with people who walk in my shoes every day."

When it comes to finding general business expertise, Jomides has a support system of local successful business leaders. "I have a neighbor who heads up a global construction company," says Jomides. "I learn so much when I can tap the business savvy of others."

He's also developed a core group of intelligence right in his own company, starting with his partner Marc Boggio. The one-time employee shares Jomides' work ethic. "He's a great complement to my talents," says Jomides. "Marc's honest nature and strong people skills give us an advantage with our field talent. With Marc on board, I can focus on developing our client base while he develops the staff."

Live and learn

While Lawns by Yorkshire is a success by any benchmark, it was a process to get to this point. Like all Type A personalities,



"I surround myself with great people. I'm like a sponge. I take a little from all of them into my head, and base decisions on a combination of all of their strengths."

Jomides has had his share of the proverbial "dive in with both feet and ask questions later" ventures that didn't pan out.

He succumbed to the diversify-and-the-profit-will-soar! misguided notion with which so many contractors endeavor, but few succeed.

At one point a garden center seemed like the way to go. At another point, a bark blowing venture was the magic bullet. Neither turned out to be the right path for Lawns by Yorkshire, but the lessons learned were invaluable.



In Jomides' effort to "go paperless," he doesn't have a traditional desk and file cabinet like others in the office. He uses the conference room table as his desk, and works almost exclusively with electronic documentation.

“Each one of them distracted from the core business,” says Jomides. “They took time, focus and resources away from our bread and butter, which was maintenance.”

He says his biggest mistake was making decisions without a comprehensive business plan. “A business plan is your blueprint for business,” says Jomides. “It took me a few years to understand how important that is, and how the process of building a good business plan makes it clear whether certain decisions are right for your company.”

The business plan is part of the due diligence necessary before deciding whether to, for instance, take on a bark blowing business. “Had I really done that, I would have known that it wouldn’t work.”

Every wrong move, though, just made Jomides more determined to get it right. Looking back, he says those were important — though expensive — events in the evolution of Lawns by Yorkshire and of himself as a leader.

Though he’s not opposed to looking at diversifying in the future, Jomides will make sure nothing gets in the way of



Dedication, motivation and focus are the tenets to Jomides’ favorite sport, kickboxing. Whether in the ring or in business, a worthy competitor must have all of these traits in order to win.

Jomides is pictured here sparring with his wife Andrea, also a black-belt kickboxer.

the company’s bailiwick: commercial and multi-family complex maintenance. “I’m a little older, and a lot wiser these days,” says Jomides.

Dedication, motivation, focus

Today, both the company and the leader have come a long way — and are better for journey. To this day, Jomides uses in all areas of life the tenets he learned through years of training in his favorite sport: kickboxing. Among them are dedication, motivation and focus. Whether in the ring or in the business, a worthy competitor must have all of these traits to win.

In kickboxing, you have two minutes in the ring to perform and conquer. Of course, that isn’t good enough for Mr. Type A. “When I’m in the ring, I’m not satisfied unless I can win in 15 seconds or less.”

Once again, time is of the essence for Jomides. As he reminisces about his younger days, he is sure of one thing. No one’s ever going to tell him he’s too slow to earn \$4 an hour again.

We can be sure of one other thing too. His parents would, indeed, be proud. ♦



“A business plan is your blueprint for business. The process of building a good business plan makes it clear whether certain decisions are right for your company.”

Customer Satisfaction

Get Customers to be Your Best Salespeople

The customer satisfaction survey gets streamlined.

Do you know what your customers really think about doing business with your company? Do you really want to know? Are you prepared for the answer?

As mentioned in Dave Zerfoss' "President to President" column on page 3, all entrepreneurs would like to think they have an intimate understanding of customer needs and desires. He recommends a book that provides a systematic process for gauging customer loyalty called "*The Ultimate Question: Driving Good Profits and True Growth*" by Fred Reichheld.

Bad profits

Reichheld suggests that there are actually good profits and bad profits. Bad profits prevent opportunities for good, sustainable growth. They alienate customers and employees, and they make companies vulnerable to competitors. Bad profits give a distorted picture of business performance.

So, what are bad profits? "Bad profits arise when companies save money by delivering a lousy customer experience. Bad profits are about extracting value from customers, not creating value." They are temporary profits that look enticing, until they disappear when unsatisfied customers, known as "Detractors," stop shopping there. More about them in a minute.

Good profits

Good profits are earned by delighting customers, so they are willing to come back for more, and tell their friends to do business with the company too. These customers, called "promoters," continue to increase purchases with the company. They also become an effective marketing tool, spreading the word about their pleasing shopping experiences. The ultimate goal for companies seeking good profits is to build high-quality relationships that provide continual, sustained growth.




How to tell the difference

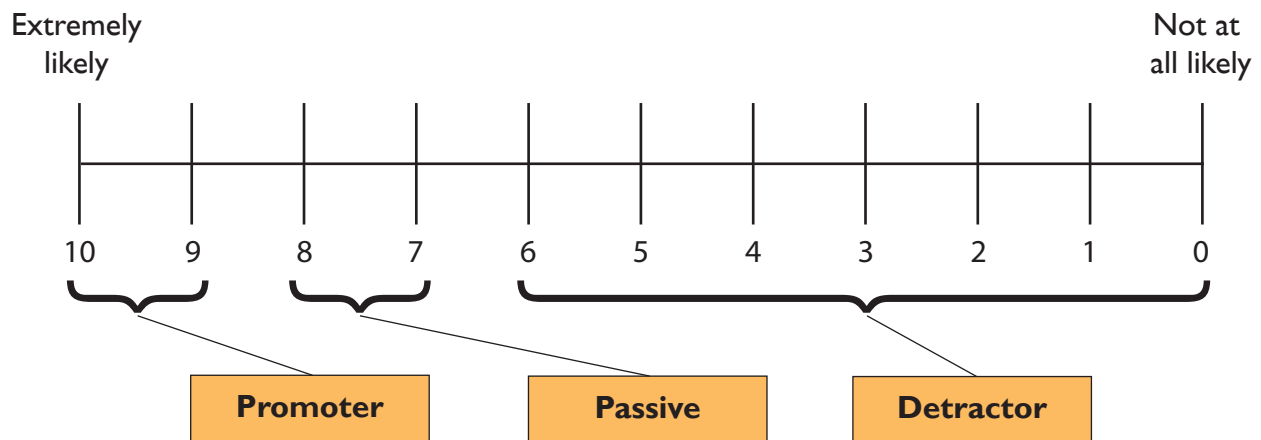
Loyalty is the key to profitable growth. Most companies, says Reichheld, don't know how to define loyalty, much less measure it or manage it. "Are customers sticking around out of loyalty, or just out of ignorance or inertia?" asks Reichheld. "Are they trapped in long-term contracts they would love to get out of? ... What practical gauge can distinguish good profits from bad?"

After years of research, Reichheld and his team determined that you can define, measure and manage customer loyalty by asking one question:

How likely is it that you would recommend the company to a friend or colleague?

Using data collected from having customers rate their answer to this question on a scale will give you a score that serves as a benchmark for customer loyalty. This is called a Net Promoter Score, or NPS.

Promoter	Passive	Detractor
		
PROMOTER	PASSIVE	DETRACTOR
<p>I am a loyal enthusiast who keeps buying from your company, and I urge my friends to do the same.</p> <p>I am the most powerful marketing tool your company has. Because of my long-term purchases – and those of the people I've referred, this company can count on me to help grow sales and profits.</p> <p>Why? Because this company takes care of me. That doesn't mean every-thing goes perfectly 100% of the time.</p> <p>But when an issue comes up, I am confident it will be solved to my benefit. I am valued by this company, and I am treated well.</p>	<p>I guess you could call me satisfied, but I'm not very enthusiastic.</p> <p>I don't buy as much as the promoter. And I don't talk about you much either. I am a customer because we've always sold this brand, and I don't see a need to change.</p> <p>That's not to say I'm not open to suggestions from the competition. I just need to see a better deal, and I'm out of here.</p> <p>On the other hand, if someone showed me why my relationship with this company is so valuable, I could probably be swayed. I might even become a promoter. Try me!</p>	<p>I am an unhappy customer trapped in a bad relationship. I feel as though I've been treated badly by this company.</p> <p>I am a customer ... for now. But I've cut back on purchases, and I will switch to the competition when I can. Not only that, I will warn others to stay away from this company.</p> <p>While I don't show up on your balance sheet, I can cost you far more than most of the things the accountants watch. Trust me. Customers who feel ignored or mistreated find ways to get even.</p> <p>It used to be that an unhappy customer told 10 friends. Now, thanks to the Internet, make that 10 thousand.</p>



How to determine your NPS

Reichheld suggests that all customers can be divided into three categories: Promoters, Passives and Detractors. **Promoters** are loyal enthusiasts of your company. **Passives** are satisfied, but unenthusiastic and can be easily stolen by the competition. **Detractors** are unhappy customers who feel trapped in a bad relationship. Customers are designated into one of the categories based on how they rate the ultimate question. Since the goal is to convert 100% of customers to Promoters — and the worst would be to have 100% Detractors — these two categories are used to determine the NPS. Simply subtract the detractors from the promoters, and that is your score.

Promoters – Detractors = NPS

No company ever hits 100% in its NPS score. For instance, even one of the top rated companies, Harley-Davidson, rated 81%. In a 10-year period, Reichheld's study showed that companies with the highest ratio of Promoters to Detractors typically enjoyed strong profits and healthy growth. They spent more marketing dollars strengthening relationships with existing customers than they did attracting new ones.

The trick to using the NPS effectively is, according to the book, "learning how to ask the question in a manner that provides reliable, timely and actionable data — and of course, from learning how to improve your NPS."

The rating system

The rating system used in this process is a simple 0 to 10 scale, with 10 being "ex-

tremely likely" and 0 being "not likely at all" when talking about recommending your company to a friend. After gathering all the data, divide them into the three customer categories. Promoters are 9s and 10s; Passives are 7s and 8s. Numbers 0 through 6 are all left to the detractors.

"Are customers sticking around out of loyalty, or just out of ignorance or inertia?"

One of the strong points of this system is its simplicity. The NPS score is one number that can be easily understood by your team. They will understand quickly what it means when the number goes up or down. As Reichheld put it, "Frontline managers can grasp the idea of increasing the number of Promoters and reducing the number of Detractors a lot more readily than the idea of raising the customer-satisfaction index by one standard deviation."

Of course, while getting a true gauge of customer loyalty is enlightening, it's just the beginning. Finding out why customers feel the way they do is the next step. The company Intuit, for example, asked two questions in their initial phone survey. In addition to the ultimate question about recommending the business, they followed that up with, "What is the most important reason for the score you gave?"

A catalyst for change

Part and parcel with why customers feel the way they do is determining what areas of your company are perceived as needing improvement — and then figuring out how to improve them. Husqvarna began the Net Promoter Survey process in 2007. Customers from around the country rated the likelihood they would recommend the company. The score is used as a benchmark to compare future survey results. In subsequent surveys, Husqvarna's scores went up as a result of improvement efforts identified in the survey process.

After analyzing the comments, Husqvarna identified some key topics and formed a task force for each. Each task force was given a month to a) gather more information from the customers who commented on the topic and b) analyze the perceived problem and develop recommendations to solve it. Husqvarna surveys customers three times a year to gauge progress.

A key part of the Net Promoter process is to have a plan for improvement with deadlines and to be held accountable for each. Follow-up surveys are important to see if you are getting the results you desire. Keep your eyes on the goal: to build a company that creates promoters. When you have that, you will also achieve sustained growth and "good" profits. ♦

Product Spotlight

X-TORQ: AN EXCELLENT EXAMPLE OF EXCEPTIONAL TECHNOLOGY

Husqvarna introduces 2-stroke engine innovations.

There was a time when many thought that stricter environmental regulations would mark the end of 2-stroke engines. They would become dinosaurs like the 8-track tape, rabbit-ear antennas and the dial phone.

But never doubt the tenacity of Husqvarna equipment engineers. Today, Husqvarna's 2-stroke engines are leaner, meaner and more efficient than anyone could have imagined just a few years ago. Thanks to years of extensive R&D, this is proven in nearly 20 Husqvarna handheld products that feature X-TORQ technology — all products that make contractors more productive and more profitable.

Sometimes you want more

Husqvarna's X-TORQ engines are designed to provide more power across a wide range of RPMs. Increasing productivity within the ideal RPM range translates into finishing projects sooner. Smart contractors increase profitability when they utilize equipment with the X-TORQ technology.

Sometimes you want less

The profit potential doesn't end with more power among a wider range of RPMs. That,

in fact, is just the beginning. With fuel prices continuing to rise, it's essential to find equipment that is fuel efficient. The X-TORQ technology can save as much as 20% in fuel economy.

Today, Husqvarna's 2-stroke engines are leaner, meaner and more efficient than anyone could have imagined just a few years ago.

That means more time in the field between refueling, and less time gassing up. It also means a smaller investment at the gas pump, which is money that falls straight to the bottom line. Each 170 blower, for instance, can save owners as much as \$100 a year on fuel.

Breathe a little easier

Not only do X-TORQ products reduce the hit on the pocketbook, they are easier on the environment as well. Most 2-cycle engines emit an air/fuel mixture. However, X-TORQ

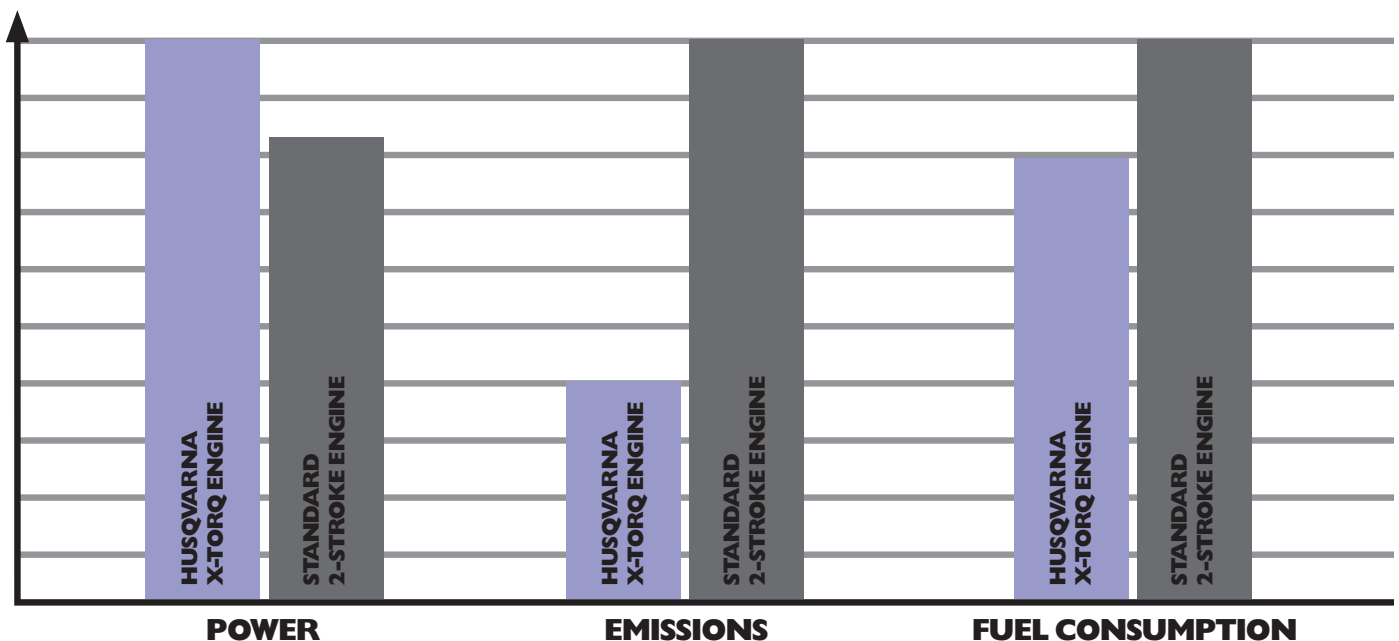
engines scavenge the exhaust with clean air, which reduces emissions by up to 60% ... all while delivering more torque and using less fuel. This technology meets and exceeds environmental restrictions.

What X-TORQ doesn't do

Such masterful innovations usually come at a price. Sometimes it is weight. Other times it is cost. Occasionally systems become more complex to repair and maintain. X-TORQ defies logic in all of these areas. All of the primary engine components still exist, so the basics would be familiar to any 2-stroke technician. There are no additional moving parts, unlike their 4-stroke counterparts. When it comes to maintenance, there are no frequent or complex valve adjustments or special oils to add.

What X-TORQ products do provide is more power and less impact on the environment.

Chalk one up for Husqvarna's extraordinary engineers! ♦



Husqvarna X-TORQ Products

Trimmers:

335LS, 335Rx

Blowers:

130BT, 150BT, 170BT, 170BF,
180BT

Hedgetrimmers:

226HS75s, 226HS99s

Chain Saws:

235/240, 434/440, 445, 450, 455, 460,
570, 575



How it Works

A conventional two-stroke engine has standard components like the air filter, which cleans the air brought into the carburetor. The carburetor's main duty is to blend the fuel and air which is necessary for combustion. The crankcase, which houses the crankshaft, becomes the point of entry for the fuel/air mixture. During the engine cycle, fuel and air is brought upwards through the transfer ports into the cylinder where the mixture is compressed by the piston and then ignited. The exhaust then is removed through the muffler. In this process, some of the unburned fuel can escape into the muffler from the transfer port. This unburned fuel is then released into the atmosphere. This is called scavenging loss and is the source of the harmful emissions from traditional two stroke engines.

With new X-TORQ technology, the primary engine components still exist, so the basics would be familiar to any two-stroke technician. The air/fuel mix enters the crankcase just as the traditional two-stroke engine. However, there is a second stream of unmixed air moving through the piston and entering the transfer ports at the upper end. This unmixed air becomes the first element that enters the cylinder. This clean unmixed air then escapes into the atmosphere while pushing the exhaust out with it. This is usually when the unburned fuel would escape in a traditional two-stroke, but since the clean unmixed air reaches the cylinder first, the clean unmixed air is what escapes. This process reduces scavenging loss, resulting in lower emissions and greater fuel economy.

X-TORQ[®]



Success Planning for 2008

Focus on business improvement now — but do it efficiently and effectively.

Many contractors are able to slow down a bit during the winter season. But according to industry consultant Dickran Babigian of Navix, Inc., if you want to grow your business — and your profit, you should in many ways be busier in the winter than you are during the growing season.

A slower season means more time to strategize and decide how your company can move to the next level. Babigian says this is a double-edged sword.

“The great thing is that while you are sitting in your office brainstorming about the company’s possibilities, there are no limits,” says Babigian. “The bad part is, well, the same thing. There are no limits.” He says contractors often land on a big idea and oversimplify how it will be executed. This leads to under-planning, and that can be a recipe for failure.

“A perfect example is a contractor deciding to add another service in 2008,” says Babigian. “At face value, this add-on service will complement your current service mix. What could go wrong?”

Lots. Contractors tend to zero in on the results, not on how to make the results happen. Adding a new service touches every level of the business.

How will it be marketed? Who will perform the new service and how will they be trained? What is the pricing matrix? How will it be sold? What equipment is necessary? Do forms and contracts need to be revamped?

“There are probably a hundred or two hundred details to consider,” says Babigian. “Without proper planning, these things will keep popping up, distracting you from your core business, usurping time and profit, affecting everything from performance and customer satisfaction as well.”

Proper focus today achieves great results tomorrow

That said, analyzing, strategizing and developing a plan for growth is not only essential during this time of year, it is an achievable exercise, if you approach it correctly. Here are some tips:

Start with the big picture. Pull all of your key players in on the brainstorming. Begin by looking at the big picture. “What will the economy do this year? How is the local market reacting?” asks Babigian. “Identify your view of the marketplace.”

Contractors say they need to control overhead better. But with further analysis, we often find that they, in fact, don’t spend enough money.

Decide what needs attention now. Bring the discussion to the current operations of the company. Zero in on opportunities as well as challenges and gaps. “It’s going to be a tougher economy this year,” says Babigian. “That doesn’t mean you can’t have a great year, it just means it is going to be more work than it was in the past. You’ve got to have your A-game ready to go.”

Babigian uses his Strategic Action Plan (sample on page 13) to make sure all the topics are covered, and to keep contractors on task.

Ask the tough questions. How can we become more competitive? Where is there waste in the processes? Go through each business area and make no assumptions. What worked in the past might not suit the current economy or the company’s growth objectives.

You might be surprised at some of your conclusions. “I have contractors call all the time and say they need to control overhead better,” says Babigian. “With further analysis, we often find that they, in fact, don’t spend enough money.” Or spend it in the right places. For instance:

Many contractors think there is no money in the budget to hire office support. They mistakenly believe it is “cheaper” to do all the paperwork themselves. “They need to realize the value of their time,” says Babigian. “You might save, for instance, a few hundred dollars by doing your own billing or payroll. However, in the time it takes you to do the task, you might have lost \$10,000 in sales because you weren’t out there doing what you do best, which is generating new business.”

Focus, focus, focus. A thorough review of the company’s processes can produce an overwhelming list of issues to be addressed. Babigian stresses the importance of prioritizing. “You’ve got to have a sense of perspective,” says Babigian. “You might identify 100 problems. Pick the top five that are the most expensive to your company, and focus your efforts on eliminating those first. If you don’t prioritize, you won’t get anything done.

“Make a specific plan with assignments, deadlines and progress dates, (as noted on the Strategic Action Plan). If you stick with what is important, the payoff will be there.”

Dickran Babigian is president of Navix, a consulting and software firm specializing in financial management programs and systems. His clientele includes dozens of successful landscape contractors nationwide. For more information, visit www.navix.com, or call (617) 828-1122.

2008 STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

ACTION STEPS/GOAL	LEAD PERSON	TARGET DATE	STATUS COMMENTS	% COMPLETE
1) Organizational Chart				
2) Sales Plan				
3) Advertising & Marketing Plan				
4) Staffing Plan				
5) Recruiting & Retention Plan				
6) New Hire Orientation Program				
7) Training Program				
8) Safety Program				
9) Capital Expenditures > \$1,000				
10) Small Tools & Equipment				
11) Administrative				
12) Accounting				
13) Forms				
14) Tracking Systems				
15) Estimating System				
16) Pricing Matrix				
17) Customer Service				
18) Production				
19) Equipment Disposal				
20) Overhead Analysis				
21) Compensation Plans				
22) Shop Projects				
23) Corporate Culture				
24) CRM Implementation				
25) Paperless Office Initiatives				

Time Management and the Art of Planning

By Tom Oyler



I have been involved in several businesses in diverse fields including real estate development, manufacturing and building services. One thing is for sure: the role of landscape manager is as trying as any and more trying than most!

Few like roles in other industries require the degree of diverse skill sets needed to be successful in the landscape industry. Landscape managers must be capable of dealing with all four key elements that make-up a business enterprise: operations, finance, marketing and human resource management. Each of these four components requires unique skills. Having the knowledge to make informed decisions and the skill to oversee that they are carried out is essential.

Most companies in the green industry recognize the complex nature of the manager's role and look for support through business tools and operating systems that are either developed internally or acquired from outside vendors. The tendency, however, is when tools do not appear to be working as efficiently as the company wants, companies buy more tools to support and reinforce their existing tools. The root of the problem is not addressed.

There are many tools and operating systems designed to make tasks easier and less time intensive. The dilemma is that tools and systems alone will not achieve their designed objectives. Problems arise when the system is not aligned with the company's business objective, or if sufficient time is not dedicated to proper implementation. More problems come when the system cannot 'scale' with the company's growth.

The fact is, improperly designed and/or utilized tools and operating systems are generally 'time bandits', exacerbating problems, not solving them.

So how does a company in the landscape trade go about developing managers with the diverse skill sets required? How do companies develop and implement tools and systems that are capable of supporting the complex role of the manager?

If your company is managing in the NOW, believe me, any tool you choose in hopes it will lead to more effective operations is a gift from the business gods, not the result of good management.

My experiences have taught me that lack of planning is the chief culprit. More succinctly, lack of long-range planning leads companies into developing and implementing tools and business systems that are inadequate and thus incapable of supporting the managers in their complex roles.

How is your company being operated? Are things being done based on a firm understanding of current and future needs? Or, is the company reacting to the everyday pressures of NOW? If the company is managing in the NOW, believe me, any tool you choose in hopes it will lead to more effective operations is a gift from the business gods, not the result of good management.

Here are a few tips towards developing a business plan that considers the crucial role of the manager and identifies the tools and systems needed:

Make a plan. First and foremost take the time to develop a five- to seven-year plan. If you lack expertise, seek counsel and get it done! The money you waste on ineffective management training and systems will more than pay for the development of the plan.

Get organized. Based on the plan's current and future resource requirements, get organized! Developing a comprehensive 'skills requirements' map of current and projected skill sets as defined by each pivotal job description is imperative.

Prioritize. Next, ESTABLISH PRIORITIES around job tasks. Define the 'pivotal duties' that must be accomplished by each 'pivotal position', current and projected. Map these requirements against the current staff. Develop training platforms around the skills gaps and set timelines for improvement. Be ready to move people around and to purge the non-willing. Hire folks with the skills needed to fulfill future jobs.

Pencil it in. Develop activities calendars for each job description's pivotal duties. Identify times when all the pivotal tasks related to a position cannot be humanly performed by one person and delegate some of the burden. This not only prevents gaps, it serves as an excellent cross-training opportunity.

Bring the plan to life. Dedicate sufficient QUALITY time to comprehensively accomplish the plan and its objectives.

Do it now. Lastly, do not procrastinate. The landscape business has seasonal production activity gaps for taking operational breathers. These gaps are the perfect time to ideate and plan.

Tom Oyler is a partner in the Wilson-Oyler Group. He is a consultant in the Green Industry. For more information, visit www.wilson-oyler.com or call (866) 517-2272.

Professional Development

Husqvarna Sponsors Seminar Series for Landscape Professionals

One of the most critical issues for landscape contractors is the need for top-tier management. Developing the right team is essential to growth for landscape companies. Husqvarna has partnered with renowned industry consultants Wilson-Oyler to offer a seminar series that will help contractors transform their businesses by developing key talent within the company.

Contractors need solutions and immediate business value when they take time away from the business to attend a seminar. That's what "Fool Proof Methods to Develop World Class Account Managers" is all about. The Wilson-Oyler team is traveling the country to educate contractors on this key issue. The one-day seminar is being offered in eight cities around the country. Some of the topics covered:

- Improving Production
- Efficient Equipment Utilization
- Effective Internal & External Communications
- Developing & Retaining Passionate, Top Tier Employees
- Developing & Retaining Loyal Customers
- Developing Top of Class Account Managers
- Discussions & Illustrations Identifying 'The Shops Role' in:
 - Production Management
 - Interaction with the Wilson Oyler team



Wilson Oyler Group
Success
SERIES



Seminar Overview

This seminar will provide emphasis into the "total customer experience" and how it pivots around the account manager. The Wilson-Oyler skill enhancement processes are developed out of real world experience. They lead to better development platforms that allow landscape management companies to produce account managers that understand and perform to their financial objectives, while enhancing company revenues and retaining "life time" clients. During each session Bruce Wilson and Tom Oyler will teach their proven methods and systems and provide the attendees the required educational content that, when fully utilized all but insures the development of top of class account managers.

Success Series Schedule:

January 10th	Orlando
January 24th	Dallas
February 7th	Atlanta
February 21st	Baltimore
March 6th	Los Angeles
March 20th	Denver
April 3rd	Chicago
April 17th	Columbus

Seminar rates:

Single registrant	\$189
2 to 6 registrants	\$169 each
7+ registrants	\$149 each

Space is limited! Sign up early!

Three ways to register:

- Go to www.wilson-oyler.com and click on the "Success Series" icon for a registration form.
- Call 866.517.2272
- E-mail info@wilson-oyler.com

The seminar series is offered by:

Wilson-Oyler Group
440 Old Vine Street
Lexington, KY 405071





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