

Facility Site Tours are Fun and Inspiring



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If you ever get a chance to tour a high-tier landscape facility – do it.

If you operate a small or relatively new landscape company, you *really* need to be there – sign up and go.

The [Ohio Landscape Association](#) (OLA) recently arranged a late-afternoon facility tour at [Schill Grounds Management](#) (SMG) headquarters. Well north of 100 northern Ohio landscape professionals responded and poured into its 3-acre facility about an hour's drive west of Cleveland.

Schill Grounds Management, with revenues exceeding \$8 million in 2015, is one of the largest and fastest growing grounds management companies in northern Ohio. In addition to its North Ridgeville location, it has a sizable branch in Strongsville southwest of Cleveland and a smaller presence near Sandusky, Ohio, an hour's drive west of its headquarters.



Britt Stantz and Robert Griffin speaking at a facility tour for Schill Grounds Management.

An equal mix of generosity and bravura



Joe Schill, co-owner and executive vice president of Schill Grounds Management, during a facility tour.

PHOTO: Ron Hall

Any small business owner that hosts a facility tour displays both generosity and bravura. They're generous because they will be devoting their personal time, their staff's time and considerable expense in preparing their facility and hosting guests, usually lots of guests. The owner also has to be brave because they will be revealing what makes their company unique - (administration, operations, equipment, etc.) to friends, strangers and competitors alike.

Brothers Jerry Schill, president and co-owner, and Joe Schill, co-owner and executive vice president, and their staff answered every question guests put to them... apart from their prepared presentations.

If you've never attended a facility tour, here is how it works, using the Schill event as an example.

After Jerry offered a friendly greeting and brief opening remarks, the guests separated into nine randomly selected groups, with each group going to a different "station." As the small bands of guests rotated to each of the nine stops, a Schill manager shared some important aspect of the company's operation. Each stop lasted approximately 10 to 13 minutes. (OLA staff and Executive Director Sandy Munley kept things moving smoothly.)

Again, guests could ask any questions they desired, and they weren't shy. The Schill presenters, including Joe who manned one stop, responded frankly to every query their guests posed.

You don't have to wait for an association to arrange a facility tour. Many company owners, through friendly relationships they develop via a networking groups or solely on their own, are invited to check out other owner's operations. Often the owners visit each other's non-competing companies. It happens all the time: friends share with friends.

If you ever get the opportunity to do a facility tour, plan to get the most out of it. If you're going just because you are curious, don't bother. Let someone else who can benefit from the experience go in your place. Usually, the hosting company can only handle so many people.

How to get the most out of your facility visit

Use these tips to reap the most benefit from the generosity of the hosting company:

1. Bring business cards as you will meet other owners and managers, in addition to those at the hosting company.
2. Bring a small notepad, something you can tuck into a back pocket. You will be walking from station to station, and you will want to jot down notes as your host shares important business information.
3. You may even want to bring a small recorder or use your cellphone to record information you want to revisit at a later time.
4. Be respectful of the owner and staff of the hosting company, and ask only appropriate questions. You know what they are.
5. Thank your host and their employees. We all know how valuable time is.

Never pass up an opportunity to visit or tour another established, well-run landscape company. You will see and learn more in a couple of hours than you ever imagined. The experience will inspire you.