

CREW Chief

SUCCESS GUIDE Volume 5



How To Become the Best Crew in the Company

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landscape industry certified

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Managing Three Types of Laborers

Think back to when you were just starting out in the company. You gradually perfected skills, learned new skills and accepted additional responsibility. Your role was a gradual evolution to where you now are in a leadership position.

Now think about the employees who work for you:

Employee #1: This is a basic entry-level employee with proper documentation who wears proper attire, can physically conduct the necessary activities required by his position, and has the ability to show up for work. View this as a 90-day trial period.

Employee #2: This employee follows instructions, should have the knowledge for basic equipment operation commonly found in the trade, can begin to recognize irrigation problems, is responsible for tools, and begins to understand the trade and labor associated with executing work.

Employee #3: This employee can do everything outlined in the positions above, plus is beginning to learn plant names, basic weed and pest identification, and whatever irrigation troubleshooting you feel is important to your business.

As crew chief, it's your job to manage each of your employees. As such, it's important to recognize which category each employee falls into. Then, make it one of your goals to help each employee learn, improve and advance to their next level.

The landscape companies that continue to do well have strong standards throughout the company, and especially at the crew level. There is accountability for a job poorly done, and recognition for a job well done.

Crew chiefs who lead by example and inspire their workers to continue learning and improving are the backbones of successful landscape companies.



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HOW TO Become the Best Crew In the Company

Crews that are professional, responsible and reliable give lawn maintenance companies a leg up in today's competitive environment.

Lawn maintenance is a service business that counts labor as its single largest expense. Within this large expense lies an untapped resource: the workforce. Although field personnel are often underestimated and underutilized in terms of their capabilities, empowering field personnel makes perfect sense.

Why? Because a lawn maintenance company that does \$100,000 per month in sales probably spends at least \$50,000 of that on its workforce, meaning crew chiefs and their crews. This is a significant amount of money that merits the same attention in terms of training and development that is offered to managers and sales staff. Furthermore, it makes good business sense for companies to utilize their crews to better assist management and the overall business in general.

Here is something you and your crew members can start doing right now: Make sure you are well-equipped and prepared to do your work. Your golden rule is to help make money for the company you work for. This will translate into a gainful opportunity for you in the long run. Keep it simple: Be smart, keep learning, and be consistent, responsible and reliable.

HOW TO CREATE SUPERSTAR LABORERS

As the crew chief, you can play a role in helping your workers become more valuable to the company. Below are some

basic requirements of being a standout laborer that you should help hold your crew members accountable for.

Image

Come to work looking like a professional—clean clothes and work boots, keeping oneself groomed and clean.

Be pleasant with customers and offer a smile and greeting.

Have a positive, “can do” attitude.

Work in a clean, organized manner.

Be responsible and show up on time.

Comply with company policies.

Knowledge

Become “landscape industry certified” since an employee becomes more of an asset when he or she has knowledge. (Make sure your boss and/or the owner of the company knows you have employees who want to become certified.)

Make sure the employee can read and write well enough to communicate with company managers and customers.

Learn plants.

Learn irrigation.

Learn weed and pest controls.

Know how to use all hand tools associated with the trade, and always keep them maintained and properly stored.

Capabilities

Know how to use all necessary tools.

Understand what specific workmanship characteristics are important to the company. For example, if the company

prides itself in the lawns it maintains, know how to mow straight lines.

Know how to operate and maintain small engine equipment necessary in your trade.

Safety

Always wear appropriate safety attire required by the industry and company.

Work safe.

Always watch for and anticipate hazards.

Comply with all local and state laws relating to the use of chemicals commonly used in your trade.

HOW TO BECOME A SUPERSTAR CREW CHIEF

Getting the most out of your crew members is only part of your job as crew chief. In order to become a great crew leader, you must make yourself valuable to the company and know what activities you provide that translate into value for customers.

In addition to the requirements set forth for your laborers, you as the crew leader should do the following:

Knowledge

Attain a license that allows you to apply and handle chemicals used in your trade. Most companies will pay for this type of training, testing and ongoing education.

Stay current with trends in irrigation. Take courses and keep up with the new products. Most vendors offer free infor-

mation pamphlets, forums or training courses as a means to familiarize their customers with their products.

Get certified in CPR and first aid.

Learn weed and pest identification.

Understand low-voltage lighting.

Know your company's landscape maintenance guidelines.

Understand the contractual obligations for projects under your control.

Know how to provide great customer service.

Capabilities

Learn how to use a wire multi-tester and wire tracer so that you can fix broken irrigation controller wires.

Know how to repair broken irrigation lines.

Know how to fix irrigation valves.

Be able to program a variety of irrigation controllers.

Have a valid and current driver's license with an insurable driving record.

People Management Skills

Be able to provide direction to your crews.

Know how to plan and organize work for your crews.

Be able to develop and train a good and productive crew.

Know how to develop highly motivated and effective crews.

Know the proper way to discipline crew members for justifiable reasons.

Know how to delegate work and gain the respect of your co-workers.

Safety

Always look out for and anticipate hazards, and also report them.

Make sure that those you work for practice good safe methods of operation. ◀



Jon Ewing has over 30 years experience in the Green Industry. He was the founder of Landtrends Inc., a multi-state landscape construction and maintenance firm based in San Diego, and was also the co-founder of Miramar Wholesale Nurseries. Visit jonewingconsultingservices.com or call (858) 229-9893.

ARE YOUR EDGING SKILLS 'CERTIFIABLE'?

Do you think you and your crew-mates can run neck and neck with the best landscape technicians in the industry? Do you operate trimmers, edgers and other hand-held tools like true professionals, or just a bunch of hacks?

The following are excerpts from the Turf Maintenance Principles chapter of the "Employee Training Manual for Landscape Technicians", produced by the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) and the Associated Landscape Contractors of Colorado (ALCC). This is the second edition of the manual; publication date this coming fall. Take a look and see if your knowledge and skills are worthy of being labeled as Landscape Industry Certified.

String Trimmer Operation

Always read operator's manual before operating a string trimmer.

Wear eye and ear protection, long pants and footwear. Be sure footwear meets government-recommended safety standards.

Inspect string shields and shut-off switches before starting. Check the surrounding area to be sure there are no people or animals nearby.

Keep hands, face and feet clear of rotating trimming line at all times.

Place yourself in a proper starting position with stable footing and the trimmer on the ground before pulling the starting rope.

Grip trimmer firmly with both handles while operating. Avoid over-reaching and maintain good

balance at all times.

Immediately turn trimmer off and check for damage if it strikes a foreign object or becomes entangled. Make repairs before restarting.

Stop operating when the hub or spool is broken.

Avoid extending trimming line beyond the length stated in the operator's manual as this can cause injury or damage to the engine.

Edger Operation

Edging provides a more finely manicured appearance than can be accomplished with mowers or string trimmers. Operate edgers with special care as they can damage concrete flagstone, brick, asphalt, wood and sprinkler heads.

Always read operator's manual before operating an edger.

Wear eye and ear protection, long pants and footwear. Be sure footwear meets government recommended standards.

Always operate an edger with guards and other safety devices intact and keep it on the ground while starting.

Remove rocks or other debris from the work area to reduce the potential for damage, vehicles, buildings, etc. or injury to pedestrians.

For information on how to become Landscape Industry Certified, visit landcarenetwork.org and click on the logo.



New Product Spotlight

NEW STIHL MotoMix™

STIHL takes the guesswork out of mixing fuel at a 50:1 ratio. STIHL MotoMix™ is ethanol-free and created with premium quality fuel with a minimum 92 octane and the superior protection of STIHL HP Ultra Oil to ensure reliability and performance.

According to Kent Hall, senior product manager for STIHL Inc., “STIHL MotoMix will eliminate the time and hassle of measuring and mixing fuel and oil. All while delivering excellent engine performance and superior lubrication.”

- **Unique ethanol-free fuel formulation results in a fuel storage period of up to two years.**
- **Customers can expect easier starting and consistent, reliable operation.**
- **Non-aromatic fuel mixed with a fully synthetic and highly biodegradable two-cycle engine oil, making it easier on the environment.**
- **Convenient 39.5-ounce metal container contains 32 ounces (1 quart) of pre-mixed fuel.**

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STIHL MotoMix is also a natural fit as the official fuel of the STIHL® TIMBERSPORTS® Series.

NEW STIHL MS 261 and MS 261 C-Q Chain Saws



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The innovative engine technology on the new STIHL MS 261 and MS 261 C-Q chain saws reduces emissions up to 50 percent and provides up to a 20 percent increase in fuel efficiency*, resulting in longer periods of use between refueling. Made for a variety of users like landscapers, arborists, loggers, farmers, and municipalities, these chain saws come equipped with a decompression valve for easier starts and an advanced anti-vibration system that helps reduce user fatigue. The stainless steel muffler and the compact, space-saving design of the split-barrel carburetor reduce overall weight.

- **Reduced-emission engine technology results in 50% less emissions and up to a 20% increase in fuel efficiency*.**
- **Self guided, captive bar nuts in the sprocket cover to prevent loss.**
- **New round, canister-style air filter for greater air cleaning efficiency and longer run times between maintenance.**
- **STIHL MS 261 C-Q includes STIHL Quickstop® Plus (Q), an additional chain braking feature designed to stop the saw chain in less than one second.**

*As compared to previous models.

NEW STIHL FS 360 C-E and FS 460 C-EM Brushcutter/Clearing Saws

Longer run times, ease of operation and fuel-efficient.

Powered by a low-emission engine with 20 percent more fuel efficiency* the STIHL FS 360 C-E and FS 460 C-EM offer a simplified starting procedure with a semi-automatic choke lever and stop switch that automatically returns to the start position. Designed for agriculture and forestry customers, as well as municipalities and utility companies, these two new brushcutters feature an ergonomic design and come standard with the extremely lightweight and comfortable universal harness and Easy2Start™.

- Large, 25.4-oz., translucent fuel tank results in long run times and less refueling.
- Easy-adjust, soft-grip bike handle swivels for easy transport and storage.
- 4-point anti-vibration system allows for optimal control and reduced fatigue.
- Vertically pleated, paper air filter element provides an extended service life.

STIHL FS 460 C-EM features STIHL M-Tronic™

STIHL M-Tronic™ provides optimum engine power at all times, automatically adjusting to variable conditions, including changes in elevation, temperature, air filter cleanliness, fuel quality and octane levels, eliminating the need for manual carburetor adjustments.

*As compared to previous models.



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STIHL SR 450 Backpack Sprayer



Ideal for distributing liquid or solid insecticides, fertilizers or herbicides, the STIHL SR 450 easily converts from misting to dusting applications without special tools or additional equipment. A larger and more powerful engine provides a wider spray range that is 20% greater than previous models, taking 20% less time to spray the same area depending on the application.

- Powered by a low-emission, fuel-efficient engine and equipped with a large fuel tank, for longer run times.
- Tube-mounted throttle includes engine controls and product feed controls, simplifying application of liquid and dry materials.
- Air speed can be easily adjusted for greater application control and reducing product waste.
- Can be used as a backpack blower for debris cleanup.
- Easily converts from misting to dusting applications without special tools or additional equipment.

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STIHL FS 100 RX Professional Trimmer

With a high-powered, low-emission engine and one of the best power-to-weight ratios in its class, the STIHL FS 100 RX string trimmer is designed for professional dedicated line head use. This loop handle grass trimmer has quick, smooth acceleration, lower vibration and is lightweight for user comfort and maneuverability.

- Powered by a low-emission, fuel-efficient engine for longer run times.
- Quick, smooth acceleration and lower vibration for comfortable operation.
- Gearbox and deflector design reduce the weight and improve comfort and maneuverability.
- Can be used with AUTOCUT®, FixCut™ or STIHL PolyCut™ cutting heads for trimming large areas.
- Equipped with a reduced-weight drive shaft and compact gearbox.



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Safe, Courteous Leaf Blower Use

Being aware of your surroundings will help you get the job done safer and faster—while also making customers happier.

Leaf blowers are an essential time and labor saving tool on the job, but landscape contractors are facing increasing pressure from homeowners associations, municipalities and other government agencies about equipment sound.

Blowers are especially targeted due not only to the sound level at which they operate but also their sound frequency. In some cases, bans or severe limitations on blowers have been enacted. By adhering to the courtesies and guidelines below, not only do you protect yourself, your employees and the environment around you, but you help avoid controversy surrounding blower use, keep your clients happy, add to your bottom line and maximize efficiency.

OPERATING COURTESY

Follow local rules—do not use very early or late in the day unless using a low noise product with a dB(A) within the city ordinance.

Check wind direction and intensity—never point the nozzle toward people, pets, cars or houses.

Do not:

- Blow debris toward open windows or doors
- Leave blower running while unattended.
- Use blower to spread or mist fertilizers, chemicals or other toxic substances, unless it is designed for these purposes and in an appropriate area.

REDUCING NOISE

- Use lowest possible throttle speed (this also saves on fuel).
 - Use nozzle attachments that help reduce sound.
 - Avoid using more than one blower at a time whenever possible—especially in neighborhoods or around buildings where sound can be intensified.
 - Check the condition of the leaf blower muffler, air intakes and air filter to make sure they're in good condition.
 - Use a quieter blower, for example, the STIHL BR 500 backpack blower or the STIHL BG 66 L handheld blower.
 - Electric blowers like the STIHL BGE 61 or STIHL BGE 71 are great for occasional use and small properties.
- Using quieter blowers like the STIHL BR 500 backpack blower or the STIHL BG 66 L handheld blower can also help. Landscape Care owner Mike Simon did and with great results. "The response from our clients has been overwhelming," said Simon. "Our crews have noticed the benefits as well—they don't have to shout over loud engines or use hand signals to get each other's attention. The equipment is even more powerful than traditional units, so we work more effectively."

REDUCING DUST

- Start with nozzle close to the ground at first and then raise it to a height where it doesn't generate dust.
- Use the full lower nozzle extensions to control sound and minimize dust.
- Practice by moving grass clippings or a paper cup without moving dust.
- Wet dusty areas down before using.
- Leaf blowers should not be used to clean up gravel, construction dirt, plaster dust, cement and concrete dust and dry garden topsoil.

LEARN HOW TO EFFICIENTLY OPERATE A LEAF BLOWER

Follow these simple instructions, along with the manufacturer's instruction manual:

- Learn to control air velocity at the end of the nozzle to lift leaves without lifting dust.
- Practice leaf blower nozzle movement/throttle control.
- Practice up/down and left/right motions starting close to the ground and the debris but not close enough to lift excess dust.

Also, it is important that when using a blower, the operator wear protective glasses, gloves and hearing protection to help protect eyes, hands, and hearing. When operating any outdoor power equipment, you should wear the personal protective equipment (PPE) as outlined in the manufacturer's instruction manual.

By following these guidelines and tips, you can more safely, courteously and effectively operate your leaf blower without disturbing the peace and environment around you. For more information on leaf blower training, visit www.stihl-library.com/pdf/LeafBlowerTraining.pdf. ◀



IS YOUR WATER KNOWLEDGE 'CERTIFIABLE'?

Do you have a sound understanding of the role water plays in the development and overall health of the turf you maintain? The following are excerpts from the Turf Maintenance Principles chapter of the "Employee Training Manual for Landscape Technicians", produced by the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) and the Associated Landscape Contractors of Colorado (ALCC). Take a look and see if your knowledge and skills are worthy of being labeled as Landscape Industry Certified.

There are several factors to consider when determining how much and how frequently to water turf. They include turf type, condition, soil type, slope, type of irrigation system, season and watering restrictions.

As a general rule, a lawn should

receive at least 1 inch of water per week. This can vary. For example, water requirements are less in shade and cool or cloudy weather. In addition, water filtration rate is lower in clay soils compared to sandy soils, which means application rate can vary.

Be careful not to underwater or overwater. Underwatering can first be detected by seeing a blue-gray tint to the turf. Overwatering is wasteful and can be detrimental to turf by depriving roots of oxygen and promoting disease. To promote healthy root development, avoid frequent shallow watering of turf.

The best time for watering is in the early morning or evening. At these times, it is generally cooler, more humid and less windy, resulting in less water loss from evaporation. Water

pressure may be higher at these times as well, which adds to irrigation system operating efficiency.

In some areas, late-day watering may encourage fungus growth. Also, with irrigated turf, it is beneficial to water shortly after each mowing to help the lawn recover. In addition, other seasonal considerations, such as fertilization or aeration, may require modification of regular irrigation schedules to promote healthy turf.

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HOW TO IMPROVE ZERO-TURN MOWER PERFORMANCE

During the mowing season, periodic maintenance needs to be performed at the specified intervals in the operator's manual. Jeff Shearin, service manager at Clay's Power Equipment in Raleigh, NC (claysequip.com), says it's important to pay close attention to the following:

- Check oil level daily before use.
- Check hydraulic fluid weekly.
- Visually inspect the machine daily for any signs of leaks or obvious damage.
- Check tire pressure regularly; do not adjust tracking without checking tire pressure first.
- Check and clean paper air filters every 50 hours or more often in dusty conditions. Use low-pressure compressed air to blow out paper filters from the inside. Do not use high

pressure or the filter element may be damaged.

- Be sure to grease fittings per the maintenance schedule in the operator's manual.

Keep blades sharp and balanced. A dull blade tears grass, which will cause the grass tips to brown while increasing the chance for disease.

Check blades for excessive wear, and replace blades that are damaged, worn or bent before they cause a problem.

Keep maintenance records on your equipment, this will help you to control costs by keeping track of the correct maintenance intervals. It will also reduce your likelihood of downtime due to lack of maintenance.

Check belts regularly for damage and to ensure proper tension.

Keep it clean. After you are done using

the mower for the day, simply take your handheld or backpack blower and blow off the entire machine. Keep the engine clean. Doing this reduces heat buildup, corrosion and premature wear.

Visually inspect your work. Shearin advises contractors to periodically walk the area they have just mowed and look at it from all directions. "This can give you a good idea of problems that may be causing an issue with cut quality," he points out. "Are there ridges at the edge of two mowing lines? Are there skips between blades? Are the tips of the grass cleanly cut? After a few times, this will become second nature and you will develop an eye for ensuring the best possible quality out of your mower."

Visit greenindustrypros.com for more equipment information and maintenance advice.

HOW TO Manage Ethnic Tension

By ensuring interpersonal communication, tolerance and accountability, crew leaders can ensure that productivity and quality remain high.

Good management is needed to keep diversity from becoming a hindrance when it could be an asset. Here's a three-point plan that can help you.

SIZE MATTERS

The size at which organizations operate is perhaps the most crucial component of managing well. An organization that is too big has a more difficult time treating its members as meaningful contributors and risks alienating them. Moreover, an organization that is too big will not be able to recognize a problem until it is too late.

The interesting thing about landscape companies is that the work gets done at the "crew level". Working in small groups like this allows for high levels of production—without compromising accountability and interpersonal communication.

When managed correctly, members of smaller groups such as landscape crews become more moderate and understanding of opposing positions, making conflict less likely when the members represent diverse positions.

PEOPLE MATTER

It is important to remember that people must be involved in the decision-making procedures. People have a natural desire to communicate and provide input. To close them off from this will only lead to animosity and perhaps lead them to look for some person to blame or take their frustration out on while not knowing

why they feel alienated. Moreover, if you do not include certain people in the decision-making process, you may never learn what the true problem is or what solutions might be available.

Secondly, there are natural leaders and natural followers within any group. You must recognize which category each of your crew members falls into. And

decisions and decisions you make. The most effective means for addressing problems as they arise is a flexible leadership structure that is populated by those who have adopted the organization's values as their own. Do you know and understand your company's mission and values? Have you adopted them as your own?

People must be involved in the decision-making procedures. People have a natural desire to communicate and provide input.

remember, leaders do not have to be in official power positions to take the lead, so it is important to control their interactions with the natural followers if the natural leader is increasing the tension level.

LEADERS MATTER

Official leaders such as yourself must be able to work within the system to address problems while remaining sensitive to the needs of the people within the organization.

A leader must embody the values of the organization while not appearing to be "a company man". A leader must look to build understanding and cooperation without those efforts coming across as artificial or manufactured.

Since most landscape companies are designed to grant some sense of autonomy to its crews, the values of the company will be the guide for the poli-

Every organization is different and every population is different, therefore the strategies employed to address the unique problems that arise within diverse populations need to be dynamic and adaptable. A static set of rules will always fail as it will not be able to address the dynamic nature of people and their needs. One of the primary advantages of the system outlined in this article is that it is adaptable and responsive so that the policies will always reflect the changing needs of the organization. It is only within such a system that conflict can be averted. And you, the crew chief, play a very important role in this system. ◀

Dr. Kyle Scott is a lecturer at the University of Houston, with a Ph.D. in Political Science: American Political Theory and Public Law. He has authored two books and a forthcoming third, "Federalism: Theory and Practice," will be available Spring 2011. For more information, contact him at: kascott@uh.edu.



*Jonathan Souers
Maintenance Division Director
Cornerstone Solutions Group
Tampa, Florida*

21 crews, 187 contracts and just one product: STIHL

"Why STIHL? We build neighborhoods, not just landscape lawns and streets, and with an operation this big, we can't afford to use products that don't work as hard as we do. Running one handheld product line streamlines crew training, inventory, and maintenance, which means less downtime.

It only takes one inferior machine to break down to see the difference in total repair cost. Tough times require tough equipment. STIHL helps keep us running and profitable."

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*Brandon Phillipie
Bland Landscaping
Weston Parkway, Cary, NC*

13 miles. No stop signs.

The crews at Bland Landscaping sure get their exercise. Trimming and edging Weston Parkway in Cary, NC, takes three days and covers 13 miles, up and back, up and back again. Not even counting sidewalks and side roads. Throw in the area's sweltering summer heat and humidity, and you have a job that's only fit for the toughest guys and most durable equipment on the planet. And Bland

has both. STIHL's line of professional equipment handles extreme landscaping jobs like nothing else, delivering ultimate power and dependability. That's important with miles to cover, because it means no downtime for this crew – as much as they might appreciate some.

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