

Like a Boss: Overcoming the Challenge of Selling Sustainability



Source: www.TurfMagazine.com

Introducing organic and more sustainable products, services and procedures into the landscape maintenance routine has been a primary goal of [Gachina Landscape Management](#) in Menlo Park, California. However, it hasn't been a simple feat for the company, which does both maintenance and construction work for commercial clients. In fact, Cristina Prevarin, sustainable landscape and plant health care manager for Gachina, says that as much as sustainability has been a goal, it's also been a challenge.

As Gachina has begun to implement sustainable practices such as using only battery-operated equipment instead of gas, applying organic fertilizers like compost tea, and using beneficial predators and parasites to control pests, there have been challenges to face. The biggest pushbacks have been increasing maintenance contract prices by as much as 30 to 50 percent, delayed results and treatments that were no longer guaranteed to be 100 percent effective. But this is a transition that the company believes in and Prevarin says they're embracing the changes—challenges and all.

One of the ways that Prevarin has aimed to combat customer pushback to the raised prices and not-always-perfect results has been by meeting face to face as much as possible.

"One of my strengths has been introducing the concept and need of 'going green' or adopting a more sustainable approach *in person*," Prevarin stresses. "Real, genuine enthusiasm and passion are contagious – and best conveyed in person."

Prevarin goes to these client meetings armed with information and visuals. She says that by showing clients graphs and reports that explain how much VOCs are being introduced into the environment just by blowing and mowing properties, they come to understand the value of reducing their carbon

footprint. She also uses pictures that show how depleted soil can become when there is no microorganism activity, and conversely, photos that show how beneficial compost teas can be for the soil's health.

These efforts appear to be paying off. In the past three to five years, Prevarin says she's noticed a difference in attitude.

"We have witnessed an increase in the public's sensitivity and awareness for adopting more sustainable practices," Prevarin says. "Gachina Landscape Management has signed several contracts where the maintenance is performed 100 percent in an organic and sustainable way."

In a few instances, compromise has sold the contract, Prevarin adds. For example, the company's no-spray policy was paired with electric blowers and/or synthetic fertilize use. Or, only the use of herbicide was allowed but not any other pesticide.

"Even in these instances, where there was compromise, we see it as a victory," Prevarin says. "It is still heading in the direction we want to go."

Our [Like a Boss](#) series highlights some common business challenges landscape professionals face and how they conquer them.