

# Act to Reduce Your Stress Level

The logo for 'Turf' features the word in a bold, black, sans-serif font. A green grass blade graphic is integrated into the letter 'u'.The logo for 'Tree Services' is in a bold, black, sans-serif font. A small green leaf icon is positioned above the 'e' in 'Services'. Below the main text, the tagline 'Taking Tree Care to New Heights' is written in a smaller, italicized font.The logo for 'DesignBuild' features the word 'Design' in black and 'Build' in orange, both in a bold, sans-serif font. A small orange square icon is positioned above the 'i' in 'Design'.The logo for 'PLOW' is in a bold, blue, sans-serif font. The letters are slightly slanted to the right.

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Operating a business in today's economy can be stressful. Making payroll, meeting bank covenants and complying with local, state and federal regulations can give any business owner an ulcer. How you manage things and the way you deal with your day-to-day challenges determines the amount of stress you feel.

Stress is optional, at least the amount of stress you feel. You may not be able to eliminate it, but how you respond to it can help you perform at your optimum and make your life more rewarding.

The question becomes, what can you do to reduce stress, or, better yet, how can you run your business and still manage an acceptable level of stress?

Say that you've been in business for eight to 10 years and stress is mounting because your margins are eroding and your costs are rising. If this sounds familiar, you're one of many landscape service providers operating in today's economy. You're a member of a not-so-exclusive club and membership has its privileges, but stress is not one of those you really want.

You've invested many, many long hours and lots of money, and you've diligently worked to be independent and now just when you think things should be getting easier, they're getting harder.

Stress, if you let it build up, can zap your energy as well endanger your health. Stress takes the fun out of being an entrepreneur and your own boss. That's just the way it is – if you let it be that way.

I often hear from contractors that a big competitor is targeting their customers and they expect to lose business as the competitor beats their prices.

Well, how can that competitor offer lower prices, you ask yourself? Why do you allow that competitor to move in on your clients?

The most common response from owners facing this dilemma is, "I'm not going to lower my prices and lose money. If that competitor wants to lose money that's their business."

## **Beat 'em at their own game**

As I've been there and done that in several businesses, it finally dawned me that the more intelligent response is usually to implement better operating practices, increase employee productivity and involve all employees in the company's operations. By becoming successful in doing all three, it's possible to become the low-price service provider and still be profitable.

Sometimes when I advise a contractor to become the low-price service provider I get a strange look and push back. But, setting up a business to provide the best value and the best performance for a price is exactly what clients want.

Your clients should look at you as the low-cost service provider and when they do, competitors won't stand a chance of taking your business, because in your client's mind, you're the best value out there. Once you're in this place, stress can be more manageable.

To get there you have to realize the changing nature of the landscape market. The market never stands still. What was true 10, five or even three years ago may not be true today. You have to be aware when the market shifts.



Not that many years ago, those years just before the 2008-2009 Recession, the green industry was flying high with businesses making good profits and picking their jobs pretty much as they wanted. Then many of your customers, property managers and property owners entered the stress zone and started operating in crisis mode.

The landscape industry wasn't unique in this regard. Most businesses found themselves in the so-called stress zone during the Recession and its aftermath. Worse yet, many didn't have a proven way of making money in this new economy. That left business owners just two options: either find new, better, less wasteful ways to operate or bow to conditions, lose customers and accept lower margins. The latter option, obviously, is not one that anybody reading this column should willingly consider.

Smart contractors began revising their business operations and removing redundancies and any action or process that did not help their businesses operate more efficiently. They had to do it on the fly, running their companies while also reviewing all policies, processes and procedures. And many owners have done it quite well.

## **Scrutinize each department**

They began scrutinizing their businesses for operational cost saving. And, in

almost all cases, they began finding plenty of opportunities to reduce expenses and streamline their operations.

You can do it, too. By really digging in, you'll start to become a better, more efficient and a more profitable company.

As you get a better handle on your expenses and you find new ways to provide services more efficiently, you will experience less and less stress.

Start now in the winter months while you've got time to think and plan. Start by performing a full company review. This is not as difficult as you might think. The hardest part is starting the process.

Review each department and really examine how it's operating. Chances are that you will find policies and procedures that can be streamlined or eliminated. Involve all of your people because they're in it with you. Managers, supervisors and even crewmembers can make suggestions that'll help the operation run better and more effectively.

You can reduce the amount of stress you are feeling by getting a firmer handle on your company. Once you start getting your company where it should be, you will be transferring the stress you have been feeling to your competitors.

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