



Setting expectations

BY GEORGE URVARI

One of the toughest challenges in small business is defining roles and responsibilities for staff. The responsibilities must outline who does what, when, where and why, at defined speed and quality levels. This applies to sales, administration and operations. This article will offer some examples of how process can be used to improve staff performance.

The big questions are, How do we get people to follow processes without creating friction, and How do we create processes people will follow?

I will start with sales, because it is the first thing that is required for a business to operate. It is the foundation to getting all your processes right along with budgeting — which I will not get into here. It's a whole topic on its own. Process goals for sales, design and estimating include:

- Weed out unwanted customers
- Ensure that the design balances price, buildability and creativity
- Reduce friction between creative, right-brained and left-brained people
- Eliminate estimating errors
- Ensure sales closing ratios are kept high
- Ensure profitable work

Solutions for the sales process

First, take your client's information, listing his wants and needs, and establish a budget up front. Screen waste-of-time customers by asking for their budget on the phone. Set up a sales meeting, bringing along this information and literature, or brochures that apply to the client. Ask the client to sign a design contract that allows for three concept drawings, reflecting an entry-level landscape design through to a sophisticated one.

The analogy is, if you went to a Volkswagen dealership looking for an entry-level car, and the dealer offered only premium models with premium prices, you might go to Toyota, instead. Do not give clients a chance to shop around. Get them thinking about your brand only! Then get them thinking about prices *within* your brand.

This process also allows your designers to design cheap-and-cheerful, or over-the-top, satisfying their egos and creative urges. The sales person can upsell, if required, and the company owner will never be in conflict with the sales or design staff, because ego problems relating to creativity or boredom are resolved through this process. Sales closing ratios will go up, with more time spent on solid business prospects, and less time wasted on tire-kickers.

The estimating process

All estimates should be set up the same way — by order of operations. Every estimate is to be verified, and signed off, by someone else. This check should include accuracy of the take-offs, discussion about how long the project will take and why, who is building it and potential production obstacles. Talk about whether or not the client is difficult. The estimate should specify the tolerances required and include a guarantee that overhead is being recovered for the project. Ensure that the correct profit margin is applied, balancing the sales target for the company with the risk involved in doing the work.

The next steps in the process would be getting the contract signed correctly, so that the customer and your accounting department are on the same page. Then be sure your crews understand what needs to

be done, in what order, and in what time period, and to what standards.

If you get the process right, your people will be happier and you will have more profit and less grief. To avoid a union-type mentality in smaller companies, it may be best to assign responsibilities and not roles, because changes can occur quickly — your estimator may be pricing one day and planting a tree the next, if required.

All of these areas are linked. Any disruption in communication as a result of poor process causes problems, which translate into lost time, money and opportunity.

Putting processes in writing

Creating all the documents and written processes for a small business is an arduous and taxing responsibility, especially when the owners have no expertise in process creation and should be selling, managing, doing, or administering the work.

Three growth and development requirements must be met before a business can become a turn-key operation. It must do the work efficiently, actually building the gardens or cutting the grass. It must do the administration: budgeting, hiring, training, invoicing, receivables, estimating, taxes, ordering materials and supplies, tracking inventory, etc. And finally, it must build the business, both physically and administratively. Physically building the office involves preparing the shop for equipment repairs or indoor construction, building the yard, the loading bays, the shelving systems, the storage areas and material bins. Administrative building includes creating the filing tree on the computer, the document library, the company's operating manual, the hiring



Heucherella 'Golden Zebra' PPAF

Terra Nova Nurseries

Foamy bells

Here's another variety that stands out in the landscape and happens to be a brand new introduction. Bright yellow foliage heavily marked with deep burgundy red will be sure to impress your clients. 'Golden Zebra' will grow 25 cm tall. Great garden performance all season long, but spring is when this selection gets noticed! Plant in similar situations as *H.* 'Brass Lantern' and you will be one of the first in the industry to enjoy the positive feedback from your client. A couple of more *Heucherella* selections that I do need to mention are *H.* 'Alabama Sunrise' and *H.* 'Sweet Tea' — both great plants, but I'll save the details for another day.



Walters Gardens Inc.

Sedum rupestre 'Angelina'

Stonecrop

I really hope that most of you have at least heard of this *Sedum*. It is not a new introduction by any means. What a great selection for the front of the border or a container. Once the snow melts *Sedum* 'Angelina' will catch your eye with its red-orange tones, but as the days warm up it will break dormancy and the foliage will take on an outstanding bright yellow colour. Hardy to zone three and loves full sun and heat. Grows eight centimeters tall. Another selection that is very closely related is *Sedum rupestre* 'Blue Spruce'. Both plants will be sure to impress in any professional landscape design, and both will certainly stand out in the garden when winter finally does disappear.

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Outstanding foliage for spring

BY DAVID VAN DE VEN

While almost every Canadian awaits the arrival of spring (a few of us still “enjoy” winter, I suppose), many of us pay close attention to tulips slowly emerging in the garden beds. But keep a close eye on the great foliage plants that impressed you at the nursery last season. While most foliage plants look great in summer, many times they stand out in spring and fall as well. Cooler temperatures noticeably enhance the range of colour in foliage. Evergreen varieties will usually appear from under the melting snow with an orangey-red cast; the warmer days and higher light intensity will gradually bring the plant out of dormancy and let the show begin. For those perennial plants that completely recede into

the ground in fall, spring brings them back to life with fantastic colour.

While foliage colour in spring may not be something we as professionals consider, it definitely should be. Our clients are impressed with plants that give them enjoyment throughout the seasons – if we can offer them some interest in the garden immediately after winter, they are sure to notice. Here are a few suggestions that are certainly worthy of use in the professional landscape design. **LT**

David Van de Ven is a perennial grower in Mount Albert, Ont.

Dicentra spectabilis ‘Gold Heart’ EU4817 CPBR0974

Bleeding heart

While identical in plant growth and garden performance, this is not your grandmother’s old-fashioned bleeding heart. Its bright golden-yellow foliage starts emerging in early spring, and doesn’t take long to reach full maturity. Normally the flowers will appear in late April to May, and I must say, they will put on quite a show. Bright pink flowers set on the bright yellow foliage will certainly be noticed from a distance! Hardy to zone three, but like any *Dicentra spectabilis*, in hot dry years it may start to decline and go into dormancy in late June to early July. Not to worry though, the plant has not died, this is just a natural defense to withstand droughty seasons. Plant *Dicentra* ‘Gold Heart’ as a specimen where it can be noticed in spring or in large groups for extra

impact. It will grow to 120 cm tall; container plantings are possible, but I recommend dismantling the pot before mid-summer’s heat. Although most catalogues list *Dicentra* as a sun-to-part-shade plant, I suggest partial shade to prevent early-season dormancy.

Heucherella ‘Brass Lantern’ PPAF

Foamy bells



Terra Nova Nurseries

Last year my *Landscape Trades* article about *Heuchera* generated more interest than any other I have written. Breeders seem to have been very busy releasing new introductions of *Heucherella* over the past year. *Heucherella* is a naturally occurring intergeneric cross between *Heuchera* (coral bells) and *Tiarella* (foam flower), which gives the common name of foamy bells. I have been a little reluctant to tout the advantages of new *Heucherella* hybrids simply because of their weak, and sometimes fragile, garden performance. That is certainly not the case with these new exciting

plants. *Heucherella* ‘Brass Lantern’ is one much sturdier. Great maple-shaped leaves, similar in colour to *Heuchera* ‘Amber Waves’, but with a contrasting red centre in each leaf make this selection stand out in spring. Grows 30 cm tall, is hardy to zone four and able to tolerate hot humid summers if planted in part shade. I think it looks its best if planted in groupings in a professional design, or as an accent in a larger container. Definitely a new plant to get excited about.

must conduct business in such a manner that his projects meet the specifications and requirements of contracts. Interested contractors must have three years of experience, and apply for the four-hour exam through the Irrigation Association.

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The CID evaluates site conditions and determines the net irrigation requirements, based on project needs.

The designer is then responsible for selecting the most effective irrigation equipment and design methods. The objective of a CID is to establish specifications and design drawings for the construction of an irrigation project. CIDs with a specialty in commercial, golf course or residential landscape/turf irrigation are eligible to become EPA WaterSense partners. CIDs specializing in sprinkler, surface and/or drip-micro agriculture irrigation can qualify as Technical Service Providers for USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service projects.

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business is the evaluation, operation, management and improvement of irrigation systems to achieve the highest

level of water conservation possible. They are involved in discussion with the end user regarding system use, particularly as it relates to scheduling, maintenance concerns and water conservation.

Professionalism for our industry

Water, the provider of life, is becoming more regulated. All irrigation projects need to be approached professionally, with conservation in mind. If qualified, experienced irrigation consultants are involved in projects from planning through implementation and inspection, issues related to poor irrigation and water waste would slowly disappear. Combined with the

excellent water management advances that visionary manufacturers are now providing to the trade, and we would have a win-win situation, instead of bickering going on between the parties involved with some unacceptably poor irrigation systems. **LT**



Lorne Haveruk is an Ontario-based water resource consultant, irrigation designer, author, speaker and educator.

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