

# Building a Culture of Growth



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Rule number one in the business culture of Exscape Designs, Chesterland, Ohio, and of its owner Bill Dysert – Enjoy the work.

“Top, down or sideways it all comes down to a ‘people business’. If our employees enjoy their work, that attitude is reflected and shared with our clients,” says Dysert. “Our culture is based upon a strong value system, a desire to grow, learn, succeed and enjoy seeing what you’ve done with your work at the end of each day. All of these things are important. If employees don’t enjoy what they’re doing none of the others can be realized.”

Now in his 10th year of business, Dysert has established this positive business culture, a gift from his father and his mother. His father owns a small construction company that builds customized decks and pole buildings. His mother owned a small cleaning company. Dysert is convinced that a caring attitude is key to success in sales or scheduling or billing or anything else in building a healthy business.

“Time and a relentless commitment to communication and coaching are the cornerstones to establishing a great business culture,” he continues. “We have many conversations with employees including discussions about our brand – who we are and what we stand for. We talk a lot about the customer experience.

“There are a lot of landscape companies out there, and we hear the bad stories. We use those stories to teach us how to be different, how to be the best and how to deliver excellent results without compromising the experience for the customer,” he says.

But none of this is possible without setting realistic expectations for clients and for employees, and by communicating often and clearly the need to be flexible, dependable and steadfast in growing the brand.

## Following up on promises

"We check our egos," says Dysert. "We want to be on time and on budget every time. We challenge ourselves to follow through and do what is promised, and solve issues others cannot within the budgets we set. Lastly we don't leave a customer unsatisfied no matter what the cost. Life is too short and referrals are essential; it's the best marketing program we can have."

Dysert says other reasons for his firm's growth is its ability to implement change when necessary, and because its employees seek continuous improvement in their jobs and responsibilities.

"When I started 10 years ago by myself I was building small patios or adding improvements and doing plant enhancements and transitioned over to bid work for some very good landscape architects in the area," he recalls.

Then came the necessary lineal progression including buying his first costly pieces of equipment in 2005: a new dump truck, backhoe and skid steer. In 2008, Dysert hired a production manager, and in 2009, he hired a field foreman. Finally in 2011, Dysert began working full time in sales and marketing and away from daily operations. He made it his goal to focus on building his company's brand and establishing target markets. A year later he added a full-time office manager to his team.

"Managing change is an important facet to any successful business culture," says Dysert. In 2008, as the Recession worsened, and when the large contractors and landscape architects were struggling, Dysert began changing transitioning his firm from relying so heavily on bid business while he worked on developing and reinforcing his firm's unique value proposition and improving its brand recognition. He also began promoting and offering maintenance services for the projects they were installing and on others they had already built.

Dysert realized that to be successful in the increasingly competitive environment a company such as his has to be constantly evaluating how best to use its talents, time and resources.



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Exscape Designs consistently delivers the many small touches that delight its landscape clients.

"I created a spreadsheet and found we had some 17 revenue streams," he recalls. "So I had to transition and decide where to concentrate our efforts. Although profit margins are always a key indicator, as well as efficiency, our first priority was to ensure what types of work our employees enjoyed most and what were we best at doing."

Dysert says that [Exscape Designs](#) rarely bids a project anymore, but

understands and markets to only those projects for which they are well-suited.

"We often get interviewed, says Dysert, "but understand we are not the best fit for every project. Knowing when to say 'no' is more important than saying 'yes' sometimes."

One of the things that his teams most enjoy, and are very proficient at, is property maintenance. Exscape Designs offers clients (residential and commercial) snow removal, mowing, fertilizing, aeration and tree/ornamental care.

"My passion has always been design and build, but after years of building these awe-inspiring spaces I now enjoy the weekly, monthly and seasonal visits to see how things are going, caring for the properties and interfacing with the customers with our ongoing maintenance programs," says Dysert. "We're in the people business, not the landscape business."

## **A four-step process**

But design and build is still a focal point of this Ohio Landscape Association's "Landscape Ohio" award-winning contractor. Its typical four-step process starts with the consultation for the design, including primary design, budget, agreement and contract. The next step is pre-build, including selecting materials, supply selection and a pre-build meeting.

Next comes the actual build part of the project, including excavations, construction, finishing and having a closing meeting. The warranty step, a one-year guarantee, completes the installation part of the project but not the ongoing relationship with the client, which Dysert believes is essential in maintaining the integrity and value of his firm's work.



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Northeast Ohio's Exscape Designs works on building lasting client relations even after completing a nice D/B project.

Exscape Designs offers complete project management in the construction of outdoor living spaces including kitchens, patios, fireplaces, walkways, waterfalls, lighting and spas. And, offers each client a maintenance contract for the facilities and plantings installed.

Dysert says building a business and a creating a positive business culture starts with selecting the people who are coming to work with you.



"All companies seek the same employee characteristics, such as a positive attitude, drive, ambition, competitiveness and the desire to grow, learn and

succeed,” he continues. “But it doesn’t matter what your age or skill level if you cannot ‘bring it’ every day at a high level, produce desired results and continue to grow personally. If you choose not to take advantage of the opportunities you probably won’t be here long.”

Dysert earned certification from the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) and is past vice president of Leadership Geauga, a regional organization that brings business leaders and government officials together to develop future leaders within Geauga County, Ohio.

He was recently elected as a director of Geauga Growth Partnership (GGP), and works with the Entrepreneur Task Force. GGP is a partnership dedicated to growing the economy and community within his region of northeast Ohio.



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Snow removal is just one of the services that Exscape Designs offers its clients.

“Each leader establishes a personal profile and we do a lot of networking and sharing information about our different industries,” says Dysert. “I’ve learned a lot about the region that I didn’t know before. And I think that will help me be a better citizen in our community.”

## **Fast Facts About Exscape Designs**

**Founder and Owner:** Bill Dysert

**Incorporated:** 2004

**Headquarters:** Chesterland, Ohio

**Markets:** Northeast Ohio

**Services:** Landscape design & installation, property maintenance and snow removal