

*The Harvest Way for*  
**RECRUITING & HIRING  
THE RIGHT PEOPLE**

**Proven Landscape Industry Tips, Tactics  
and Techniques for Finding and  
Getting “On Board” The Right People**

By Bill Arman  
Head Harvester

## DEDICATION

I am dedicating this book to my awesome bride of more than 30 years, Carrie Joy. Writing a book is truly a work of passion and it certainly requires some concentrated focus, attention and a bunch of time. This book was possible as a result of the support she gave me during this whole book writing process, even when my attention was often not focused on what counts the most – being the husband, partner and father I should be and that she deserves. She supports me in my crazy adventure of being a traveling “hands-on” consultant/coach. She serves as my spiritual compass to keep me focused on being a loyal servant. She offers me encouragement when things don’t go exactly the way we thought they would. She helps put things into perspective. The JOY that my bride brings to my life is incredible and I am truly thankful for her patience, understanding and unwavering support. I am truly fortunate to have this woman be part of this Harvester’s life. The old saying that “it takes a great and special woman to bring the best out of a man” certainly applies in my life.

Thank you Carrie Joy. You are the JOY of my life.

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## PRAISE FOR THIS BOOK

“I respect Bill as a person as well as a business mentor. Bill has consulted with our firm for many years, and we are a healthier company because of it. Bill’s unique perspective in how to manage and motivate people helps enable both the employer and the employee achieve more than they could ever imagine. Bill has the ability to paint word pictures to help make the important things related to growing and sustaining a business more understandable. In today’s business market the key is retaining the right people in the right roles to be effective each day. I recommend this book to anyone looking for new ideas on effectively growing their business.”

Dale M. Micetic  
President, Property Services Division  
ISS Grounds Control, Inc.

“Head Harvester Bill’s book is an absolute bonanza for the contractor emerging from survival mode into the next phase of growth. For established companies, it’s a great checklist with many tips, tactics or techniques that may previously been overlooked. For newer companies, this is a great “road map” to build your recruiting program. I found Harvester Bill’s words to indeed be tried and true.”

Ron Kujawa CCLP  
Chairman Emeritus KEI  
Past President of The Professional LandCare Network (PLANET)

“Harvester Bill provides a blueprint for finding, attracting and growing the right people! Through his proven techniques we have hired and retained several key employees and college interns. This has now provided the needed infrastructure for us to grow to the next level. Follow his insights and you will recruit and retain exceptional individuals to build a successful, sustainable company.”

Allen Chariton  
Owner, Tierra Verde Landscape, Inc.

“Forget about the business books on The New York Times bestsellers list. Throw out all your old reference books gathering dust on your shelves. The only source you will need to help recruit, motivate and retain top employees is captured in Bill Arman’s new book *The Harvest Way for Recruiting and Hiring the Right People*.

Bill shares the expertise he developed during his illustrious career as one of the top professionals in the green industry. From his early years working on a maintenance crew to the presidency of a major landscape maintenance company, Arman has excelled at every level.

This must-read book is superbly organized in action-oriented chapters filled with sage advice and insights based on real work experiences. Arman has been nurturing and growing his green industry knowledge base for more than 40 years. Now the rest of the industry can harvest the fruits of his labor. Priceless!”

William Hildebolt  
CEO, Nature’s Select Premium Turf Services, Inc.  
Author, *The Professional Entrepreneur, When Cowboys Grow up*  
Past President of The Professional LandCare Network (PLANET)

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# INTRODUCTION

In A Garden Far, Far Away and A Long Time Ago...

I first started my amazing journey in the landscape world in the summer of 1966. My friend Johnny Cox called me to inquire if I would be interested in being his substitute on a landscape maintenance crew at a homeowner's association near where I lived. He was going off on his own two-week adventure with a junior military boot camp in the San Diego area and I was left to mow and maintain 90 lawns along with a crew of four others.

The days were filled with a variety of activities including mowing, trimming, watering, and general maintenance activities. I actually started liking the physical part of it, and enjoyed working outdoors. My two-week stint as a gardener went by quickly, and my friend Johnny returned to retrieve his job. The only problem was that the head gardener decided to relinquish my friend's duties for the rest of the summer and engage my services.

As it turned out, Johnny really wasn't that heart broken and off he went to enjoy the rest of his summer doing what most kids in their early teens in those days enjoyed doing like swimming, meeting girls and hanging out at the beach.

Today, 45 years later, Johnny and I still remain the best of friends and I owe my humble start in the landscape business to him. Thanks Johnny!

So that is how it all got started with me in the landscape industry. I was now a "professional" earning a whopping \$1.25 per hour and enjoying every minute of it. I would work on this same account for the next nine summers. In between those last four summers, I attended Cal Poly San Luis Obispo to study Ornamental Horticulture and received my Bachelor of Science degree in 1976.

I learned a lot in those early years about how the landscape business worked and how much hard work it required to keep landscapes looking good. I also learned the key ingredient for keeping a landscape looking good and for a business to be successful was the importance of PEOPLE.

There were actually several components of the people equation that would come into play, thus creating a fairly complex dynamic. There were the team members I worked with, the leadership who lead us, and, of course, there were our customers. It's the PEOPLE trifecta – team, leaders and customers.

After I graduated from Cal Poly, I joined ValleyCrest Companies, a very reputable landscape organization. When I first got started, I was very focused on growing the plants that were in the landscape. I spent a great deal of time and energy learning the different growth habits of various plants and trees.

When I started moving up in the organization I was charged with getting things done through others, and then the fun began. I realized in fairly short order (actually it took me about three years) that while plants and plant knowledge would play a large role in the success of a landscape company, it was the people part of the business that would be by far and away the greatest single component an organization needed to be successful. Yes, it was about growing people, not plants!

While working at ValleyCrest Companies, I had the good fortune of playing a part in setting up their recruiting efforts at the field, manager, sales, and college levels. I also served as Vice President of human resources for two years designing, developing and implementing training, performance management and recruiting systems for, at that time, a \$650 million operation with 6,500 employees.

During my nearly 30 years with the company, I screened and interviewed more than 5,000 candidates and along with several very talented folks, helped build the recruiting infrastructure for what is now a billion-dollar organization employing more than 10,000 people. I am truly proud of the many people I recruited who are still with this great organization. Many of them have been there for most of their careers.

Today, I am now serving my true purpose in life – helping people “Harvest their Potential” as the co-founder of an international landscape consultancy/coaching firm called The Harvest Group. During our workshops, podcasts, webinars, seminars, and working with our Harvest Group “Best in Class” members, my partner Ed Laflamme and fellow Head Harvesters Steve Cesare and Cindy Code, spend a great deal of our time and efforts on the PEOPLE side of the business.

### ALWAYS REMEMBER

“Having the right people in the right spot, doing the right things, doing the right things right, and treating them right will get the right results. Right? Right!” – Head Harvester Bill

# THE PURPOSE AND HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

The primary purpose of this book is to help you and your organization find, attract and bring on-board the right people. This book can be used to hire managers, owners, human resources professionals or, anyone for that matter, in any business who wants to build a better organization and wants to “Harvest their Potential” through their people.

We will focus on tried and true tips, tricks, tactics and techniques I have used over the last 30 years for attracting and hiring the right people. These proven recruiting practices have been used to find literally thousands of people for landscape design, installation and maintenance companies.

During my time at ValleyCrest Companies, I spent the majority of my time in three critical areas:

## **1: Developing Employees**

Recruiting, coaching and mentoring new and veteran employees  
(20 to 30 percent of my time)

## **2: Caring for Customers**

Selling new work and building lasting relationships with customers  
(15 to 20 percent of my time)

## **3: Delivering Consistent Quality**

Reviewing job sites and giving feedback to our employees, and building and adjusting systems to improve our quality and productivity  
(20 percent of my time)

Far and away the most gratifying part of my role as a leader was finding talented people, getting them into the program, pointing them in the right direction, and getting out of their way (most of the time) to allow them to be successful.

Take a good look at where you are spending your time and if it doesn't involve spending 50 percent or more with your people and your customers, you may want to re-evaluate where your time is being spent. Remember, you are in the PEOPLE business.

### HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

**Read and Highlight the Good Stuff.** Go through each lesson and read and digest the material presented. I usually either use a highlighter or I dog-ear a page that really hits home with me. I hope by the time you have finished your first run through this book, you will have highlighted several key ideas and it will have lots of dog-ears!

**Identify Two or Three Areas to Work On.** Practice some of the exercises and see where your organization needs to tune up their recruiting skills. Identify two or three areas you should be working on to improve your overall PEOPLE program.

**Try Out Some of the Tips.** Refer to the Helpful Hints, Always Remember, True Stories and Case Studies sections throughout the book. These are meant to have high impact and are truly “nuggets” mined over decades of experience. Try some of them out and see how they work for you.

**Tool Box Cornucopia.** Go to the Recruiting Toolbox lesson (Lesson 10) and see what tools are available in the areas where you might need help. Each time you have a recruiting need, go back and look for the tools that will help with your recruiting or on-boarding campaign.

### SEND ME YOUR SUCCESS STORIES

See what new ideas you can come up with and let me know how they work for you. I will use them in the first revision of this book and will be happy to give you credit! I promise.

Send your success stories to [bill@harvestlandscapeconsulting.com](mailto:bill@harvestlandscapeconsulting.com) or call me at 949/466-8837.



# LESSON 1:

## GROWING GREAT PEOPLE – A HARVESTER’S PERSPECTIVE

Whenever we give workshops, we ask the audience what their top priorities are for the next year, and “people needs” usually comes up every time. No matter what the economy, no matter where their business stands, PEOPLE always finishes in the top three priorities for virtually every company.

When we ask what their recruiting needs are for the following year, I am always astonished at the number of managers, middle managers, sales people, foremen and workers who are being sought for the next year and the year after. We are equally amazed at how low the organizations rated their ability to retain and grow their existing people.

You must keep in mind that recruitment is only the first part of the Growing Great PEOPLE equation. You must also find ways to get them on-board and retain and grow the right PEOPLE. This book will deal with the first two parts of the Growing Great PEOPLE equation – finding and getting the right employees on-board.

Without a doubt any organization’s ability to find, attract, get on board, retain and grow the right people will be critical to its’ long-term success. The organizations that are just average at this critical skill will just be average.

After being part of the wonderful world of landscaping for nearly 45 years, I have decided to spell out some practical ways for organizations to find, get on-board, keep and grow great people. We will go over important tips, tricks, tactics,

and techniques I have learned and practiced to attract and get the right people into an organization.

These are proven, field-tested methods to finding the right PEOPLE, and to attracting them into your organization. Please keep in mind that this part of the equation is merely the beginning of what will become the single most important part of your business success – PEOPLE.

Remember folks, it all about people.

#### ALWAYS REMEMBER

“We are in the GROWING PEOPLE business. We just happen to manage landscape companies to test how good we are at the GROWING PEOPLE business” – Head Harvester Bill

## LESSON 2: BUILDING SUSTAINABLE AND SUCCESSFUL BUSINESSES WITH THE “BIG FOUR”

Whenever we begin a Harvest Group workshop, we start with a very simple formula for a business to be successful. The formula deals with the four critical areas an organization must pay attention to in order to enjoy sustainable success, or for it to “harvest” its full potential. The areas include:

1. Attract, get on board, retain and grow the right people.
2. Consistently deliver on the service promise.
3. Attract, get on board, retain and grow the right customers.
4. Make money and grow profitably.

You can do one or two of these for a while and be average. You can do three of these very well and last for years. However, if you can’t do all four, you will not reach your true potential.

It could be debated which of these areas needs to be done first. However, the fact still remains: In order to enjoy sustainable success, an organization must accomplish all four. I would argue that without the organization’s ability to attract, get on board, retain and grow the right PEOPLE, the remaining three areas would not be possible to achieve.

Think about it, you can have all of the best systems, programs and processes in place. You may have great clients that are in your portfolio. You may even be profitable. However, without the right people in the right positions it will not be possible to truly “Harvest Your Potential”™ in a sustainable manner.

**STEP 1: ATTRACT, GET ON-BOARD, RETAIN  
AND GROW THE RIGHT PEOPLE**

Get the right people on board and in the right positions. Keep the keepers, and keep them happy and engaged. Happy employees attract and keep your customers happy. If you do this first, then you can perform the work consistently.

**STEP 2: CONSISTENTLY DELIVER  
ON THE SERVICE PROMISE**

Deliver your service or product consistently all the time, on time, every time. Meet and exceed your customer's expectations and then some. When you deliver consistently it will enable you to go after the right customers.

**STEP 3: ATTRACT, GET ON-BOARD, RETAIN AND  
GROW THE RIGHT CUSTOMERS**

Customers want to do business with people they like and trust. Happy and completely satisfied customers who can count on your consistent delivery will stay loyal and refer you to others. Remember, happy employees and happy customers are a winning formula. Do business with customers with shared values and build them into partnerships. When you get the right customers, they will become more loyal and that will make you more money.

**STEP 4: MAKE MONEY AND GROW PROFITABLY**

Having money and being profitable helps to make more money! More money enables you to in turn build your business. Build your business and it becomes a greater value or asset, which builds equity. Equity and sustainable results are what it is all about. Now you are building a legacy and it all started with – PEOPLE.

## LESSON 3:

### RETENTION OR RECRUITING: WHICH COMES FIRST?

A solid recruiting plan is very similar to a marketing and sales plan. The first ability or result an organization needs to perform is to retain its customer base. If you are losing customers faster than you are getting them, you have a problem with retention.

Just like in sales, if you are losing employees, especially the good ones, you better take care of that issue first before running off and recruiting more employees only to lose them. You need to close the back door exit before you open the front door to new customers and employees. Before you launch your recruiting efforts let's review the symptoms of what might be a retention issue and not a recruiting issue.

#### IT'S A RETENTION PROBLEM WHEN...

The wrong people are leaving, or in other words, the good ones are bailing out. They are not giving their real reasons for leaving, but are being nice about it. Before long they are working over at the competition – yikes!

Another sign a retention problem exists is when the wrong people are staying. Often top performers feel they are being held back because the company tolerates low or non-performers. By allowing the wrong ones to stay around, you can unknowingly encourage the good ones to leave.

### WHY EMPLOYEES LEAVE

Employees leave companies all the time – it’s a fact of business. Here are some top reasons employees decide to leave for greener pastures:

- Lack of recognition.
- Little input in the decision making process.
- Not being used to their potential.
- No opportunity for advancement.
- Not enough challenging assignments (they are bored).
- Feeling undervalued (non-monetary reasons).
- Undervalued (monetary reasons).
- Their boss is not a good leader (this is a big one).
- Not keeping promises .
- A bad culture fit or a broken culture.
- Stressed out environment/overwhelming workload.

Do any of these reasons sound familiar to you? Keep in mind there are organizations that would love to have your best employees working for them. They will be reading this book and getting some pretty good ideas on how to get these people to make the move over to their organization. Don’t give your best employees a good reason, or any reason for that matter, to leave. Remember you will need a good defense (i.e. a good retention program) before you launch your offense (i.e. recruiting) and that means building a solid retention program.

### WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Let’s review the most common reasons why people leave organizations and what to do about them. There are plenty of other reasons why people leave organizations some of which are completely out of your control. For example, they may be moving to another state because of family, they may be changing careers altogether, and some employees, unfortunately, get sick and can’t work or some may even pass away.

## LESSON 4: TOP REASONS PEOPLE LEAVE AND WHAT YOU CAN DO TO STOP THE EXODUS

The following are the most common reasons people leave an organization that you do have some measure of control over. If addressed effectively, it will reduce the odds of your top employees leaving. These are not necessarily listed in order, but these are definitely the most common reasons that people leave from what I have learned with my experience.

### REASON 1: LACK OF RECOGNITION

People are just chugging along in the organization. They are thinking, “No news is good news so I must be doing my job right?” or “I’m doing all this hard work and nobody is recognizing my efforts?” All of us need some sort of recognition and acknowledgment that we are doing our jobs, and doing them well. We need to know if we are a good fit and are behaving and performing in ways that will bring success to the organization and me personally.

Leaders need to let people know they are appreciated and recognized. A simple statement of, “Nice job on the Smith account” or “Thank you for your efforts on the new program rollout,” can go a long way. Recognition comes in many forms including money, awards, perks, etc.

While these do play a role in the recognition process, few are more powerful and affordable than carefully selected words. Here are some Harvester Helpful

Hints to help with your recognition programs:

- Recognition isn't always about the money.
- Be specific with your recognition.
- Say thank you often and mean it.
- Recognize people in front of others.
- Always try to recognize and reinforce the desired behaviors and desired results whenever possible.
- Spend more time catching them doing the right things right rather than busting their chops when they have a blunder.
- Give regular feedback using positive reinforcement and encouragement whenever possible.

Certainly money or other more tangible ways to recognize people are needed as well. Employees can't live on a simple "thank you" alone. You should have some reward and recognition programs that recognize achievement and performance. Some examples of monetary recognition include:

- Safety awards for not having any worker's comp accidents.  
This can include drawings, cash bonuses or getting new equipment assigned to your crew.
- Monetary awards for achieving Quality Counts™ scores and gross margins levels.
- Company bonuses for achieving certain levels of growth and profit.

Remember to use these incentives to drive the desired behaviors and results. Make sure any systems you come up with will drive the behaviors that you want to have within the organization.

## REASON 2: LITTLE INPUT IN THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS

"What possible input could be helpful from my people?" "I have been in this business for a long-time and know how to do this better than anyone else." Do these statements sound familiar?

Many of us are guilty of this way of thinking and as a result we miss out on a great opportunity to gain from others' experiences and knowledge. Get your people involved and have them participate in the decision and planning process. I'm always amazed what great ideas people have when given the chance to express them. This is a great way to keep them involved and let them know they have a voice which will be heard! When people are involved they feel a sense of ownership and respect. A sense of ownership and being respected are great ways to keep your people on board.

Here are some **Harvester Helpful Hints** for jump starting the employee input process:

- Solicit input from your people either by one-on-one sessions, small groups or surveys.
- Leaders should be active listeners rather than pontificators or orators – listen until you sweat.
- Ask them what they think about the direction of the company and about your leadership style.
- Solicit suggestions on how to improve customer service, improve quality, increase gross margin, etc.
- Ask, what should we stop doing? Start doing? Do more of? Less of?
- If you were the boss, what are the top three things you would do?
- Hold town hall meetings and get input on current issues or challenges.
- Hold small group meetings to brainstorm ideas.
- Conduct surveys to gather information.
- Have semi-annual or quarterly state of the company information sessions.

### REASON 3: NOT BEING USED TO THEIR POTENTIAL

In tough economic times, some people will come on board with your organization just to have an income while they are looking for the next opportunity. In the mean time they may have some talents that can add to the organization. This is an opportunity to tap into their experience and talents to help build a program or process they can contribute to and feel good about.

In other cases, you have people on board that truly have a lot more potential than you think. Many smaller companies are guilty of this and lose these folks to larger organizations that have better growth opportunities.

There are always several processes or projects that need developing, improving or implementation in every organization. These are great opportunities to tap into your talent pool and to have people use their potential in positive, productive ways. I have had some nice projects completed with people who just needed to have their potential tapped into.

Here are some **Harvester Helpful Hints** on getting employees to tap into their potential:

- Take inventory of your peoples' talents – computer, photography, horticulture, writing, etc.
- Make a wish list of the projects you always wanted to get done.
- Review all of the “best practices” you have in place and find two or three to improve or upgrade.
- Determine two or three projects that have the greatest leverage for the company's' success.
- Form a task force to work on these projects and have regular team updates
- Give a reward for successful completion of a special task force assignment.
- Consider giving a piece of the savings to those who came up with a cost savings idea.
- Have employees become part of an advisory team.

### REASON 4: NO OPPORTUNITY FOR ADVANCEMENT

This can be particularly true of smaller owner-operated organizations. It is one of the main tools I recruited with when I was at ValleyCrest Companies. I would say, “I can absolutely, positively tell you there is an opportunity for you to advance in our organization.” Then I would list dozens of examples of success stories.

Just so you know I had a caveat to this claim: Employees seeking advancement needed to have and demonstrate the necessary skills and deliver results, have someone ready to take their spot, and be willing to move. I would end it with I'm not certain when or where this opportunity would be, but if you met the criteria there was definitely a place to move up.

It was a good tool to have in my recruiting toolbox. How do you, the smaller company, counter this approach? Here are some Harvester Helpful Hints you can use:

- Have a career ladder or a pathway spelled out for moving ahead and adding more responsibility.
- Have an entry-level position that can grow into a senior-level position. For example, start as an apprentice foreman and move to foremen and eventually to senior foreman.
- Move them along with greater and greater responsibility, and of course pay them in proportion to their added responsibilities.
- Have them shift to other job duties for additional exposure.

### REASON 5: NOT ENOUGH CHALLENGING ASSIGNMENTS (THEY ARE BORED)

Often our jobs can become mundane. Even in the crazy world of landscaping, you can get into a rut. People get bored, and bored and unchallenged people are often vulnerable to leaving your organization. Remember, this is can happen at any and all levels within the organization and is likely happening at your organization

right now. Bored people with boring jobs often go elsewhere just because they are bored and need a change. Take a look at your people and see how long they have been in the exact same spot doing the exact same thing for more than a couple of years. Ask yourself the following questions:

- What new assignments can be either added or changed with this person?
- Are there some stretch assignments that these people can either individually or as a team assignment be given?
- Can you simply have them do the same thing but in a different area or location?

#### **REASON 6: FEELING UNDERVALUED (NON-MONETARY REASONS)**

People sometimes feel plain old undervalued or not appreciated. They come to work, do their job day in and day out, and are just putting in their time because they don't feel important or valued. I know some of you out there are asking, "I pay these guys to work not to feel good!" The fact of the matter is we all want to feel that we are contributing and are a valued part of the team. What are you doing to make your people feel valued?

Here are some **Harvester Helpful Hints** on having your employees feeling valued:

- Make the time to spend one-on-one time with your people even if it's just a moment.
- Learn what makes them tick and get to know them on a personal level.
- When possible, have great stories to tell about them about the tough client who was turned around because of this specific effort or action was taken. These can become legendary tales told to share amongst others.
- Let them know how much you appreciate them in specific terms.
- Know their name, yes as simple as that, know and use their name when talking with them.

#### **REASON 7: UNDERVALUED (MONETARY REASONS)**

I often say it's not all about the money. However, the reality is if you are not reasonably competitive with compensation you can make employees feel good all you want, but they will still leave if they are not fairly paid.

Here are some **Harvester Helpful Hints** on addressing your employees feelings about not feeling properly compensated:

- Do a review of your compensation packages to see if you are competitive with other companies in your market area. This can be done during the interview process as a means to see what they are being paid and/or what they are expecting. Both could be a bit skewed somewhat but at least it's a start.
- You can get published regional pay ranges from PLANET, the national landscape organization ([www.landcarenetwork.org](http://www.landcarenetwork.org)).
- Check with friendly competitors and see how you compare.
- Depending on changing economic conditions, compensation plans should be revised every three years.

While pay is certainly a reason why people leave organizations, it is not in the top five. When I was recruiting I consistently offered a lower starting wage than what people were making elsewhere. It was the opportunities and challenges we had that were the key reasons they came and stayed at our organization. I was also not looking for people who were just hopping around the market place seeking the highest bidder for their services.

#### **REASON 8: THEIR BOSS IS NOT A GOOD LEADER (THIS IS A BIG ONE)**

This was one of the top three reasons why people leave an organization. It was their lousy manager being a poor boss and leader. Here are a few examples of what I discovered about leaders from employees who wanted out: They were:

- Poor communicators.
- Combative, yelling and screaming all the time.
- Not engaged with the organization, disappeared for long periods of time or were out goofing off.
- Buying frivolous things like boats, cars, condos.
- Demonstrating inappropriate behavior such as drugs or drinking.
- Micro-managing or macro-managing or just plain mismanaging.
- They were too full of themselves (i.e. BIG EGO).
- They weren't truthful.
- Their expectations were unrealistic.
- They didn't keep their promises.

Ask yourself, are people leaving your organization because of you and/or the leaders you have in your organization? Recognize that maybe, just maybe, you are the retention problem or part of it.

Consider the following **Harvester Helpful Hints**:

- Perform third-party exit interviews with all employees who leave.
- Have 360-reviews performed on you and your management team annually. These should be administered and delivered by an outside party /facilitator.
- Address weak areas of your management style and take immediate steps to make improvement – show them you are willing to change.
- Apologize to your people and let them know you will work hard at becoming a great leader and will continue to get their input.
- Conduct regular, at least annually, employee surveys to get their input on their managers as well as other parts of the organization.

### **REASON 9: NOT KEEPING PROMISES**

I find more recruits with this one than you could imagine. Over the years you wouldn't believe the number of recruits I found because my competition did not keep their promises with employees. Promises made by their previous employers were not followed up on and this left a bad taste in their mouth, and led them to seek employment elsewhere.

To avoid this from happening in your company, here are some **Harvester Helpful Hints** you can follow:

- Have agreements put in writing and agreed to by both parties before an employee comes on board.
- If there are new deals made along the way, put them into writing so they are understood and agreed to by all parties involved.
- Statements such as, "I thought you said this" or "That's not the deal we agreed on." usually turn out bad if they are not followed up on with a written understanding.

### **REASON 10: A BAD CULTURE FIT OR A BROKEN CULTURE**

The culture of an organization is an extremely important part of its success and plays an important part in your recruiting and retention efforts. It can be used against you by your competition or it can work for you depending how you build it, shape it and live it. Remember, we all have a culture whether we know it or not.

Culture is the personality of the organization. It represents all of the shared experiences, beliefs, values, and behaviors that are a part of the organization's community of people. Culture deals with how people interact and treat each other. Culture is a great deal of how the people in the organization act and behave. Here are some questions to ask to determine what kind of culture you have:

- How does the organization deal with adversity and solve problems?



- What is seen and heard?
- Who seems to be accepted and who doesn't?
- What kinds of behaviors get rewarded? What are punished?
- What does management pay the most attention to?
- How are decisions made?

After asking these questions you should have a pretty good idea of what your culture is like. So how would you describe your culture? Team-oriented, fun, collaborative, cooperative, open communication, brutally honest without being personally brutal or pessimistic, untrusting, guilt ridden, back stabbing, self-promoting? Culture can be your best or worst recruiting tool, so make sure to make any needed adjustments.

These are some **Harvester Helpful Hints** for creating a positive, healthy company culture include:

- Get some professional advice from a human resources or business structure consultant.
- Gather information from your people through employee surveys, town hall meetings, one-on-one meetings to create an open dialogue.
- Build a written vision, mission, and core values statement along with the expected success behaviors.
- Determine the organization's non-negotiable rules and regulations.
- Have the Vision-Mission-Core Values Success Behaviors as part of the performance review process.

### **REASON 11: STRESSED OUT ENVIRONMENT/OVERWHELMING WORKLOAD**

This comes up quite a bit and happens for a variety of reasons. I have seen some companies just pile on the work and stretch their team to the very limits. Unfortunately, in most cases this is money motivated and profit driven. Now

don't get me wrong, you need to make a profit, but you also need to have some life balance.

Good employers recognize this, plan for it and make accommodations for this. The bad news is it pushes people to their limits and it becomes so overwhelming that people will eventually run out of gas and leave. They will seek out organizations that work hard but do not overwhelm their people, at least not on purpose and not for too long at a time.

Another reason this occurs is there are just not enough people on-board to spread the workload out or the current people do not have much capacity. This places more pressure on the more qualified people. This is a result of not having a good People Map and People Plan in place. This ties into the recruiting process and we are back to another reason to have an active recruiting program in place. See how it all connects?

When the company culture is like a sweat shop and it's a grind every day, you can feel it when you walk through the office. People are somewhat listless, it's quiet and there is not much chatter or fun in the air. This makes the employees of these organizations easy pickings to seek employment elsewhere. If this is happening at your company you have two choices: You can do nothing and just keep on grinding or you can make a change.

Owners and leaders need to be aware of what the workload level is and, more importantly, where the hearts and minds of their employees are. The fallout from people "burn out" usually includes employees fleeing for greener pastures or just hanging on and going through the motions. It will reveal itself through performance related issues such as slower response time to client or internal requests, poor attitude, conflicts with other employees, being late or missing work all together and not getting work done.

When it comes to taking stress out of the workplace, here are some **Harvester Helpful Hints** leaders can follow:

- Recognize the symptoms and do something about it.
- Take responsibility and don't blame others.

- Seek some professional help. Hire an outside independent facilitator.
- Gather input from the troops by an outside source via surveys or one-on-one meetings.
- Identify the issues and challenges; usually there are only three to five that need work.
- Take action – make people adjustments, fix the culture, build a recruiting program.
- Communicate, communicate and communicate some more.

### ALWAYS REMEMBER

“Employees do not get recruited away or “stolen” from your organization, more often they leave for a reason that should have and could have been remedied.” – Head Harvester Bill

## LESSON 5: BUILDING A RETENTION PROGRAM

Let’s look at some other steps that can be taken to help keep the exit door closed. Here are some simple ideas for building a solid retention program or tuning up your current efforts:

**Keep Your Keepers.** Take a very good look at yourself and your retention rate of good people to see if you need an employee retention tune up. Ask yourself, who has left our organization in the last three years? Of these people which were keepers and which ones were not? Create a list of the employees that left and why. Are you seeing any patterns here? What have you done differently to adjust? If the answer is nothing, then don’t expect the departures to stop.

**Conduct a Third Party Employee Survey.** I once conducted an employee survey of the entire middle management of our company, which at that time was more than 300 people. The two most important questions we asked were – why did you come to work here and why do you stay? The answers were the same for both questions: opportunities and the challenges.

As it turned out, we certainly had plenty of both to go around for everyone so recruiting for us was not as hard as it is for most landscape companies. We had a very large funnel to constantly keep full. For example, our typical needs list included 80 college graduates, 100 to 125 foremen, 30 to 40 account managers, 15 to 20 business developers, five to 10 branch managers annually! This was for just one division out of four. Today this demand requires a staff over six full-time recruiters nationwide.

I believe every organization should survey all of their employees from the foreman level and above every year. Your HR folks or an outside third-party should do these surveys. Your people who are the closest to the ground level and to the customer will supply you with almost everything an organization needs to know to get better.

Surveys can determine the overall morale of an organization. They can yield some great suggestions for improvements with systems like the shop repair process, the performance review process or the customer service process. Surveys can help determine what your employees' aspirations are with their careers. They can let you see into the hearts and minds of the organization. I have included a sample survey in the Recruiting Toolbox Lesson (Lesson 10) for you to review and use.

Remember to have the surveys be anonymous and that there is no retaliation for those folks that have spoken their minds. Try to get them sorted by job level -- foremen, supervisors, administration, support staff, etc. This way you can isolate some of the issues and get a better perspective.

Each year we would conduct a survey of all middle managers, managers, sales people, and administration and they would be submitted to a consultant. The consulting firm would then consolidate the survey results and hand them out at the beginning of our annual leadership planning meeting. Believe me when I say, we took the surveys very seriously and the input was great for our "learning organization."

It gave us a clear sense of what the organizations' pulse was and helped with our planning for the next three to five years.

**Seek Professional Advice.** Hire a human resource expert or an experienced business consultant who has helped other companies with organizational change. It takes serious effort to build the framework for a strong positive culture with the development of a vision and mission statement along with identifying and gaining clarity of your core values and success behaviors.

It has been proven higher-performing organizations have these key elements in order and they live them from the top down. This will take some time and practice, and the help of a professional facilitator. Once you have the framework in place and your culture is well defined, your people will have the chance to grow, develop and learn like never before. Good people like to work and stay with companies that have a strong positive work environment and culture. That is why such organizations like Southwest Airlines, Ritz Carlton, Zappos, Timberland and Nordstrom do so well with their recruiting efforts.

### ALWAYS REMEMBER

"A great company culture can be a powerful recruiting tool that attracts GREAT PEOPLE." – Head Harvester Bill

**Stage A Retreat.** Not like retreat and run in reverse to escape the enemy but retreat as in get away from the day-to-day work grind and spend some time together. Try a one-day get away and have it facilitated by an outside professional. Have an agenda of things to go over, have some healthy dialogue, assign tasks, and have some fun. Go bowling or play bocce ball or maybe take a walk in a beautiful garden. Break bread together and celebrate your victories and learn from your mishaps.

As your team develops you can arrange for multi-day retreats. Our company had many retreats including a four-night retreat with managers and their spouses in Hawaii. Wow, was that a nice get away! There was bonding time, there were awards presented, a business and goal setting portion, as well as a family games day including a round of golf. All paid for by the company.

I can tell you first hand this was a big part of the culture of this very successful company. You don't have to go to Hawaii, but I'm sure there are some nice spots you can think of where you and your team can get away for a period of time to

pause and reflect, plan, bond, and build a winning culture. If you need some help on this one contact me, I can help you get started.

**Establish an Employee Advisory Team.** One of the signs of a great culture is that the leadership listens to their people. I have seen this done by several methods and one of the most effective is having an employee advisory board. The team can be made up of several levels of people and should be rotated periodically. They should have specific areas to review and come to the leadership team with positive constructive ways to help improve the company. Remember, spend 90 percent of the time finding ways to solve the problem and spend 10 percent of the time talking about the problem, not the other way around. Be sure to practice the 90/10 rule.

**It All Starts At The Top.** Like most things in a company its culture starts and stops with the man (or woman) in charge. When we look at organizations we look at the top and go from there. This is where culture gets its origin, this is where the culture gets reinforced, this is where the culture and its behaviors get modeled from – all from the leader.

If you are having a culture issue that is having a negative impact on your organization, you are the problem. You may be asking yourself, “Gee Harvester Bill, everything in this book so far sounds pretty reasonable but why are you picking on me, the leader?” Because I have seen this way too many times that it really needs to be addressed.

The reality is the leaders are often the owners so if you recognize that you might be part of your cultural challenges you can choose to do something about it or keep chugging along and hope for the best. If you really want to create and sustain something special, then you may want to do something about it.

Here are some **Harvester Helpful Hints** to help energize you and your company, and get them both on the right track:

- Take a good look at yourself through an independently conducted 360 assessment.

- Take a sabbatical – take two or three months off and recharge the batteries.
- Seek professional advice – hire a professional coach/mentor that tells it like it is.
- Turn the business over to someone else – it might be time to play another role in the company.
- Take a look at who surrounds you – you might have to make some tough decisions.
- Establish an employee advisory board that is strong enough to rein you in when needed.
- Have a clearly defined vision, mission, core values and success behaviors.
- Have clearly defined non-negotiable rules with how people deal with each other.
- Live and breathe the vision and mission – serve as the example.

**Retention or Recruiting?** Make sure you have the back door tightly closed to help prevent your good people from departing before you get the recruiting program going. Be realistic toward the reasons why good people are leaving and make every effort to get these remedied. Now that we have addressed the retention issues or possible issues, let’s move over to building a recruiting machine shall we?

Even if your retention is very good the harsh reality is that people, some of the good ones and some of the not so good ones, will leave. Spouses get transferred, family issues emerge, lives change, people change, people retire, and people just get tired.

Just remember, nothing or no one lasts forever but one fact remains, you will always need the right people in the right positions in your organization.

### TRUE STORY: KNOW THEIR NAMES

My first visit to our corporate headquarters was a pretty scary moment in my career. I was asked to come in and meet with the owner of the company along with several other people who, I figured out later, were being groomed for management positions. Keep in mind my only time spent other than in the field until this time was in a satellite office – nothing near to what I was about to experience.

The corporate office was on the upper floor of some really fancy building. I had changed from my work clothes to something that didn't remind anyone I had spent all day sweating out in the field. We met with the owner and he went over a mini-training session on the financials, he was gracious and pretty amazing. But the thing I remember the most was a wall of "Polaroid" pictures of every person in the company from the foremen level and above. The photos had their names on the pictures with some notes attached to each picture.

At the time we were still a pretty large company, but not huge. Regardless, there were around 100 pictures of every key person in the company with some personal notes like name of wife and kids, their position/title, and the division and branch where these people worked. The owner memorized the names of every single key employee in the company from the foremen level up. He also memorized a key personal something about each one of these people! Holy guacamole was that impressive or what?

I have never forgotten this and now realize what a special touch this was. He knew the names of every key person and something personal about each one as well. Talk about a wow factor!

Thanks Burt Sperber for teaching me this most valuable lesson.

## LESSON 6: SEVEN STEPS TO FINDING THE RIGHT PEOPLE

All too often organizations want to go out and recruit and "damn the torpedoes!" However, there is a step-by-step process (seven in all) to attracting and finding the right people. These steps are designed to be accomplished sequentially. Do not hop around because you are in a hurry or don't really want to take the time to get this recruiting process right.

The first step in recruiting is to take stock and good care of what you have. This step will give you a sense of what your current reality is. Keep in mind, if you aren't keeping the good ones on board, as we have reviewed in the earlier portion of this book, it will be quite futile to go out and get new folks only to lose them.

First take a good look at yourself and see who is staying and who is leaving. If the good ones are leaving and the not so good ones are staying this needs to be addressed immediately. It makes no sense to build a nifty recruiting machine if you can't keep the keepers.

### STEP 1: TAKE STOCK AND GOOD CARE OF WHAT YOU HAVE

Draw an organizational chart (i.e. **People Map**) of your existing team – draw out the entire organization and show who reports to whom. Sometimes you will find out some pretty interesting things like people reporting to two people, some folks don't have that much responsibility or the ratios are out of whack.

The next step is to rate each person on an A, B, C scale. The A employees are your stars. Take good care of these folks. The B employees are your main core of people. They are the soldiers and they too need good care. The C employees need to pick it up and/or be successful somewhere else.

If your company uses a 1 to 5 rating scale, each person gets two numbers next to their name – the first number is for their performance and the second number is for their potential.

- 1 = Unacceptable with behaviors, skills and or performance; no potential.
- 2 = Poor level with behaviors, skills and or performance; little or no potential.
- 3 = Satisfactory – acceptable levels with behaviors, skills and or performance.
- 4 = Good – consistently performs, demonstrates the right behaviors and skills.
- 5 = Excellent – great potential exceeds in all areas and is a star.

The next step is to write each employees recruiting source – website, referral from current employee, job agency, newspaper ad, etc. Take a look at who you have on your roster, who is on your developmental bench warming up and who is preventing you from achieving success.

Next to each name on the company organizational chart have the following information listed:

- What is their current status? Great, good, not so good, high potential, too early to call and so on. Almost like a scouting report on each player on your team.
- You will need to determine development and performance levels needing attention for each employee. What will it take to develop this person to be a top performer at their position?

Write down what behaviors and skills need development. What results need improvement? List what their strengths are as well as their weaknesses. What is their potential to be promoted? How long would it take to get to that level?

The main point here is to really know who you have on your roster and what possible options you have. Who do you have in the bullpen warming up?

Other things to think about include answering the following questions. What would you do if you were just awarded a large job? What if you lost a bunch of work? Who would you promote, demote, layoff and why?

Some organizations do a ranking within their organization within each position category such as foremen, account managers, sales, etc. This process will serve as your People Map or People Plan.

- Identify those you believe can move up in the organization.
- Identify those who are fine where they are currently.
- Identify those who can play a different position.
- Identify those who need to be successful somewhere else (code for get them out!).
- Determine who has left the organization in the last year and why.

Your **People Map** or **People Plan** will show you the following:

- Where your organization is strong or weak and vulnerable.
- Sources of your people so we can add to these or better use existing sources.
- What developmental needs are there within the organization?
- Who can move up to fill the new positions?
- Where are you susceptible if people were to leave?
- Where are the gaps with people vs. potential?
- Who needs to be dealt with, or do they need to be successful somewhere else?

The **People Map** or **People Plan** will help with your training and development strategies, as well as help guide you toward “best practices” for retention of the right people. And don’t forget some of the basics on retention we reviewed in the first lesson. It will also remind you to let your employees know where they stand.

Here are some helpful tips in dealing with your A, B and C players, and keeping them engaged, motivated and on your team.

### THE “A” PLAYERS

- These people are the top 10 to 15 percent of your employees – let them know they are your stars and how much you appreciate their contributions.
- We often forget about the “A” group because we are usually too busy dealing with “C” players – make the time to get their thoughts and input.
- Get them involved with the strategic planning process.
- Assign them to teams or to head up teams that are involved with key initiative design, development and implementation.
- Have them involved with recruiting new employees.
- Have them be part of the company’s advisory board.
- Send them to the cool national PLANET events and give a report when they get back to the leadership team.

### THE “B” PLAYERS

- This will be the bulk of your employee population – 60 to 70 percent.
- Take good care of these folks because they are the foundation of your organization.
- Let the “B”s know they are doing well and what they need to do to become an “A.”
- Not all of these folks necessarily want to be put into the limelight so don’t force anyone to be something they don’t want to be.

### THE “C” PLAYERS

- These are usually the lower 10 percent of your employee population.

- Review with the C’s that they need to step it up – be specific and with timelines and consequences if they don’t.
- Keep them on a fairly short leash and don’t hang on too long if they don’t make noticeable progress. Meet with them on a regular basis to monitor their progress, weekly or monthly at the longest.
- Often your good B and great A players will be scratching their heads as to why are you keeping these C players and spending so much time and energy with them when you should be spending that time with them.
- Some key players will actually leave as a result as they see these folks as preventing the organization and themselves from moving up and forward.
- You need a process in place that deals with these people in a humane and consistent manner. If your organization makes exceptions because he or she has been here forever or if you have a misplaced relative or friend in the organization the message that it is acceptable to be non-performer here and you will offer safe harbor until they leave, will be sent out loud and clear.
- Remember the lower performers or the folks with the bad habits and behaviors rarely quit. They will hang around as long as you let them feed at the company trough.
- These folks need someone to help them to become successful somewhere else. Guess what? That someone is usually you the leader.

### LESSON LEARNED

“Make certain you have a good retention program in place before launching your recruiting program. A big part of a successful recruiting program is a successful retention program. It makes no sense to go out and find new people if you can’t keep the good ones to begin with.”  
– Head Harvester Bill

## STEP 2: IDENTIFY YOUR NEEDS

This deals with looking at where you are now and where you are projecting to be in the future. We usually start with a three-year horizon and then work back from there. Here is how to identify your needs in this area.

- Project your revenue growth over the next three years.
- Draw an organizational chart or what we like to call a PEOPLE MAP of what your organization will look like in three years as a result of your growth.
- The new organizational chart or PEOPLE MAP will show where the needs are, as well as where your existing people will fill in the new spots created by growth.
- Compare your current PEOPLE MAP with the PEOPLE MAP for three years out.
- Go back a year, to year two and chart that out with your PEOPLE MAP and project what next year or year one will look like at the end of the next 12 months.
- Now you should have a good picture for each of the next three years with revenue and people needs.
- Consider who can be moved up to the new positions from your existing team – this will help avoid dissention and frustration with existing troops who are not being considered for these slots.
- Think about sequencing and prioritizing your needs. Try to start from the highest-level position and then work your way down the chain of command. This way you can enlist these people in your search process of screening, interviewing and on boarding.
- Know your ratios of revenue to positions needed and your chief to Indian ratios. For example, how many account managers are needed for a certain amount of revenue.

This can be a bit overwhelming at first, especially if you plan on significant growth over the next three years. When you predict your trajectory of growth

along with the people needs to support it, you also need to project the timing needed to go find people or to develop the ones you have. Take the time needed to plan this out and allow time for all of this to happen. In any case, with your **People Map** in hand you know what your people needs are and when you will need them.

### LESSON LEARNED

“Recruiting and development needs always require a certain amount of time to accomplish because after all we are dealing with PEOPLE here.”  
– Head Harvester Bill

## STEP 3: IDENTIFY THE TARGET

When we identify the target we mean just that, we need to get a very clear picture of who the target is. I know it sounds like a military operation but the battlefield of recruitment can be very much like a war for people, so why not call the recruits “targets”?

**Who Are Your Targets?** Your targets can be found in a variety of places, ages and cultural groups. Here are some areas where you might consider looking:

- People who enjoy this industry or at the very least like working outdoors.
- They are usually people who literally like working with their hands.
- They may have been influenced by others in the industry to make a living with their passion like with plants and people.
- Some are educated in the fields of horticulture, landscape architecture, soil science, crop science, natural resource management and agriculture.
- Some are educated in a variety of areas that have nothing to do with the industry.
- Most of the industry has a high school level of education or less.



- They are predominantly male. While females are certainly a growing part of the workforce and represent an excellent talent pool, this industry is dominantly male populated.
- Another great pool is baby boomers. There are 12,000 turning 50 each day!
- In the United States, the majority of the work force is Hispanic, and come from or has roots in Mexico or Central America.

The good news is that there really are plenty of targets out there we just need to be good hunters and always need to be looking.

**Where Do I Find Them?** Identify every possible location they may be – schools, churches, parks, learning or vocational training centers, flea markets, Department of Motor Vehicles, restaurants, car washes, gas stations, sporting events. Also look for some possible communities or pockets of areas where the targeted employees are living. Your potential employees are all over the place. They just don't know that you want them to join your team quite yet.

**Location, Location, Location.** Get a map and draw a territorial boundary of where you want the potential employee to live so that getting to work regularly is not a problem. Actually draw the “zone” boundary where these people need to live to make it a win-win for their employment at your organization.

Mark locations in the “zone” where the targets frequent. Parks, English as a second language schools, vocational training schools, churches, sporting event venues, high schools with FFA programs, junior and community colleges, four-year colleges and universities, the Department of Motor Vehicles, vendors you do business with and so on.

When they live in the “zone” it should be fairly easy to find them, you know where they live. Mark on your map each church in the zone, each park, golf course, your vendors you do business with, educational centers (ESL classes or certification classes), high schools, junior colleges, colleges and universities, vocational training centers, Department of Motor Vehicle offices, recreation areas, flea markets, shopping centers anywhere the target may go to learn, recreate, socialize, worship or shop.

This will help with how you “market” to these targeted folks. Maybe you go to them rather than hoping they will just show up at your doorstep.

If they live outside the targeted “zone” or will require relocation, it opens up another list of challenges like moving expenses, the sale of a house, the kids picking up and moving, the spouse giving up on their job, moving to a higher cost of living part of the country. I have had some great successes moving people to another area so I don't want you to throw in the towel on moving people to your neck of the woods. Just realize it does get complicated and has its' challenges.

The other issue that comes up often is that the target lives more than an hour from the office or worksite. This brings up issues, especially for positions that need to be at the yard in the morning and in the afternoon. This is another challenge that needs to be thought out.

Clearly living in the “zone” is the best option. Look first within the “zone” for the targeted locations listed above. This will make your recruiting efforts easier with fewer complications like relocations, acclimation to a new community, moving and housing costs, etc. We will not rule out going outside the “zone” to recruit, but let's exhaust the target potential within the “zone” first.

### TRUE STORY: DANCING WITH THE CANDIDATES

We used to have a great supervisor by the name of Joe. On the weekends Joe was a Mexican band and dance promoter. He would advertise all around town for the famous bands he promoted and people would turn out in droves for the Saturday night music and dancing. Lots and lots of people would attend and over half of them were our target market – Hispanic males.

Armed with his “elevator speech” along with his business cards, he would tell these folks all about how great our company was and that they would really like working with our team. Every Monday we would

literally have a line of excellent candidates ready to be screened and then interviewed.

We would have our staff meeting early Monday morning and we would go over our people needs and then Joe would walk out to the entrance to our building and literally set up shop. He would screen them and then forward the best of the best into the office for hiring and orientation. We were dancing with all those great new employees. Know where your targets recreate, congregate and dance!

**Harvester Helpful Hint:** Watch out for long commutes for your employees. At first it sounds OK but then it will wear even the best employees out. What does a fair and reasonable commute to work look like? Decide this before you become too enamored with a candidate.

**Building a Selection Criteria.** Do a profile of your desired target and make a list of what is mandatory to be considered a viable candidate and what might be a “wish list” of items. This becomes your selection criteria and will be used when considering each candidate. Different positions may have some added qualities or minimum requirements so you may need to build selection criteria for each level.

I have often been quite smitten by a candidate and hastily hired them only to find out later they were missing some fundamental skills, knowledge and or experience needed to be a success. Hey, even Harvester Bill has had a few hiring hiccups!

There is no perfect system or process that will guarantee your candidate will be a success, but there are certainly some very fundamental ways to increase your odds. Your selection criteria is another tool to use to build and enhance your recruiting efforts and increase your odds. Think about some of these areas when building you selection criteria:

**Shared Values.** What are your company’s core values? Do you have these spelled out in writing? More importantly are they lived out within the organization

starting with the leaders? You will want to build your team with people who have the same values as the rest of the team. Make sure they are the right values and are spelled out in writing.

**Profile Your Best.** Look within the organization and profile your best employees. What was the source? How did you find them or them you? What is their educational background? What is their experience? What makes them your best? Attitude, hard-working, great behaviors, team oriented, teaches others, volunteers for assignments, education, experience and results-oriented.

**Experience.** What kind of experience do they need to have? What is mandatory or what would be nice to have? Each position needs certain core competencies, experience, skills or perhaps some education, certifications and licenses in order to be productive and successful. Define the kinds of experience that would be nice to have, but keep in mind experienced candidates will possibly bring with them some bad experiences and bad habits that sometimes require retraining and that is pretty hard to do.

**Skills.** Define skills needed for the position and remember it is easier to teach technical skills such as plant names, irrigation, mowing, pruning and chemical application, than it is to teach the soft skills like communication, playing nice with others, teamwork, and time management.

**Licenses, Certifications.** What licenses (as in driver’s license) pesticide applicators licenses, or certificates like the Certified Landscape Technician (CLT) would be nice. If they don’t have these can they get them?

**Education.** What types of degrees would be nice to have – horticulture, landscape architecture or design, agriculture business? Is education important and needed for this position? A degree does not necessarily make the person the right person, but does indicate some focus and goal achievement traits.

**Other Considerations.** What pay has the potential candidate been making? Watch out for people willing to take big cuts (more than 20 percent) to work at this position. Where do they live in relationship to where they will be working? Where have they worked? What is their employment pattern? Do they have short hops or long stints? Some examples for selection criteria might include (these will

vary from position to position):

- Everyone needs to successfully fulfill the I9 requirements (mandatory).
- Can effectively communicate both written and verbally in English/Spanish or both.
- A valid driver's license that can withstand your insurance company requirements.
- Can do basic math for estimating.
- Knows how to fix a sprinkler.
- Basic computer skills.

Here are some additional selection criteria fundamentals for all positions. If the candidate responds yes, then move to the wish list: and if no, really, really think about passing.

- Fulfills the I9 requirements.
- A valid driver's license and driving record passes with your insurance company.
- No felony convictions.
- Lives in the "zone."
- Less than five jobs in past 10 years or has an acceptable track record with work history; not a lot of hopping around.
- Compensation expectations are within reality and your pay ranges.
- Has demonstrated a successful track record that can be objectively measured.
- Their motivation to make a change makes sense.
- Experience in similar position with track record; it doesn't have to be the exact position or from our industry, but industry experience may often be preferred.
- Professional appearance.
- Passes questions from the EAR line of questioning (See Lesson 7).

- Passes basic skills proficiency review depending on the position. For example, Word, Office computer skills, job inspection write ups, estimating and number proficiency, sales presentations or writing a basic business plan.
- Where needed has desired certifications, licenses and education.
- Passes drug and alcohol testing.
- Communication skills – written and verbal (English/ Spanish or both).

Some other possible selection criteria include having the candidate successfully pass an assessment review like Myers Briggs or DISC profile. Some positions will also need a background clearance.

You can also add to the wish list, people who are fun to be around! Do they have an outgoing personality, are they a team player, do they possess that much-valued skill of humility, and are they a quick learner?

**What To Watch Out For.** Things which might throw up a red flag on the personality front include too much of me instead of we, a know-it-all personality, talks too much, long stints of unemployment, and being self-employed for a long time. Two types of candidates I have had experience with that can certainly be a challenge include:

**Former Owners.** Owning and working at their company for over 15 years and now wanting to work for you. Will they play nice with others? Conform to the company way of doing things? On the other hand, they have learned how hard it really is to own a company and can bring some hard earned experience to your team. Either way, more often than not, I have had some real challenges with this category.

**Working for Non-Profits.** There is a big difference between making a profit type of work vs. the non-profit world. My experience here, more often than not, has been challenging and hasn't resulted in much success. Be aware and spend some extra time here when you interview these types of candidates. I'm not saying don't hire these folks, just take a very good look and make certain they will fit in with your culture.

My apologies to all those owners and non-profit candidates out there who are looking for work. I'm sure there are many exceptions to what I have experienced. I'm just drawing from my experience – no harm meant.

#### Harvester Helpful Hints:

- Not all candidates have to be from our industry; don't get stuck on this notion.
- Look to see if the candidates are quick learners vs. them having tons of experience.
- Look for attitude, aptitude, being a team player, humility, enthusiasm, passion and the desire to be a success. If they can bring these qualities to the table, you can handle the fact they don't know much about our industry or have experience.
- Keep in mind some of these in the selection criteria are mandatory and are disqualifiers if not met, while others can be learned.
- It's a lot harder to teach the soft skills than the hard skills

#### LESSON LEARNED

“Many companies demand their prospects have “experience” in our industry. Keep in mind; the wrong experience may be more detrimental than no experience.” – Head Harvester Bill

#### LESSON LEARNED

“Very rarely do organizations recognize how long it takes and the energy and resources needed to start and sustain a successful recruiting program. This is a never-ending process. Don't just stop it and start it up. You must continually be on the hunt for talent ALL OF THE TIME to keep a full funnel of qualified prospects” – Head Harvester Bill

#### LESSON LEARNED

“Usually we get stuck on looking for the perfect person with all of the right experience and for a quick fix. Good luck! You may be looking for quite a while. All the while opportunities with building your business may be passing you by. I usually prefer to find humble, hungry and smart candidates and not necessarily ones with the perfect experience. Look for attitude, aptitude and the desire to be successful.”  
– Head Harvester Bill

#### STEP 4: GET YOUR TOOLS READY

I am truly amazed at the number of companies that just run out and start recruiting without gathering some of the basic tools needed. Would you go out to a job without the right tools? Like a shovel if you are planting a tree, or a lawn mower if you wanted to mow the lawn? Of course you wouldn't – at least not on purpose.

When I ask recruiters questions like, “What is the compensation package for this position,” or “What are the expectations of this job?” I usually get silence and or goofy look. Do you have to have all of that stuff before I launch my recruiting efforts? The answer is yes. The time you will waste fumbling around with a viable target getting it all sorted out will often scare your target away or at the very least give them good reason to think twice about joining your organization.

Here is a list of the very important tools needed before you run out and try to attract people to your organization.

**Vision, Mission, Core Values and Success Behaviors.** Have these spelled out and in writing so there are no questions or doubt from the job candidate on what you and your company stand for and will live by. This helps shape your culture and define the personality of the company. Always remember that your culture can be a great tool for recruiting or a not so good tool depending how you come across to the candidate.

**Job Description or Job Outline.** What are the job duties and responsibilities of this position? What results are expected? What skills are needed? What level of experience is needed? What are the goals and expectations of the position? If you can't figure this out go to the "big boys" websites and see how they do it.

**Career Ladders/Building A Career Path.** Have a clear sense of where one can aspire toward. It doesn't mean they have to aspire there, but having a clear career path does give a sense of upward mobility, if and when they do wish to move upward with their career.

### ALWAYS REMEMBER

"Have an actual "road map" that shows people how they can move up the ladder at your company." – Head Harvester Bill

**Pay Ranges and Bonuses.** Compensation is probably the most important item on a prospective employee's checklist. It should rank high on your list as well. Here are some tips on how to present this important element in the hiring process:

- What is the pay range for this position?
- Are you competitive? You better be.
- Are there bonus opportunities? Are they specific to something that can be measured or are they just random acts of kindness?
- Are both pay and bonuses clearly spelled out in writing? If not, please do so to avoid miscommunication or worse, lose a viable candidate or even a great employee when "D" day arrives for bonuses or raises.

Hopefully, "D" doesn't stand for disappointment or worse, departure. I can't tell you how many times I have interviewed people that are leaving another organization because they were promised this or that, and when this or that came around it was never really spelled out before they were formally hired.

"We'll figure it out later," is a phrase used all too often and when later arrives and the owner or hiring manager gets a case of "selective amnesia," these types of recruits are easy pickings. Don't make your people "easy pickings" for other companies.

Make sure your salary ranges and bonus programs are spelled out in specific terms. You can always add some good company language such as "These bonuses are in place and will be paid out provided the entire organization makes a profit" or something to that affect. This way the company can protect itself from promising to pay out bonuses even if there is a loss. Remember, it's supposed to be a win-win for the people and the company.

**Know Your Benefits.** Prepare a one-page summary sheet (I call it a "cut sheet") that gives the main points on who is eligible and when they are eligible for vacation time, personal days, holidays, health benefits, 401k etc.

If I asked you what exactly are your current benefits would you know what they are? Always have the most up to date details on your 401k plan, medical benefits, vacation and holidays, etc.at the ready.

**Show Off Your Good Side.** Have examples of the cool things that make your company special and different from the place down the road:

- Great culture – positive environment, people play nice with each other.
- Working with fun nice people just like them. Don't ever undervalue this!
- Training programs – have "awesome" training program examples to share.
- Allowances for continued education, we pay for your certifications or additional training.
- Retreats for them and their spouses.
- The latest technology with computers, nice uniforms, trucks, equipment and facilities.
- Memberships at the gym or country clubs (I like this one!).
- Vehicle assigned or vehicle allowance this is big.

- Location and proximity to their residence. No more long commutes so they can spend more time with their family.
- Smaller, family-oriented company or a well-organized, real deal company without family issues. Depending where you are coming from you can spin it either way.

Show them and share with them, whatever you have that can differentiate you from the competition. What do you have that the company across the street doesn't have? Why should I want to work here vs. over there? Remember, no trash-talk, just stick to the facts or at least as close to the facts as you can.

**What Does the Candidate “Feel” About Your Company?** Here is how you make a prospective employee feel this is the right choice for them:

- Be prepared to explain the opportunity with great enthusiasm.
- Have your elevator speech ready without being too pitchy.
- Why should they work for you and not your competition?
- A great deal of an employee's decision to work at your organization is based on how they “feel.” Now I know some of you tough landscapers out there are thinking, “Feel, schmeel,” but many of your candidates actually go by “feel” when making their decision.
- How do they “feel” about you and the people they will be working with?
- How do they “feel” about your culture?
- How will you make them “feel” that your company should be their new home?
- A great deal of your recruiting success will depend on how you come across to them and how they “feel” about you!

Do not undervalue your role as the owner or the leader in this process.

**Application for Employment.** Have all applicants fill them out. This tracks your applicants for EEOC requirements, as well as serves as their first test on their ability to write and follow directions. If they can't fill out a form, how will they be with a time card or an estimate?

**Screening and Interview Questions.** Have a set of these for each position you are looking to fill and use them each time so you don't get off track and have a record of what was discussed. Make sure these are human resource approved and are consistently used for all candidates. Use the EAR method: Examples, Actions Taken, and Results Achieved. If you don't have these in place before you start recruiting, then get busy building or securing them as these will need to be in place before you launch your Recruiting the Right People Program.

### **STEP 5: ESTABLISH AND PRACTICE RECRUITING “BEST PRACTICES”**

These are very important so let's spend some time here and make certain these practices are employed so that you attract and get the right people. Ask yourself before your candidate asks you, why should the potential candidate come work for you vs. the competition. Do not badmouth anyone, even your competition. However, don't be afraid to list all of the good things that you and your organization represent that perhaps your competitor doesn't. So let's review some recruiting “best practices” for you to follow.

**Start with an Attitude.** Instill the “mindset” in your organization that you are always looking for great people to become part of the team. You should understand that forming a candidate pool saves time and money. The entire team should understand and have “buy in” that recruiting is important and will affect them in a positive way. Recruiting awareness should become second nature for all employees. Of course, having a “money reward” system in place wouldn't hurt either.

#### **Harvester Helpful Hints:**

- Broadcast the people needs you have regularly amongst the troops – be specific of what they are and when you need them.
- Offer monetary rewards that are pretty attractive.
- Let your “front line” folks in the office know what the needs are on a weekly basis and teach your front line some basic recruiting skills.

Get Your “Elevator” Speech Together. Know and communicate what you are.

Often the question will be asked, “So what do you folks do?” Be prepared, as you will need to come back with something that is quick, to the point and compelling. Have your “elevator” speech ready to go. You usually have one to two minutes to deliver. This will be used over and over again – trust me.

Answer the following questions and you have the makings of your minute long advertisement:

- What makes the company special in the eyes of your customers?
- Where is the company going? What is the vision and mission for the company?
- What kinds of people do we need to get us there? Behaviors, core values, skills, etc.
- What can our people expect to get from being part of this besides a paycheck?

I have literally used this in elevators and have had unbelievable success. It must be delivered enthusiastically, passionately and be genuine. Be ready, you never know when an opportunity will arise!

### TRUE STORY: THE “ELEVATOR SPEECH: HONEST, THIS REALLY HAPPENED!

Once when I was attending one of our planning sessions the topic of recruiting came up. Many of our leaders were complaining and whining about how hard it was to find good sales people. “I’ve tried this and I’ve tried that,” – just a lot of whining.

When there was a break in our meeting I went up to my room to make a few phone calls and check my messages (yes this was before e-mail, texting, etc.) and on the way back to the meeting I took the elevator down. It stopped at the business level where a well-dressed individual came on board with a manila envelope under his arm. The elevator door

closed, and I now had a minute or two maximum to go to work.

I have interviewed thousands of people and seen lots of candidates, and now I was seeing a very small glimpse of what looked like to me a resume in the manila folder. I asked the person in the elevator how the interview went? He looked at me in dismay and asked how I knew? My time was running out so I just said I could tell. He then shared with me that he was going through a series of interviews for a sales position with a national company that was very well known (not a landscape company).

I shared with him a “tip” on how to separate his candidacy from the competition and he was very grateful for the tip then asked me what I did for a living. I then went into my 30 second pitch (we only had one floor to go!) on how I worked with the nation’s number one privately held landscape company. A company that has enjoyed a compounded annual average growth rate of 20 percent for the past 40 years and that is currently looking for business developers just like you to become part of this exciting and fun industry. Just then the elevator door opens and he gives me his resume and I give him my business card. Wait, it gets better.

As this person I just met leaves the elevator, the next sales candidate enters the elevator with their manila envelope and resume. I STAY in the elevator and go up to the business floor and start my conversation with my new “target.” “Are you going to the interview on the business floor?” I asked. “Why yes I am, how did you know that?” Never mind, just call me crazy!! I then shared with him a tip that they could use during the interview that would definitely help differentiate themselves from the competition. Oh boy, were they grateful and after I delivered my 30-second “elevator” speech he handed over his resume and I gave them my business card.

Now I am at the business level and I am still in the elevator and lo and behold the next candidate who just finished their interview was entering

my “recruiting center” going down. You guessed it – I collected my third resume and decided I better get back to our meeting. I dropped off the three resumes on the desk of the whiners and shared with them that the opportunity for recruiting can be just about anywhere and everywhere including the hotel elevator! Have your elevator speech on the ready, you never know when it will come in handy.

### THE HARVESTER ELEVATOR SPEECH

Hi I’m Bill Arman and I’m with the Harvest Group where I serve as Head Harvester. We help companies get from “here” to “there” and I’ve been “there” before and it’s a great place to be! Collectively, my fellow Head Harvesters and I have more than 100 years of experience in the landscape business. Collaboratively, we will work our pants off to help you “Harvest Your Potential” We travel all around the country “Harvesting the Potential” of more than 50 companies in some amazing ways and they are well on their way to “there.” And you know what? Your organization, your customers, your people and you have a lot of potential. Interested in finding how we can help you get from “here” to “there” easier, faster and with less pain than we had?

**Be Attractive.** Take a very good look at your operation and ask would you want to work here? Are your trucks, equipment and tools clean and presentable? Go out and look inside your trucks or your vehicle right now. Looking good? Would you be proud of what you see? Are your facilities clean, no clutter, no inappropriate items hanging around? Go take a walk around your yard, shop and office. Now ask yourself, is this the image you want to project to a candidate or customer that could help you achieve all of your dreams and will stick around for a long time making you a ton of money or at the very least make your job a lot easier?

Would you bring your children and spouse to your facility and walk to every point in your facility and yard and feel proud about what they see? Would they be proud of you? If not, you better get cracking! Being attractive attracts the right candidates. It also helps keep your good employees motivated and proud to be part of the team.

### TRUE STORY: BE ATTRACTIVE – IT HELPS

I went to visit a new Harvest Group member in another state and as part of our Harvester Assessment we take a tour of the yard and facility with the owners and leaders. During the tour we do a housekeeping checklist along with some photos.

Off I went to tour the facility and yard with the owner. This tour was later dubbed by the owner as “the walk of shame” and what a shame it was! Trash and debris everywhere, oil spills, equipment strewn about, broken this and broken that. It was just plain unacceptable and most certainly sending the wrong message to the employees and to potential new hires. We finally came up to an enormous pile of debris at around 100 cubic yards and I asked what is this? The answer, of course, was, “Why Harvester Bill that’s a pile.” Of course it is, but why is it here? “I guess we should get rid of that pile Harvester Bill.” Yes, I guess you should!

The pile was also put on the checklist to remedy along with the rest of the items. When we got back in the office we met with the owner to review what we just had observed. I noticed there was a shot gun in the owner’s office. I asked what’s up with the shot gun. “Why that’s to shoot the skunks in the pile we just saw!”

Eventually we got rid of the pile and the shot gun and they also got the whole facility cleaned up in no time and the positive affect it had was enormous! They even threw an employee party to celebrate their “like new facility” to recognize everyone’s hard efforts. They now can be proud and use the facility and yard as part of their recruiting process. Be attractive from the moment you enter your property to the very back portion or piles.



**How Do Your Employees Appear to the Candidate?** Are your people acting appropriately, uniforms are worn and safety PPEs used? Do your employees like working here and are they willing to share their story? I used to shout out as I was walking down the hall with a recruit,

“New potential employees on the deck, look happy!”

Guess what, everyone got a pretty good chuckle and they were eager to share how happy they were with their career at our company.

Have your people be prepared to put on their genuine happy face and give an employee testimonial. Offer the candidate a chance to talk one-on-one with some of your employees, maybe even offer a shadow half-day or a full-day if a higher-level prospect is involved.

**Have a List of WOW Jobs.** Are your jobs looking good and your clients happy? Do you have client testimonials around that you can share? I used to keep a “wall of fame” in our office where everyone could see the framed letters we received from our happy customers. It was pretty impressive. With today’s technology maybe you could have some YouTube footage playing or something that was fun to watch and listen to.

**Know Your Needs: Now and in the Future.** Clearly define the person you are seeking. We have gone over this in “Identify the Needs” but it bears repeating, as you will always need to know what the needs are. You never know who may appear and if you really know what is needed now and in the future, you can at least keep some candidates warm until the need arrives or get referrals.

**Know What You are Looking For.** Remember, you are looking for knowledge, experience, core competencies, desired results, behaviors, and education, certifications and licenses. Have your selection criteria at the ready at all times. Remember, anticipation of needs reduces panic!

**Learn From Your Employees.** You can learn so many things from existing employees both performers and non-performers. By observation you can learn what you really like about some – good time managers, team players, communicators, on time etc. Conversely, you can learn what you don’t care for

### TRUE STORY: THE MECHANIC AND ME

Someone once shared with me they were looking for a mechanic / shop manager. When I was early for an appointment for one of my clients, I went into a truck stop coffee shop for a cup of coffee. I met a fellow and struck up a conversation and started talking mechanic speak (I’m not fluent yet). Next thing I know he refers me to a mechanic/shop manager type and I give the lead to my friend. Done deal! Because I knew the need and what the target was, I was able to find a good referral. Know your needs; you never know when a recruiting opportunity may arrive!

in others – a bad attitude, late for work, whining about this or that. You can learn from this and make adjustments during the screening and interviewing process, performance reviews, employee surveys or exit interviews.

**Create and Sustain Your Funnel.** If you only take one thing from this book this “best practice” would be the number one thing that I would love to impress upon you. How good your funnel is will reflect on how good your recruiting program will be. Remember that recruiting is very similar to the sales and marketing process. You are or should be looking for talent all of the time. Just like in sales, no funnel no sales.

You need to build a funnel of qualified candidates and keep the funnel active and alive. It is very challenging to start from scratch each time a need arises. Keep a funnel of qualified candidates and keep them warm if you don’t have an immediate opening or heat them up if you do have a need. (Also see “Tag and Release” section) I generally keep a file with active possible candidates at the ready and check in periodically just to “take a temperature reading.” You should always create and sustain an active up to date funnel, ALWAYS.

With no funnel, you will just have the usual people finding chaos commotion every time you need to “find someone now” without a full funnel. Here are some Harvester Helpful Hints on feeding the funnel:

- Carry a recruiting file with resumes for targeted jobs or keep them on your computer for easy access. I just checked my computer file titled: Recruiting and it has well over 50 resumes in varying stages of cool to hot leads for my Harvest Group clients.
- When I'm really on the hunt I will plug in the names and numbers of my targeted candidates in my cell phone so I'm not fumbling around to find them. This is also pretty impressive when they call and they are greeted with their name when they call.
- Keep candidates warm with regular touch bases via phone and some face-to-face chats. Don't drag out the deal and have them get cold or develop a bad taste in their mouth. If you can't bring them on in short order as in the next 30 to 60 days, let them know.
- If the need is not immediate – the next 30 to 60 days – move this active funnel of candidates into the “Tag and Release” category (more on that later).
- You should have at least three to five qualified candidates for each opening.

**Have a Hiring Process.** Do you have an interview process that involves all the key stakeholders in the hiring process? Does your process keep the ball rolling or are there stops and starts along the way? Do you rush too hard to make a hire just to be done with it?

Here is what too often happens: There becomes an emergency need, there is panic, we hire too quickly, throw the new person into a system where they are a crummy fit and wonder why they don't work out? Or you get a hot prospect and everyone gets too busy or distracted to pay close attention to the candidate and they get cold and you lose them to a competitor.

I know this isn't how your company deals with recruiting but you may have heard about companies like this? Remember, this is kind of like dating and you can't just leave them waiting. You have to keep the relationship warm, especially if they are a good candidate. There are plenty of other wooers out there looking for the same date!

Here are some **Harvester Helpful Hints** on establishing a hiring process:

- Have a list of telephone screening questions, once screened and if they pass, set up time for a face-to-face interview
- If they do not pass the initial screen let them know in a reasonable time frame they are not in the running, usually less than two working days. Be respectful; don't leave them hanging or with a bad taste in their mouth.
- Have a quiet place to do the interview without interruptions – no cell phones, computers, phones, team members with crisis issues, etc.
- The person doing the interview should be there to greet the candidate when they arrive, don't just have them sit there for too long before someone “discovers” them.
- Offer them something to drink and show them where the facilities are if needed.
- Have all candidates fill out a job application, if you don't have one, get one.
- Use a list of appropriate questions to ask, if they pass this interview question phase have them do a site/field visit.
- Have the person they are interviewing with be prepared. Have their resume in hand, paper and pen to write, etc.
- Have the candidate spend time with other team-members and get feedback
- For higher level positions, the more people that meet the candidate the better. Often it will take from three to five times/touches for the higher levels like managers, vice presidents, sales people, and two to three times/touches for a middle manager, and one to two times/touches for field level foremen and workers.
- Have the people who meet the candidate be prepared to report back their observations and recommendations.
- Follow up with a phone call or a nice e-mail to keep them warm
- If they pass all of your screening and interviewing processes, first agree on a verbal offer. This will help prevent a going back and forth negotiating process. Then prepare a written offer letter after the terms of the offer are agreed upon verbally. Follow up on the written offer to make sure they received it and if there are any questions. The point here

is to have this be a smooth, timely and efficient process where the viable candidate is dealt with in a consistent and professional manner.

- When the candidate is not a match make certain they are dealt with professionally and in writing letting them know they are not the successful candidate. You never know when and where candidates appear again.
- If they are really not a good match, note it on your interview notes in case the person re-applies down the road.
- Be nice, courteous and professional – remember the Golden Rule.

**Listen and Learn.** Just like a successful sales person, being a good listener is usually your best way to find out the most about the potential customer or candidate. If you are talking more than 25 to 30 percent of the time, then you are talking too much. Listen to what they are saying and how they say it. Are they good communicators? Do they badmouth their former employer? Can they articulate and present themselves in a positive manner? While you have them in for a visit, you might learn a little about how other companies operate through good questions and listening. Don't be asking for proprietary information but do learn how things get done in other companies.

**Hire the Best When They Appear.** During my 30 years of active recruiting I learned that every once in a while the recruiting Gods would test me and place a near perfect candidate in front of me to test me out. I quickly learned when these rare opportunities present themselves, and they will, you need to have the mindset to receive this gift and get this gift on board. So keep this option in mind when they appear and figure out a way to take advantage. There are always upgrades that can be made with existing staff, there are those special projects you would have a consultant perform (being a consultant I can't believe I just said that), or a new position you are creating.

**Tag and Release.** An option to the "hire the best when they appear," I have used the "tag and release" process. This is when you find a great candidate but for various reasons, you can't figure how to bring them in as part of your team immediately. Let them know your level of interest and make certain it is mutual. Now start the "tag and release" process to keep them active, engaged and interested. Keep in regular contact after work hours and occasionally have a face-

to-face to keep the relationship intact. "Tag" them with your interest "release" them to pursue their endeavors, but keep them close and maintain regular contact.

I have practiced this technique for more than 30 years and it truly works wonders. You never know when an opening may come up, and you never know when your target is ready to make a change unless you stay in touch. I have made some of my best hires after more than five years of just keeping in touch or "tag and release."

This is a long-range way of keeping your funnel full of good candidates. When the circumstances are right then you will not be starting from scratch with your search. Remember, each employee has peaks and valleys at their current place of employment. You just need to be there when both of these occur and offer suggestions and recommendations including considering other employment opportunities with companies like yours.

Even in tough times, you should always be looking at potential talent. If you spot some talent, but don't really have a spot for them then "tag and release" them. Always be looking!

**Harvester Helpful Hint:** Take a good look at your candidate's resume and see what their average stint has been and where have they moved to and from. These show the footprints of the candidate. If there are more than five jobs in the last 10 years ask why?

## STEP 6: GO TO THE SOURCE

Finding and getting great people to join your organization is one of your top priorities. As we have mentioned earlier, this part of your business needs to be in your company's top four priorities. It should receive the same amount of attention and effort as sales and marketing, making a profit, and delivering exceptional customer service.

We will review the next major step in building your organizations' recruiting program and that is sourcing. We will spend time reviewing the sources of potential employees and how to develop these sources so there will be a continual stream of potential candidates that meet your selection criteria. Always have

a solid candidate funnel just like your sales funnel. Keep steady streams of prospects flowing constantly. You know the “funnel” concept is important as I have mentioned it several times so far and will mention it a few more times before the end of this book.

**Engage a “Recruiting Force.”** The key to having good sources is not to be out searching all by your lonesome. You are engaging all of your “recruiting radar” and as such you have a “recruiting force” on the hunt for great prospects. Knowing and nurturing your recruiting sources will pay big dividends with your recruiting program. Take good care of your sources.

**Harvester Helpful Hint:** “You just don’t “turn on the tap” with people and all of a sudden they appear at your door. The people recruiting business requires that you always have a steady stream of possible candidates to look at. Keep the flow continual, not just when you have an immediate need. You should be feeding your funnel even when you aren’t actively looking.” – Harvester Bill

Now let’s get busy and “go to the source.” Consider these three steps to determine good sources:

**Step 1: Determine All of Your Current Sources.** The first thing I suggest doing is to go to your organizational chart and take a look at all of your current employees. Determine the source of each and every one. Some were referrals from other employees, some were walk-ins, some responded to an ad in the paper, etc. Some are great employees, some are good and some probably need to be successful somewhere else.

**Step 2: Determine the Best Sources, Stay Away From Bad Sources.** Determine where your winners came from and where your low performers came from. This will help determine the sources that work and ones you should avoid. Are there any patterns as to which source is best and most reliable?

**Step 3: Improve your best sources and try some new sources.** Determine your winning sources and see if you can do better. See if you can come up with two or three additional sources to help with prospecting.

The following are nearly 30 reliable lead sources I have used over the years when recruiting. Some I used all the time, some I tried just to get something going

from a different angle. The first two sources I went to every time, the rest I used in combination with other sources. The idea here is to get at least three to five of these going simultaneously to generate a good supply of qualified prospects. Feed the funnel!

Here are the first two sources I always liked to use and usually started with:

### **Source 1: Seek Internal Candidates First**

This is an important source and if not handled correctly there will be a large price to be paid by the organization. The price includes disgruntled, disappointed and discouraged employees, not a good thing. Before we run off and try and find someone from the outside let’s look inside first. If we look inside first then we won’t cause a big commotion by “skipping” on an internal candidate.

The reason why some of your current employees came on board was because of the opportunity to advance. If you just go out and hire new folks above these people, it will cause disharmony. Disharmony leads to organizations being out of alignment, being out of alignment leads to spending too much time, energy and money getting back in alignment. Get the picture?

Is there someone who can be transferred from another business division or location? Can someone be developed, cross-trained, or groomed for this position? Maybe we should move that person into the position and their position becomes the targeted position to fill. You still have a position to fill but you didn’t lose a good employee by running out and filling the position this person wanted and is capable of doing.

Many large companies advertise internally and go through a qualification process along with interviews. If the internal candidate is not selected they are given good reasons why, along with some developmental objectives so they know what they need to do to be considered next time.

Another way to find out what your employees’ aspirations are is to conduct employee surveys, as well as having a solid performance review program in place that identifies a career path or a career ladder for your employees.

### Source 2: Enlist Existing Employees in the Search

When you looked at the sources for your employees hopefully employee referrals were number one or at the very least in the top three. If it wasn't, you might have a whole other set of issues that you need to deal with because generally good employees want to help find other good employees.

Create awareness of the need within the field and in the office. I have literally walked from a staff meeting to the receptionist and asked if they were aware we are looking for someone and too many times they didn't know. Often these are our front line of recruiters. As people arrive looking for work they are greeted with, "We aren't looking for anyone right now" and away goes your possible candidate.

Take the needed time to regularly let your front-line recruiters know what the needs are and teach them how to do a basic screening and what to do if they encounter a candidate with potential. I would have my front-line folks come in to interrupt me if they thought a winner just landed at our doorstep. That's how important it was to me and should be for you.

Be specific with the criteria of who you are looking for to avoid disappointments from both sides when there is a referral. If a referral or a lead has been given to you, give the person who referred them some feedback on how things are going with the candidate – whether they are good or not so good candidates, and give reasons for each. This way they can make the needed adjustments when looking for viable candidates.

**Offer Referral Bonuses.** Offer referral bonuses as an incentive for people that are hired from an employee referral/lead. Pay enough to attract the attention of your "recruiting force." I would suggest \$50 to \$100 for a worker, \$250 to \$500 for a foreman and \$750 to \$1,000 for a supervisor. Sometimes it is a good idea to set a deadline and increase the payout to help get it going. This may seem high to some of you, but what is more costly is the position not being filled and the lost opportunity costs associated with not delivering your service? That is really expensive, trust me. Pay 50% on hire and 50% on 90-day passage of the orientation or on-boarding period.

### Other Sources for Recruiting Employees

**Set up a Scouting System.** Enlist strategic partners who share in your success. In other words when you are successful these folks will benefit from your success. These can include vendors, local schools, vocational training centers, churches, community organizations and yes, even friendly competitors.

Let these folks know you are looking for people. Be very specific with what you are looking for like title, experience, pay range, performance expectations, benefits, etc. I have used many sources over the years and if handled correctly, they will really want to help with your search.

By being very specific with your needs you can avoid many "false alarm" leads from your sources. The more people you have out there looking for you the better. You can't do this all by yourself, but you can definitely help orchestrate and choreograph the effort. I will share some examples with the following list of sources.

**Vendors.** Pick out your top two or three vendors. Either the ones you are spending the most money with or who are the savviest with what's going on in regards to people. Let them know what you are looking for in very specific terms as in a job outline and expectations. These people are usually in contact with many people in the industry and hear and see lots of opportunities.

I once had a great vendor – a chemical supplier – who was always looking for good sales people. Once I let them know I was looking for sales people they referred me to several prospects from their leads they had generated. I am still very close to this vendor after 35 years and they recently have signed me to give some talks at their annual conference. I am now referring my clients to them. What goes around comes around.

I had a rodent control vendor who also served as a great referral source for people and for new accounts. The guy I used to control gophers on my jobs now became a lead source for people and potential customers – go figure. Good vendors want you to be successful and would love the opportunity to help you to continue to be successful and spend money with them for a long, long time.

**Professional Organizations.** This could be landscape industry types of organizations like your state landscape contractors association or the national landscape industry organization called PLANET. This could also be the property management organizations that you belong to like BOMA, CAI, CACM, etc. It's all about networking and helping each other out. Keep your eyes and ears open for people that may want to get introduced by you to people you know as well.

**Selected Customers.** Be careful, this option is not for the weak at heart. If you really have a good relationship with your clients they too can be a source for leads for recruiting. They have many connections with all types of service providers like janitorial, sweeping, security and even other landscapers. They too know many other people that could be referred to you. I have actually placed some property managers into companies that I knew were looking. Do you think that may have helped me with getting some more work or leads for recruiting? You bet it did.

However, be careful here as they may want you to hire their wayward nephew or recently "released" brother-in-law so make sure you give them very specific criteria for what you are looking for in a good employee. I said this is not for the weak at heart.

### TRUE STORY: CUSTOMER TURNS INTO INTERIOR SALES CHAMPION

We were taking care of a nice local shopping mall and the customer was extremely happy with our service. We dealt with the assistant manager named Elizabeth and boy did we make a team. Over time this relationship transformed from service provider to trusted advisor to partnership. My wife and I attended her wedding and we became good friends with her and her husband.

We had accomplished a lot with this project and Elizabeth really learned a lot about the landscape business and she fell in love with interiorscapes and the indoor gardens we maintained at the center. She finally approached

us for a position to be a business developer for our interiorscape division. We had to make a very critical decision here, do we lose a great client or should we bring on an excellent potential employee?

As you could probably tell by the title of this True Story, we brought Elizabeth on and in her first year in sales she became the top national interior sales person and stayed that way for 10 consecutive years out selling the next three sales people combined. Our type of business attracts all sorts of people even your clients.

**Network.** Work your network while looking for candidates. Today, even as a consultant, I am in touch with people all around the country and when I encounter a top candidate, I often ask what their status is and if they are looking or know some folks that are looking for opportunities.

In the relatively few years I have been in the landscape coaching/consulting business, I have helped place six sales people, three branch managers, one office manager, four account managers, and two shop mechanics for my customers just from my network alone. Do you think that helps me with my customers? You better believe it! Establish a network and keep them posted on what your needs are and know what their needs are as well, because you never know.

**Similar Businesses.** One of your networking sources should be companies in similar businesses employing people from some of the same labor pool. These would include janitorial, restaurants, hotels, construction contractors, etc. They may be reducing the number of their seasonal employees and would love to get their employees a job. Keep an eye out for similar businesses and go introduce yourself because you never know.

**Friendly Competitors.** Yes, friendly competitors. They too can be a source, as often they are not hiring or not looking, but they know you are looking and since you are friendly, they refer them to you. Remember, you need to help feed them when they are hungry for candidates as well. I have had very good success with this lead source – really.

**Get Involved and Know the Community.** Get involved with the communities you hire from. Once you have identified your target, learn where they socialize, relax, go to learn, where they shop, eat, worship, recreate, and get gas. Are you getting the picture? It sounds a bit like stalking, but hey recruiting is serious business and you need to be very resourceful.

### TRUE STORY: BOOK HIM HARVESTER BILL, RECRUITING IN THE FIRST DEGREE

I used to get my car washed at the local car wash near our office. One day, I was waiting for my car to be finished and I struck up a conversation with a local policeman. When I finished sharing with him what I did for a living, I asked if he knew anyone that might be interested in joining our company.

Lo and behold if he didn't have a brother who was in the industry and was not happy where he was working. The next thing I knew, I recruited his brother and hired him for a summer position. I then recruited his brother to go to school at my alma mater, Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, to finish his degree in horticulture. And when he finished his education, I hired him. If you are not seeking out candidates in some way or fashion, you may just be missing out on some opportunities.

**Volunteer.** I often do volunteer work in my community and the communities where my business operates. When you volunteer you have a great network that loves to help not only with others, but with your recruiting needs. When I was a volunteer soccer coach, I would meet families and they knew people who knew others, and often they would offer up some very good candidates. I have a current client who also volunteers as a coach for soccer with his five kids and this has now become his top lead source for his residential landscape installation business. You never know.

I believe good things come to those who volunteer. If nothing else, volunteering is a truly gratifying experience. I once learned that those who are truly generous,

especially with their time, will be greatly rewarded and not necessarily with monetary riches. Rather by the measure of the enduring relationships that are built.

**ESL (English as a Second Language).** These classes are for people learning to speak English as their second language. Learn where these classes are being conducted in your community and let them know your needs/opportunities. Try and get invited to talk about (in English) all the great opportunities in the landscape industry for people who speak English and Spanish.

**Local Parks.** Look for the local parks in the community you do business in. During weekends these are great family gathering spots and if you have a good scout, they can get the word out on your company. I suggest either hiring a scout for this assignment or have some of your guys work this detail. Make up some informative handouts and offer a reward for people to get someone they know to come in and interview.

**Churches/Places of Worship.** These often have job boards and job fairs with companies listing their positions. Is your company on this job board? Many of the larger more sophisticated churches, temples, mosques and synagogues have websites with job-listings. They are also looking for speakers to give talks on how to get jobs. Get on it brothers and sisters.

**Colleges and Universities.** I have set up college relations programs at over 20 colleges throughout the United States and Canada. This is a fairly complex process and takes a few years to establish. I will have a workbook and DVD available on college relations that will be part of our Harvest Group's "Recruiting the Right People" kit for those of you interested in starting a college relations program.

**Become Friendly.** Get to know companies with a similar workforce. I have engaged with janitorial companies, restaurants, hotels and construction contractors that have similar workforces. They can serve as sources for people, getting new ideas for recruiting tactics and to give and receive referrals. Remember, it is a two-way street here, give and get leads.

**Hold a Job Fair or Open House.** Have a job fair or open house at your

facility with free food and giveaways. Have your facility looking its best and your best people there to host. Allow time to meet one-on-one and in small groups. Have your job outlines and benefit overviews at the ready to hand out. Remember, people want to work in a positive, friendly and encouraging environment. Have participating employees who are well spoken and are very positive role models, represent the targeted positions you are seeking. Advertise in the local paper, place radio spots and put up larger banners in strategic locations to get the word out.

**Attend Conferences.** Be present and attentive at landscape or related industry conferences. Attend meetings network and scout for talent. I have had great success attending and paying attention and of course networking with other attendees.

**Write Articles.** If you have the inclination, do some writing for industry magazines, local papers, or a blog for your company website. This will get your name and your company's name recognized by people who want to learn more about you or who could refer candidates to you. This positions you and your company in a positive way and attracts many of the right people that take the time to read and learn.

**Give Talks.** I give lots of talks and workshops around the country, and I am amazed at how many people I meet in the process. When I was actively recruiting, I found many qualified candidates in the process. I could even tell which candidates were the best by when they showed up, how prepared they were, the questions they asked, and even where they sat! Give talks and presentations, it is great practice to tune up your sales and presentation skills. Remember, the most successful leaders in all of history were great speakers and communicators.

**Advertising.** Run a creative ad in targeted local newspapers or community magazines. Try a billboard, signs on trucks, signs in front of your facility, banners, and church job boards. Track your results to make sure you are getting the needed return-on-investment. The best advertising I have used was running radio spots on the local Hispanic radio stations, *Muy Bueno!*

**Temporary Agencies.** This is an effective source to fill administrative and office staff positions. You have the ability to try out several candidates with little risk and, if they aren't working out to your needs, you get a new person. Temporary hires can be converted to full-time employees after a given period of

time, usually 90 days. Negotiate the conversion fee up front; usually you can have this at no charge if you have them as a temp for 90 days at a higher hourly rate. As for field personnel, I have had very little success using this source. I have tried it in cases of extreme need situations but with marginal results. I have heard of entire organizations using contracted out employees, but do not have first-hand experience with this process.

**Placement Agencies.** I have used placement agencies with good results. Use a contingency vs. a retainer for most positions. On contingency you pay if they find a person for you, and on retainer you pay up front a portion of the fee to retain the opportunity to search for a candidate. Most agencies want you to pay a portion up front to help pay for their costs and show them you are serious about the search.

When looking for a vice president or a CEO a retainer might be best. For supervisor, sales and manager positions I suggest you find a reputable agency and build a solid working relationship. While this can add up costwise, it does save you a ton of time to turn it over to a professional, especially if they have worked in the landscape industry. This "partner" has been in my top three sources for account managers, branch managers and business developers. Your source comes in handy for scouting out candidates from other companies as well as when you are looking to replace an existing employee and want to remain incognito.

**H2B Visa Program.** The H-2B visa program allows U.S. non-agriculture employers to hire temporary or seasonal non-immigrant foreign workers. Many landscape companies use the H-2B program and have been very pleased with the results. In order to obtain a Visa, a company must go through the certification process, as well as searching for a potential worker, and then petition for the Visa. The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) limit the number of foreign workers who can receive an H-2B Visa to 66,000 per year.

Overall, this program has been pretty positive; however there have recently been some challenges with the limits being filled and with the program possibly being severely limited or dropped altogether. The government is starting to mandate tougher and higher minimum pay levels, as well as making it administratively difficult. By all indications and by everything we have heard from those in the know, this program probably will not likely be a viable source for much longer.



As a result of the unpredictability of H-2B, I highly recommend to the landscape community that it build its recruiting skills back up. For those that have grown comfortable with this program, I would be real uncomfortable. This program's probable demise helped serve as my inspiration to write this book. Just think of all the recruiting skills that will need some tuning up! Don't be the last one to convert back to good old-fashioned recruiting and, of course, using all of the ideas I am sharing with you in this book. Remember, the companies with the best people skills win. And that starts with a vibrant recruiting program.

**Hire Some Hired Guns.** This is quite a mercenary approach, but it is a war for talent out there. Consider finding people who are among your targeted candidates and offer a commissioned program, a bonus or a part-time position to seek out people. One thing is certain, all of the national companies spend thousands of dollars to keep their recruiting funnel full. It's pretty hard to compete with that, but sometimes you need to fight fire with fire.

**Your Company Website.** People are looking at your website and putting your job openings on your website is an inexpensive and effective way to spread the word. Take a look at your competition's sites and see how they are doing it to get a feel for it. I suggest making it a bit more fun and attractive rather than the traditional job duties and responsibilities listing. Put some sizzle into the description and how fun it is to work at your company. Consider a YouTube video with some employees talking about how great it is at your company. Maybe even write out your elevator speech or have it delivered via video to serve as a differentiator of why people should work at your organization vs. the boring guys across town.

I am always a little concerned when some companies list all of their star people with photos and names on their website. Guess what? These people now become targets for resourceful recruiters. If you believe this practice outweighs the potential of getting your people "spotted" then go for it. I'm just a little nervous about this practice. Why make it too easy for others to poach your star performers?

**Electronic Job Boards.** There are dozens of electronic jobs boards being used to reach out to candidates. If you check out [www.indeed.com](http://www.indeed.com), it will show you at a glance who is using what electronic boards. Try it out to see what is going on in

the market and who is looking for whom. You can also get a feel for how people advertise their openings to be more attractive, or not so attractive, depending on how well they did with their wording.

**Social Media.** LinkedIn, Facebook, YouTube, Google+ and Twitter are all ways to reach out to a large number of people in today's high tech world. LinkedIn is now considered one of the top ways that people are located and sought after.

**Advertising Trucks with Mobile Billboards.** Call me crazy, but here is one source I was going to try out just before I started consulting. Have a billboard truck travel around – maybe English on one side and Spanish on the other side – and put something really clever on it to attract your target. I even thought about having this parked across the street from the Department of Motor Vehicles. That way folks with a driver's license (a prime target qualification for landscape folks) can be targeted and isolated out from the general crowd. Hey, I said call me crazy!

**Always Be Looking for More.** Keep your sources warm and feeling good about helping you. This will save you a ton of time when you start searching for talent. You never know when you will need to fill positions, and by keeping your sources "warm" they can be engaged quickly. This will require frequent "touch base" communications like a phone call, e-mail or a face-to-face meeting to let them know where you are with your needs. I have given you 28 sources here to consider. Try some new ones out and see how they work for you. If you have more that you think are worthwhile, please contact me. I would love to hear them.

## STEP 7: BUILD YOUR PROGRAM

Now it's time to build your recruiting program. Based on your growth projections and/or your existing needs established in Step 2 (Identify Your Needs), we will now put into practice all of the steps we have reviewed.

As we reviewed earlier, you will always need to anticipate what your needs may be in the near future, mid-range and long range. Also recognize that the real world comes into play with people leaving, being asked to leave, etc. Keep your People Map or People Plan live and active, and always be on the hunt for talent even when you are not looking. Keep your candidate funnel full of viable targets even if they might not come on board right away.

**People Map or People Plan.** This should be part of your organization's planning and review process on a quarterly basis, at the minimum. Remember, you want to keep a reasonable funnel with candidates and your sources at "the ready" in the event a need arises, either planned or unplanned. We have clients that have the People Map on their wall in their office at all times. It is constantly there to remind them of where they are headed, the positions that will need filling, and the people who need to be developed over the next one to three years.

List the positions needed and prioritize them:

- Start with the highest position needed and work your way down through the organization. You will be using some of these people to help you identify, screen and select remaining candidates.
- What are your needs? Be very specific with positions and numbers needed.
- Establish the order of priority for hiring. When do you need them? Be specific with a start date.
- How long will it realistically take to fill the position? 30 days? 90 days?
- Do you have an option plan – subcontractor or consultant – in case it takes longer?

Determine when these positions need to be filled and set a timeline:

- Right Now – How the heck did we get here and how can we avoid it in the future?
- The Next 90 Days – This is a usual spot and not too bad of a position to be in.
- The Next 90 to 180 Days – Now you are in control and can really take some time.
- The Next 180 to 365 Days – Wow, now you are being very proactive.

One challenge is if you encounter a great candidate before you need them. These candidates could be lost forever if you don't take immediate action. What

a great challenge to have! Here are some options to consider if you find yourself in this situation:

- Present an offer letter with a later start date. This will assure (or at the very least help secure) the candidate will come on board.
- Put them in "tag and release" program and stay close, hire later when possible.
- Bring them on and put them on a "special project" that needs some re-working or design and implementation. We all have a "wish list" project that we will get around to some day and we never really do. Here is your chance to bring this talented individual on board even if it's on a project-by-project basis, as an independent contractor or consultant.

**Define the Target.** Use the profile of the employee that best looks and performs like what you are looking for. Be very specific here and stick to your guns – experience, skills, competencies, license/certifications, education, etc. Use the selection criteria tool we reviewed earlier in this lesson.

### TRUE STORY: SPECIAL PROJECT

**With a Special Candidate.** I once completed an interview with a very talented candidate with a landscape architecture degree and nice experience. I really didn't have an opening for her, but I did have a special design project that could use her skill sets. I described the assignment with the expected deliverables and the time frame needed to have the project completed. I then asked her for a proposal to complete the project. After she gave me an estimate for the project I agreed on the price and I paid her as a consultant. She did a fabulous job and I have used the concepts from this project still today. Once she completed the project there was an opportunity with our company and we brought her on. She has enjoyed a great career and is still there more than 25 years later. Remember, get creative on those great candidates that appear out of nowhere.

**What Tools Are Needed?** If you followed me here with the seven steps in this lesson all the tools you will need are listed in Step # 4 (Get Your Tools Ready). If you skipped a few steps, now would be the time to Get Your Tools together including job descriptions, pay ranges, bonuses, interview questions, brochures, and company handbooks.

**Review Best Practices:** Which best practices need to be worked on or will you be using? This includes:

- Selection criteria.
- Build and practice your elevator speech.
- Create an attractive work environment.
- A clean and quiet area for interviewing – no disruptions.

Then go to your top five sources for recruits and light them up. Some of these sources can include:

- Find out where your best have come from.
- Have your best hunt for others – offer rewards as in money.
- Line up your scouts – hold an informational luncheon, have job outlines.
- Borrow from other segments or divisions from your organization.
- Find out where your targets are (i.e. church, parks on the weekend, etc.) and get the word out in person.
- Hold a job fair or open house.
- ESL classes – give a talk about opportunities in the landscape industry.

## CASE STUDY 1: AN EXERCISE IN HIRING

Let's lay out a real-life scenario where you need to hire an account manager for your company and review what you need to do to make the process go smoothly.

Position Title: Account Manager

When Needed: Within the next 60 days or by a specific date.

Job Description/Outline: In place? Y/N Is it updated? Y/N

Base Salary Range: Is it current and valid in today's market? Y/N

Bonus Program: Does it make sense? Is it still appropriate? Y/N

### Consider Internal Candidates First:

- Is there anyone within the organization that can fill this position?
- Have we considered them? Have we had them apply for the position?
- If we move them into this position what affect will that have?
- Have we created another opening? If so, which is harder to fill?
- If we don't fill with an existing internal candidate do they know why and what is needed to be considered in the future?

### What Are the Minimum Requirements?

#### Experience

- Minimum five years in the landscape maintenance business.
- Three years of experience at the account manger level.
- Overseeing a minimum of three foremen.
- Has worked with commercial accounts.

#### Basics

- Valid and clean drivers' license.
- Bilingual – can effectively communicate in Spanish and English.

### Technical Skills

- Knows plant and tree names.

### Managerial Skills

- Knows what gross margin is and can get a low margin job to acceptable margin.
- Basic computer skills – Outlook, Word, PowerPoint, Excel.
- Is well-organized and can manage his/her time well.

### Bonus Qualifications

- Two-year technical degree or better.
- QAL license.
- Lives within the desired zone.

You now know who you are looking for, when you need them, what skills and experience are needed, you know where you would like them to live, you have all the tools ready to launch the campaign. Now go to your sources and get this baby rolling!

**Source 1: Seek Internal Candidates.** Review the existing employee pool for possible candidates and do a check of your bench strength.

**Source 2: Offer a Reward.** Offer a finder's fee to employees of \$1,000 to generate recommendations.

**Source 3: Look at the Funnel.** Look at your current funnel of possible candidates or from past interviews or current “tag and release” candidates. If you have been “feeding the funnel” and keeping it active, then it will come in handy right now.

**Source 4: Work Your Network.** Work those contacts – vendors, friendly competitors, good clients, church, colleges, etc.

**Source 5: Run Electronic Ads/Search the Internet.** Place the job posting on your company's website, post it to your LinkedIn profile, and review the job boards from landscape associations. Check out what other companies are looking for and where they are placing their ads.

**Source 6: Hire a Hired Gun, Placement Agency.** If this is a pretty critical position and sources one through five are not warming up in the first 30 to 45 days, it's time to “light up” the placement agency you have groomed and negotiated a fair price with so they can light up all of their sources in short order.

### Now you have the makings of a solid recruiting program that features:

- Culture is solid and clearly spelled out, lived breathed from top to bottom.
- Retention strategies for existing good employees are in place.
- People Map or People Plan projecting needs for near, mid and long range.
- Identify development opportunities for existing employees.
- Having your top sources on the ready and engaged.

### CASE STUDY 2: TRY PLAYING SINK YOUR SHIP

This is a game we played quite a bit just to keep us in touch with the reality of how vulnerable an organization can be when it comes to keeping the right people on board and the fact that we always had to be “hunting” for talent.

Think about your organization as a large battleship traveling through the seas of the business world. (I know it sounds a bit dramatic but take your battle stations!) Now what would it take to sink or at least have your ship listing severely from a people retention perspective?

How many people leaving your organization, for whatever reason, would it take to sink your ship? How many people, if lost, would make your ship stop in its wake and have the remaining occupants start bailing out water? Or jumping overboard?

We actually ask this question during some of our workshops and find out that it wouldn't take more than five people to sink the vast majority (over 80%) of the companies out there! Even with the very large companies, I was always amazed at how few it would take to put some serious hurt on an organization.

**Harvester Helpful Hint:** To avoid your ship from sinking you need to have a “balanced ballast” for your ship with a great retention strategy along with a continual stream of viable recruiting candidates and a succession of talent being groomed for the future.

## LESSON 7: CONDUCTING EFFECTIVE INTERVIEWS

This is a critical part of the recruiting process and needs to be well choreographed and taken very seriously. Everyone should be at their best both the candidate and the interviewer. Let's go over the key areas that you should keep in mind during this part of the recruiting and hiring process.

### THE BASICS

**Know What Job They are Seeking.** I have actually started some interviews thinking the candidate was looking at one job when in reality they were looking for another. So make sure you are on the same page from the start.

**Make Certain the Candidate Knows Where You are Located.** Verify location, address and give out and get phone numbers just in case. Sometimes landscape company yards and facilities are located in some pretty unique areas and people need very clear directions on how to get there.

**Set Up the Interview at the Right Time.** Set a time that is good for both parties and allows enough time to have some good dialogue – 45 minutes to 1 hour is good. Try to make it at a time when there are minimum interruptions like first thing in the morning after crew dispatch or in the afternoon before or after crew arrival.

**Be on Time and Prepared.** Both parties should to be at their best that means you as the interviewer have some responsibilities. Show up on time and be

prepared with a list of questions and a copy of the resume or job application. Have something to write some notes on – do not write on an original resume.

**Make the Candidate Feel Welcome.** Greet the candidate and see if there is a need for the facilities and offer something to drink like coffee, water or soda. I can't tell you how many times I have encountered candidates waiting around in front of the office in their car or just looking lost and unwelcomed. They are often waiting for the late disheveled interviewer. What message do we want to send? These are potentially your future team members send the right message right from the beginning.

**Conduct the Interview in a Neutral Zone.** Try for a conference room and reserve it to eliminate interruptions. I preferred to hold interviews at the office or facility where this person would be working. Don't interview people in your personal office as this can be a bit overwhelming and uncomfortable to the candidate. In today's world we do interviews in all sorts of areas including Starbucks, Denny's or any multitude of spots. Sometimes these are even more appropriate especially if the candidate does not wish to be spotted by others in your facility where they may be recognized and put in a compromising position.

**Minimize Interruptions.** Put away the cell phones, texting, computers and people with their "fire drills," and I'm sure you can think of several more. Very few things are more annoying and disrespectful than a bunch of interruptions during the interview.

Make certain you know the human resources interviewing dos and don'ts. Here are some helpful tips:

- Do not ask or deal with non-job related areas such as age, sexual orientation, race, religion, etc.
- Stick to questions that are job related; if in doubt review with your human resource folks or with PLANET or state landscape organization and get it right.
- Give an overview of position and process, but don't give too much information like we want this or we want that. The crafty interviewers will morph their answers to fit what you just shared with them. Remember

school and regurgitating your teacher's information back to them to get the best grade? This happens with interviewees as well.

- Ask questions about specific skills, goals, duties, and responsibilities.
- Drill down on answers with EAR – Examples, Actions, Results.

### Interviewing Dos

- Get them to talk 60 to 70 percent of the time – that means that you listen 60 to 70 percent of the time.
- Have a list of questions with some EARs (I'll explain later).
- Let some time pass before making a decision – hire slow, de-hire fast.
- For higher organizational chart positions, have multiple "touches" or time with different people to get different perspectives.
- Break bread with higher-level candidates – I'm amazed what I can find out about people at the dinner table.
- Observe how they interact with others.
- Be "present" and focused. People can really tell if you are "present" or not, and this can influence the candidate in a most positive manner. Be "present."
- Be an active listener. Give them your attention and verbally verify some of their comments and answers to demonstrate that you are listening and paying attention.
- Use their name when addressing them. The sweetest word we all like to hear is our name.

### Interviewing Don'ts

- Don't make a job offer on site.
- Don't give all of the job particulars before you ask the questions.
- Don't take phone calls, respond to text messages, or be interrupted or distracted

- Even though I suggest a “Get Hot” phase during the interview don’t abuse this phase or have it as an interrogation just pick up the pace and have real deal situations or examples given.

**The Interview.** Finally we start the interview. I usually use somewhat of a workout approach with three phases: Warm Up – Get Hot – Cool Off and here is how it works:

**Warm Up.** I always try for a warm greeting, introduction and welcome. Have the candidate feel at home as much as possible. Remember, this is always a pretty nervous time for the candidate. I try very hard to be on the lookout for the candidate and be right there when they arrive. Most good candidates usually arrive early. If for some reason I can’t personally greet them when they first arrive, I will have prepped the office person or the first person that comes in contact with them that we are expecting a guest and make sure our guest is met with a warm welcome.

All too often I have seen where the candidate arrives, nobody is around and they aimlessly meander about until somebody stumbles upon them and asks who the heck they are. I try very hard not to have them sit out in the lobby very long. Treat them like you would a guest to your home. Would you have a friend, a visitor or a relative sit out in front of your home until you “found” them? Or would you have them sit in your front room until you were ready? Of course not, nor should you treat your candidate as a total stranger that was just passing by. Treat all candidates at all levels like a welcomed guest.

Make sure your people know that a candidate will be visiting and that they need to put on their “happy faces.” When they arrive personally greet them or at the very least the receptionist, an office person or one of our field people should greet them. Then have them fill out a job application (if they haven’t already done so) in the conference room or a quiet spot where they won’t be interrupted.

When they are done with the job application use this time to get to know them with a little informal chit-chat – can I get you a cup of coffee or water? Do you need to use the rest room? Explain how the interview will go so they can get a sense of what lies ahead in today’s interview. Explain you will ask them some questions and encourage them to do the same.

This portion of the interview takes around 10 to 15 minutes. Don’t rush this first part just move at a good but steady pace. Now that you have them settled in and feeling welcomed, start moving through the preliminary questions. These are short, crisp to the point questions and basic info gathering this takes 10 to 15 minutes. You are now around 20 to 30 minutes into the interview. The next phase is the Get Hot phase of the interview.

**Get Hot.** You are done with the welcome and the preliminary questions, now will move into what I call the “Get Hot” phase which moves from slow pitch to fast pitch. You now ask the tougher questions or give them real deal scenarios and get them “heated” up. Also use the EAR questions in the “Get Hot” phase. This is not intended to be an interrogation. However, the real world does not play slow pitch softball it’s usually fast and furious as most of you already know. Pick up the pace and the intensity here to see what they have and to see what they do and behave like under some applied pressure. If you sense it is just too darn hot, back off and start moving to the “Cool Off” phase.

**Helpful Hint:** Using the EAR method (Examples, Actions, Results), here are some sample questions to dig a little deeper with the candidate.

**E = Example.** Give me an example of a job that had a poor gross margin. What was the situation? Why was it at this level?

**A = Action Taken.** What actions did you take to get the gross margin in line? Walk me through the steps you took to get there.

**R = Results.** What exactly were the results you achieved? What was the gross margin % before you got involved and what % did you get it to? How long did this take? What did you learn to prevent this from happening again?

### Sample EAR Question

Have you ever dealt with a non-performing employee? Give me an **Example**. What **Actions** did you take? What were the **Results**? What was learned?

### Sample EAR Question

Share with me an **Example** of when you dealt with an upset customer, what **Actions** did you take to bring them back to satisfied level? What was the **Result**?

### Sample EAR Scenario

Walk me through an **Example** of your basic sales plan and what **Actions** would you do during the first 90 days to build your funnel to achieve the desired **Result**?

These are some sample questions and scenarios using the EAR process. I have also gone in the field with candidates and run them through simple exercises like having them give me a punch list on a job with the items to complete, the order they would do them in, and how long will it take to complete each task.

I'm sure you can come up with a number of great real world questions and scenarios. Use some current issues that are causing some angst in your organization. This might even give you some clever ways to get after some of these issues. This can take 10 to 20 minutes depending how interested you are in the candidate.

**Cool Off.** Now let's move to the "Cool Off" phase of the interview. This is where you start winding down the interview and if you think they are still a viable candidate, ask to see if they have any additional questions and how interested they are with this opportunity and why. Be really impressed with those that have great questions and not very impressed if they don't have any questions. Let them know the next steps and when to expect to hear from you again.

The point to the Warm – Hot – Cool process is to have a thought out game plan to move the candidate through in a reasonable time and extract the information needed to determine if you want to keep pursuing them as an employee or not. It doesn't have to be warm-hot-cool. Your interview process can be anything you want, just have a purpose and glean as much information as you can in a professional and comfortable manner.

If they are still a viable candidate, there might be a couple more steps required such as return visits to meet additional staff members and or having them shadow a person in a position similar to the one you are hiring them for.

As mentioned earlier the higher the position the more "touch points" that should be completed. Three to five touches with mid-management, two to three touches for foreman, and one or two touches for workers. "Touch points" can include one-on-one meetings, group interviews, field visits, shadow time, meals, trips, meetings, etc.

### TRUE STORY: DAVID MEETS AND BEATS GOLIATH

Once when I was really on an intense recruiting campaign, I was moving pretty quickly through my resume folder and started reading one in particular. This was a recent college graduate from my alma mater, Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, named David. That was the good news, then, I noticed he majored in landscape architecture, a major that often brings more creative juice than practical juice to the team (or at least we thought so in those days).

What the heck, he was a fellow alumnus so I started dialing his number while I was still reading his resume. The phone is now answered by a person who sounded like a mom, so I introduced myself and explained why I was calling. I was finishing reading the resume when mom mentions the fact that her son David is hearing impaired and asked if I was aware of this? Just as she brings this to my attention I'm reading the resume and at the very bottom it states he was a member of the "Deaf Man's" volleyball team so I said, "Yes, I was aware of his situation (whew)."

I asked her if he could come in the next day at 7:00 a.m. sharp for an interview. She informed me that he would be there. The next day this great looking recruit arrives at our doorstep and I started following my three-phase interview program. David is deaf and is reading my lips carefully and he could speak well enough that after some time I could better understand his speech pattern and he could keep up with my lips!

I then took him on a tour of our beautiful office, yard and facility, and I introduced him to all of our happy employees. Now I'm done with the



“Warm Up” phase and ready to go to the “Get Hot” phase. I brought him into my office and in those days I had a very traditional office with a nice couch, a round table and, of course, my fairly massive desk with my extra-large plush leather chair (people often called it my throne not sure why?). I have David sit on the couch that sits at a lower level while I sat in the throne which is at a higher elevation getting ready to “pounce” on this fresh landscape architect graduate.

We ended our small talk and now I offered up the following question, “David, there are quite a few things I really like about you, but you know what I don’t like about you? He looked at me and said, “No Mr. Arman I don’t.” I then went into what was a several minute dissertation on why landscape architects probably wouldn’t make good landscape contractors.

My examples included they don’t know how to do hands-on horticulture, they draw pretty pictures of plants that don’t work and so on and so on I went just kicking dirt on him verbally. I then abruptly stopped and waited to see what he would say or do next. Was he going to be offended? Would he say, “Yes Mr. Arman you’re right” or would he just be quite, smile and be on his way?

After a brief pause he said, “That’s well and fine Mr. Arman, but do you know what I don’t like about you?” Are you kidding me? I’m thinking what on earth is there not to like about me! So I replied, “No David, what don’t you like about me?” David’s answer floored me, “You talk too fast and you have a mustache!” I was so flabbergasted that he had such a great come back to my long-winded diatribe, I hired him on the spot. This, of course, is in complete violation of everything I recommend with recruiting and hiring.

David came to work with us the very next day and was a remarkable employee for more than three years. He was later recruited by the largest property owner in all of Southern California where he remains to this day as a landscape inspector and manager overseeing you guessed it, landscape maintenance contractors! Go figure.

When conducting an interview look for some of these signs or actions to help make your hiring decisions:

**Did They Show Up On Time?** If they can’t get to the interview on-time, what will they be doing when the day-to-day grind comes along? Showing up late usually is a disqualifier for me unless there really is some compelling reason and there is an attempt to touch base to let me know they are running late.

**Are They Prepared?** Have they done any background on you or your company? This is a good sign if they do and a bad one if they don’t. Depending on the position I would take this into consideration on whether to hire or not.

**Good Eye Contact.** Are they focused and paying attention and making good consistent eye contact?

**Do They Stay on Topic?** Do they stay on point and answer the question or just drift from here to there.

**They Talk Too Much.** Most sales people end up talking themselves out of the job!

**Too Much Emphasis on Me and How Great I Am.** Humility really is a virtue.

**Did They Ask Good Questions?** This can really reveal how well prepped they are, did they do some homework?

**How Did They Find Out About the Position?** This will determine your source like your advertising piece or word of mouth or referral.

**Are They Currently Employed? Why Not?** If not, this could be a danger sign – have they explained their situation?

**What is Their Motivation for Change?** Such as my boss wants me to show up on time and work hard. Are you going to have the same issues? Find out why they are leaving.

**Are They Interviewing Elsewhere and Where?** This is always a good thing to find out. It can tell you a lot of things like where and what types of jobs and companies have they looked into. Are they very industrious? Motivated? If they are really close to getting a job somewhere else, then why are they here? If they have not been interviewing elsewhere, why not?

**What Do They Do and Is It Similar to Us?** Use the EAR method and get examples, actions they took and the results they got.

**Do they have a valid driver's license with a good driving record?** What other certifications and training do they have? What is their education level and in what area?

**Where do they live? How long? How far from work?** Make sure they live within a realistic proximity to your facility.

**Do They Know Anyone in the Company? Have They Interviewed With Us Before?** If so, find out why they were not hired from the person that interviewed them.

**Have they ever worked with your company before?** What were the circumstances of their departure? Good or not so good?

**Do they know anyone that you know?** This could be used as reference check and different from the references they have listed.

**References.** Of course they are going to give you good references aren't they? How do you get the real deal references? Check with customers, former employees where they came from, maybe a vendor or two. It's usually a small community so check around. Sometimes when I call a former employer the owner will only give me the basic info like name, rank and serial number. When I ask again with passion like please, pretty please tell me something about this guy and they return with name rank and serial number they have told me volumes.

Use questions like what did they do for you? How successful were they? What were their strengths? Weaknesses? Would you rehire? How long did they work there? Why aren't they there anymore?

Now keep in mind with the litigious society that we live in these questions don't have to be answered and most human resource people would advise that only name, rank and serial number be given out to protect the company from any repercussions. Walk softly here and work with absolute confidentiality. Remember, this will work both ways and you will be on the other side of these questions someday, so use good judgment.

The resume will speak volumes and show very clearly where they worked and how long they worked there and gaps in employment. Use the resume in your line of questions to the candidate and with the references. Verify what was on the resume actually happened including their education, certifications and accomplishments listed.

### HOW THE EAR METHOD WORKS

Drill down on skills and knowledge with the EAR method. This is the best way to find out actual real experience, knowledge and skills and the ability to get results. When asked a question and they answer, ask for an Example. Then ask what Actions they took and followed, and then ask what Results were accomplished. Put on your EARs!

Question: Have you ever had a job with a low gross margin that you brought up to speed?

Candidate Answer: Why yes I have

Questions: Please give me an EXAMPLE of how you did that: hopefully they have one. What ACTIONS did you take to get the margin up? have them walk you through this. What were the RESULTS of your actions? What specific measurable results were there?

Practice EAR and get good at and you will find out a great deal.

**Salary Expectations.** If you think the candidate is a possible good fit, you usually start getting some salary expectations just so you know if you are in the same ballpark. Sometimes you fall in love with each other, start walking down

the aisle and then after five interviews talk about salary and you are way, way far apart. That is why I start getting this on the table usually at the second interview. If they need to take more than a 20 to 25 percent salary cut to fit into your program I suggest a pass. It all sounds good until the harsh reality sets in, then there is often buyer's remorse.

**Possible Next Step: Field Visit.** If they are still a viable candidate then have them back in for a field-visit to verify knowledge and company cultural fit. This would be for middle management positions and above or college recruits.

**Do Not Make An Offer During the First Interview.** Do not make a job offer on the spot. This is not the best way to operate and sends the signal that you are desperate!

**Summarize and Follow Up.** Let them know what the next steps will be in the process. For example, let them know you will finish interviewing candidates this week and will let him/her know your decision by Friday. Get a sense of where they stand in making a decision to be part of your team. Always follow up in writing, even if it's a pass as a courtesy.

**The Offer.** If you want to put an offer on the table you should verbally go over the basics and get a verbal understanding and agreement of the offer with the base salary, bonus, benefits, etc. Before you make a written offer, go over the possibility of a counter offer from their current employer and rehearse what will be said.

The offer letter then serves as a summary on what has been agreed to in your verbal discussions. This avoids the going back and forth of negotiations. Let's add this or drop that and don't forget this, etc. The letter should have a deadline to make the decision or not. The letter should also have a start date that both parties agree on. Have a signature line for both parties and you should sign this to show them you are in "all in" on the offer. Verify they received the offer letter and see if they have any questions and when they will be making their decision.

**Closing the Deal.** As with any proposal and possible agreement pending the offer needs to be completed and a signature submitted back. Having a signed

agreement or letter of understanding is a good practice for middle manager positions and up. It gives a sense of commitment by both parties and allows for the person to give notice to their current or soon-to-be former employer with the confidence knowing they officially have a job from you.

**The Counter Offer.** What to do if they come back with, "My boss offered me more money so I am staying put." To avoid this it needs to be discussed before they give notice. You should be asking this question during the verbal job offer discussion and go through this scenario. What if they come back and counter offer with more money or a new title? How will you deal with that?

If they are still serious about coming on board, do a little role play to help them out. If this is just a game to get a raise from their existing boss then you probably wouldn't want them on your team anyway right? But if they really are interested you should prep them for this possibility.

Sometimes an employer will counter offer just to hold this employee until the employee can be replaced and or to keep them from going to the competition on their terms and timing.

**Harvester Helpful Hint:** Have someone check out the candidate's vehicle they drove to the interview. What does it look like? Is it taken care of? Is there debris inside? Diapers, food wrappers, empty soda bottles, beer cans etc. Or you could walk them out to their car after the interview and do a cursory scoping out of their vehicle. How they take care of their stuff is usually a good indicator of how they will take care of your stuff.

## USING THE INTERVIEW AS COMPETITOR RECON

Remember, this cuts two ways – good and not so good. Here is a look at both sides of the equation:

**The Good.** It is an opportunity to do some recon on the competition. It's amazing what a disgruntled employee or an employee out interviewing will cough up about their employer. Be careful yet be a good listener. Learn about the other company's culture and how they treat each other and who gets the most attention.

What clever nifty ways do they recruit, retain and train people? Why do they want to leave and what makes them want to come to work for you? Learn the hierarchy and organizational chart. Are they similar in structure? If not, how do they do it? Even learn about their pay ranges and bonus system and how it works or doesn't work.

**The Not So Good.** It is a danger signal because this is what they will be doing if they leave your employment. Be careful, especially if they are promising to “bring“ along their former employees and accounts. This is where I get really nervous because this cuts against what I believe to be right. Again, if they are volunteering too much then I'd just remember this will cut both ways if you hire them and they leave your organization. If they are giving you this amount of information and if it's inappropriate, then be careful what you are telling them about your company, as surely this will be communicated to others.

### ALWAYS REMEMBER

“Even if you know they are not a fit with your organization treat all candidates with respect. They often reappear in your future dealings in the industry like positions with customers or they become the inspector on that public works job you just landed. “ – Head Harvester Bill

## LESSON 8: FINDING THE RIGHT PEOPLE, RIGHT NOW!

I put this section toward the end of the book realizing that some of you really are under the gun and need some ideas to help find some people right now! You also are probably not practicing all of those great tips we reviewed in the first several lessons. I'm not trying to make you feel guilty, but you really do need to get with the program.

Here a few tips that I use for companies that don't have the first part of this book in play quite yet. After you have placed these “emergency” positions, please go back to the beginning of this book and build yourself a sustainable recruiting program.

### STEP 1: PREPARE A JOB OUTLINE

Get a job outline together that highlights the job duties, behaviors, skills and what the results or the job expectations are for this position in very clear terms.

### STEP 2: HAVE PAY AND BONUS RANGES DETERMINED

Have your salary range and bonus opportunities that go along with this job opening.

### STEP 3: HAVE YOUR QUESTIONS AND SCREENING PROCESS PREPARED

You may be going through a whole bunch of candidates you will need to have a five to 10 minute basic screening process in place.

#### STEP 4: LIGHT UP YOUR SOURCES

Go to your best “go to” sources. For me, depending on the job, I would light up the following sources. Keep in mind that what you want to do here is to have as many scouts out looking for this/these positions as possible that want to be doing this and see this as an advantage or benefit to them and their success.

Here is a list of sources you can explore to identify candidates in a hurry:

**Existing Employees.** Offer a reward to your employees for finding you a qualified candidate that is hired. Don’t be cheap here and make it too low. Make it worth their while and get their attention. Raise the reward if they get the position filled by a certain deadline.

**Friendly Vendors.** Especially with ones that you spend a lot of money with or ones that are close to the action and know of organizations or even the names of people that are good targets. Be sure they know exactly what you are looking for with a copy of the job outline. I have had many a well-intentioned folks send me their recently “released” step-son or their ex- girlfriend as a possible candidate. Be sure to be specific on what you are looking for.

#### Visit Locations Where Your Target Visits.

- Parks on the weekends – make up some really nice flyers to hand out.
- Educational events – bring and receive lots of business cards.
- Industry events – take notes and do some scouting.
- Department of Motor Vehicles – everyone drives.
- English as a second language classes – give a talk on industry opportunities.
- Have a “reward” flyer letting people know you are looking (i.e. “Turn you or your friend in for a \$1,000 reward”) for employees.

**Your Network.** Let your network know you are looking and what you are looking for with the Job Outline. Use your social network: e-mail blasts, LinkedIn, Twitter, facebook, etc. Give away a weekend getaway to a nice hotel as a reward or get creative. People love to help others, and if they know you well they will really want to help you!

**Placement Agency.** If you have a trusted relationship with an agency then by all means put in for a contingency position placement. These aren’t cheap and range from 15 to 25 percent of the base salary, but often these open a whole new universe of candidates. These can also be used if you want to remain at arm’s length from going directly into a targeted organization or keeping an opening confidential, especially if you are looking to replace someone already on board. For a really, really, big position consider a retainer placement.

**Your Company Website.** Post the opening on your website. Make it fun and with some sizzle!

**Electronic Job Boards.** Determine what electronic job boards make the most sense for you. Your state landscape associations will have job boards as do many conferences, churches, schools and even your customers. Take a look at what other companies are using and determine if this is what you want to add to your arsenal. Keep track of the leads generated and the “sales” or job offers that result from these efforts.

**Hispanic Radio Spots.** I have had some super results with Hispanic radio spots. Check with your guys for what stations they listen to and call some of the more popular stations to get their input and pricing. If you go this route, get ready to do a lot of screening and interviewing.

**Hispanic Paper.** La Opinion or its equivalent in your neighborhood is another good source for leads. As with every effort, track your leads and results and adjust accordingly

### TRUE STORY: WHATEVER IT TAKES, BE ON TIME

I once interviewed another fellow college alumnus and when I was wrapping the interview up I found out that she had driven from a very long distance – more than 125 miles – for the interview. I commented I was very impressed that not only did she drive that far, but she also got to the interview on time with all of the traffic. She then shared with me that she and her dad had driven up the day before to make certain she knew where she was going, and to see how long it would take to get here. I was impressed and I had really liked the way the interview went but this story of driving more than 250 miles to make certain she would be at the right spot and on time cinched the deal. Doreen became one of the best employees we ever had. She was smart, reliable, bilingual, had a degree in horticulture and was at the ready and always on time!

## LESSON 9: GETTING THEM “ON-BOARD”

A long time ago we called the new employee’s first 90 days their “probationary period.” Does that sound crazy? You are now sentenced to 90 days of hard labor and if you survive, then you get to be assigned even harder labor for the rest of your life! Today, the first portion of a person’s job or usually the first 90 days is called the orientation period and many even call it the on-boarding process.

I have not witnessed many good employee orientations or on-boarding processes in the landscape industry. In fact, I have witnessed none. The usual process has the new person look at videos, fill out paper work and take a drug test. Then after a fairly clumsy three to four hours they are sent out to the field to fend for themselves, never to be seen again until they quit, get fired or are begging for a raise or worse they get injured doing something they had no business doing. Does this sound familiar? Look at this point in the new employee’s tenure as one of the most influential times to shape this new person’s perspective of the organization.

### A REAL DEAL ORIENTATION/ ON-BOARDING PROCESS

I went through the Ritz Carlton hotel orientation program as part of a service provider requirement. That’s right, even the service providers were required to go through this orientation process for one full day and all new employees went through a three-day program! I still have their credo card that I was required to have in my possession when I was visiting any of the sites I was involved with. They live and breathe their vision, mission and credo every day from the top to the bottom and back up throughout the entire organization. No wonder Ritz Carlton has won the Malcolm Baldrige Award twice!

I am not suggesting that you have a three-day program but I would highly recommend that you take another look at your orientation/on-boarding system and see how it can have an enormously positive affect on your new team members. I also am not suggesting this process only last 90 days as it really should be for several months until they are literally on-board with the culture, working safely, being productive, and become a positive team player.

This should at the minimum include a clear explanation of the company’s values, the culture, dos and don’ts, what are the success behaviors that are expected, as well as the review of the employee manual and safety rules. While we have come a long way since the probationary period days for a new employee, we still have a long way to go before our industry really gets this process right. How about if we called your employee’s first 90-days their “orientation or on-boarding period”? How about “Welcome Aboard” my fellow team member, we are glad you have joined us!

Here is a better way of looking at this critical “touch point’ with your new employees. To show them how glad we are about having you join our company we would like the following 10 action items to happen:

### **1. Have all Materials and Assigned Items Ready.**

Any of the stuff a new employee should have will be ready and waiting for their arrival or at the very least in very short order. Get them their gear – a uniform, hat, PPEs, employee manual, etc. before they get there. Depending on the position:

- Have credit cards, business cards or a vehicle assigned.
- Have a computer, keys, alarm codes, cell phone and a camera ready.
- Have a soil probe, an e-mail address or a bio in the newsletter have them ready.
- If you have credo cards have them in English and Spanish (if applicable), and hand them out and review them with the new employee.

### **2. Take a Photo and Display It.**

Take a picture of the new employee and have it on a nice space where everyone can see it and say welcome! Send the local paper a press release about your new addition if appropriate; give a short biography of the person.

### **3. Cover Basics before Entering the Field.**

Have a sit down review of the safety program, the company vision, and mission and core values along with the employee manual before they go into the field. Cover all of the legal required areas including Equal Opportunity Employer, sexual harassment, FMLA, etc.

### **4. Have Leadership or Owner Involvement.**

Leadership should be involved in your orientation or on-boarding process. Always remember people are watching the leaders and where they spend their time. Where the leaders spend their time is perceived as important by the team. It’s hard to think of many things that are more important than getting new team members off to a safe, productive and positive entry into your organization. The general manager of the Ritz Carlton, who is the highest-ranking person at the facility, is personally involved with every orientation. They actually give a portion of the presentation on the history of the Ritz-Carlton chain and how the logo came about. This takes about an hour during the first day of orientation. Just think what an impact it would be to have the owner of the company spend a little time with all new employees. I’m thinking a very BIG IMPACT.

### **5. Have a Mini Boot Camp or Training Crew Entry Point.**

Here is where it’s critical to take the time and host a hands-on mini boot camp with two to four hours of fundamental training exercises. You can also have designated crews equipped to handle a new employee with very specific areas to teach the new employee. Have very specific fundamentals that are clearly spelled out along with a certification-verification process that assures the skills were learned.

### STORY: BEFORE YOU PASS GO YOU NEED TO SEE ROBERTO

When we had had enough failures with our new employees not getting on board successfully we finally decided we should designate one of our best foremen and his crew as the entry portal into the company. Roberto was a solid foreman who was very good at pruning skills and an overall very good foreman. He was patient with his workers and really took the time to teach them and show them how to do things right. We would start all new gardeners on Roberto’s crew and after about 90 to 120 days if they passed the Roberto training program they were ready to go and be a productive and a qualified gardener at a needed area. Roberto was rewarded with a training “fee” of an extra dollar per hour when he had a designated trainee on his crew. He understood that this new person would not be on his crew for more than 120 days and he had to get him trained and certified as part of the deal. Roberto got some extra pay and an extra set of helping hands that were not charged out to his jobs. It was a win-win for Roberto and the company. Look for the “Robertos” in your organization and have them involved with getting the new folks on board.

#### **6. Give Regular and Specific Feedback.**

If for any reason the new hire is not performing to your standards or expectations, they will receive a sit down coaching session before the end of the 90 day on-boarding period. Make it clear what is expected of them and what will need to be worked on to remain an employee. This could include behavior areas, as well as skill and performance areas.

#### **7. Identify Training Objectives.**

They will receive the appropriate training that comes along with the position during the on-boarding period. Review their basic training expectation that you

have gone over and make certain these skills are learned during their first 90 days. The foreman/ supervisor will assist the new hire with the training needed to learn these skills. They should be required to demonstrate these skills on their own with a certification process.

#### **8. Place an Emphasis on Safety.**

They will not be asked to do things they are not qualified to do. If they are asked to do something and don’t feel comfortable doing it, please have them contact their supervisor. Have them always wear the appropriate PPEs

#### **9. Get Feedback/Input from the Employee.**

The new hire will be able to give the company some feedback through a confidential survey. Have them fill out a survey and also allow for feedback during their 10-15 Report.

#### **10. Assign a Coach or Buddy.**

Assign a coach or buddy to help them become a successful safe and productive team member. The coach will touch base with them weekly until they have got their feet on the ground or around 90 days. After that there will be a monthly “touch base” with the 10-15 Report

Remember, the on-boarding process is a critical part of getting the new employee in-the-know, productive and performing at the highest standards within the shortest amount of time possible. The investment on the front side of this process is well worth the time, effort and money spent.



# LESSON 10:

## RECRUITING TOOLBOX

When you are building or maintaining a garden you need to have the best tools to perform at the ‘best in class’ level. This applies with your Growing Great People program as well. I have selected some really good tools here to help with your recruiting and on boarding programs. There certainly are a lot more tools than the ones I mention here like training programs, career ladders etc. but these will be a good start for you to look at and model after.

- Screening/Qualifying Questions
- Interview Questions
- The EAR Question Process
- The Benefit “Cut Sheet”
- Job Outline: Foremen
- Performance Review: Foreman
- Advertising Pieces: Business Developer, Foreman, Account Manager
- Coaching With The 10-15 Report
- Offer Letter
- Employee Survey
- On-Boarding for Account Manager
- On-Boarding Overview
- On-Boarding Checklist
- Exit Interview

### **SCREENING/QUALIFYING QUESTIONS**

You don’t have enough time to have every prospect come in and conduct an interview so you will need to be able to have a screening and qualifying process

in place to quickly determine if the candidate is a viable target. Remember even though they may not be a real target, always treat all candidates with respect and as if they might come back in your professional or personal life. How you deal with them could influence them in a positive or negative manner and this could come back to haunt you or help you. Believe me, as one who has had it happen to them. Stick to the facts and basics.

Here are some basic screening questions you can ask:

**How did you find us?** Find out how they found you – what is it a referral? If so, how do they know the referral? Was it from some advertising? Name recognition? It's always nice to know the source to see if any of the sources I fed you earlier work

**What position are you seeking?** I know this sounds crazy but sometimes they think they are seeking one position but the actual position you are looking for is something else. Get it straight on which position they are looking to apply for early in the interview.

**Why are you looking?** Determine their motivation for leaving their last stop and listen carefully to find out the true reasons. Some questions you may want to ask to find this out include:

- What are you looking for? Where else are you looking? What is their current job status?
- Where do you live? How long have you lived there?
- Do they know anyone that you know? See if you can find a connection.
- Do you have a clean driving record? Have you had any moving violations in the last five years? Have you ever been convicted of a felony?
- Where have you worked and for how long? Why did you leave? Ask them to explain.
- Have you ever been terminated? Ask for an explanation.
- Do you have a resume that you can send me?

Now keep in mind you cannot expect to bring everyone from this basic screen in for an interview so you need to be pretty direct and to the point. End by telling them you will need to review their resume, and will let them know the next steps and when they should expect to hear from you.

### **SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: BUSINESS DEVELOPER**

- 1) Where have you worked before? Give me some of the highlights of those positions and companies.
- 2) What did you learn about sales, people, customers, and yourself?
- 3) What have you sold?
- 4) Walk me through your sales process from start to close.
- 5) Think of one of your most successful sales you've ever achieved. With that sale in mind, tell me about it and what you did to successfully achieve the sale.
- 6) What is your biggest challenge in selling in today's market? How have you overcome this?
- 7) Give me an example of a recent difficult sale and how you closed the deal. What actions did you take and what was the result?
- 8) Tell me about a recent sale that you failed to get. What was learned?
- 9) What are your goals? How have you performed relative to your goals?
- 10) What lead sources have you found most productive?
- 11) How do you find new prospects?

- 12) What do you think will be the most important thing(s) you'll have to convince people of in order to turn them into customers?
- 13) Do you have any thoughts on how to meet those challenges?
- 14) How do you plan to go about learning what you need to know in order to do this job?
- 15) On average how many first appointments do you have each week?
- 16) What are your top three open-ended questions for initial sales calls?
- 17) How do you move forward when faced with a number of objections? Give me an example.
- 18) Describe a time your company did not deliver with its service and how you responded.
- 19) Describe one or two of the most difficult challenges and/or rejections you've faced in the past and how you responded to them.
- 20) If you were given this position, what would your first 90 days look like?
- 21) Describe how you would go about building and implementing a Marketing and Sales campaign.
- 22) What questions do you have for me?

**BUSINESS DEVELOPER EVALUATION CRITERIA**

	POOR	AVERAGE	OUTSTANDING	COMMENTS
Eye Contact				
Sense of Humor				
Voice Volume				
Voice Speed				
Grammar				
Confidence				
Sincerity				
Enthusiasm				
Listening				
Industry Experience				
Sales Experience				
Sales Knowledge				
Marketing Knowledge				
Career Pattern				
Professional Appearance				
Sales Skills				
Sales Process				
Results Achieved				
Time Management				
Planning				
Team Player				
Goal Oriented				
Asked Good Questions				
Overall Evaluation				

## THE EAR QUESTION PROCESS

Many years ago while attending one of the PLANET workshops on recruiting I picked up this relatively simple recruiting questioning technique called EAR, yes EAR. When you look at the typical questions that are asked of your candidate they really don't give you much insight on what skills and experiences the candidate truly possess. You certainly need to ask some of the basics just to gather fundamental information, but the EAR questions really get after the real information that means the most.

Basic questions will include:

- Where do you live? How long have you lived there?
- What pay range have you been accustomed to receiving?
- Is your driver license valid? Any moving violations in the last 5 years?

There are always other questions asked that really don't tell you anything except what the candidate thinks you want to hear like:

- Describe your leadership style
- What are your goals?
- What qualities in a leader are important to you?
- What's important in a company that you work with?

After learning the basics let's now put on your EAR questions

Decide what skills, knowledge and experience you would like to verify with the candidate such as; Can they improve your gross margin? Can they handle difficult employees and customers? What do they know about any common horticulture problems?

Here is how EAR works. When asked a question and they answer ask for:

An Example

Then ask what Actions they took and followed

And finish with asking what Results were accomplished. Put on your EARs

## OK, here is how EAR works:

**Question:** Have you ever had a job with a low gross margin that you brought up to speed? **Candidate Answer:** Why yes I have

## OK, Now Use Your EAR Questions:

Please give me an EXAMPLE of how you did that: hopefully they have one. What Actions did you take to get the margin up? Have them walk you through this. What were the Results of your actions? What specific measurable results were there?

Practice EAR questions and get good at it and you will find out a great deal.

**Note:** This is one of the best tips I am offering you in this book. **Please use your EARs...The Benefit "Cut Sheet"**

## SAMPLE: THE BENEFIT "CUT SHEET"

Often there are different benefits associated with different levels in the organization. It helps to have a one-sheet overview or the benefit "Cut Sheet" Here is an example of a "Cut Sheet"

### Workers

- 401(k) inclusion
- No sick leave
- No paid vacation time
- No medical, dental, vision, life, short-term disability, accidental death and dismemberment insurance
- Paid holidays after one year of service

### Foremen

- 401(k) inclusion
- 3 days paid sick leave after one year of service

- One week paid vacation after one year of service
- No medical, dental, vision, life, short-term disability, accidental death and dismemberment insurance.
- Paid holidays after one year of service

### **Middle Management**

- 401(k) inclusion
- 3 days paid sick leave after 90 days of service
- Two weeks paid vacation after 90 days of service
- 65 percent employer paid medical and dental insurance after 90 days of service
- 0% employer paid vision, life, short-term disability, accidental death and dismemberment insurance after 90 days of service
- Paid holidays after 90 days of service

## **JOB OUTLINES**

### **Sample Job Outline: Foreman**

The Foreman is a non-exempt, Landscape Maintenance job classification responsible for performing various gardening skills, ensuring efficiency at the job level, and demonstrating suitable leadership skills that maximize crew morale, safety, quality, and efficiency.

### **Areas of Performance**

**Safety.** Maintains tools and equipment to ensure safety; attends safety meetings; wears proper PPE; wears seat belt when traveling in a company vehicle; demonstrates proper lifting procedures; wears over-the-ankle boots; follows all safety policies/reporting procedures.

**Punctuality, Attendance, and Appearance.** Shows up to work each day on time; completes all tasks within time expectations; adheres to company dress code policy; wears clean clothes to work each day; follows inclement weather policy

and sick leave reporting procedures.

**Crew Supervision.** Motivates the crew to achieve performance goals; is a strong role model, trainer, and coach; applies customer service principles to exceed expectations; does not permit the usage of unsafe equipment or tools; completes forms (i.e., timecard, vehicle inspection) correctly.

**Field Operations Management.** Manages plant materials at the job site (i.e., preparation, planting, clean-up); installs color beds for a change-out; handles chemicals (i.e., fertilizer, pest control, MSDS) properly; monitors irrigation controllers; can repair main lines up to 3 inches.

**Job Quality.** Understands the relationship between job quality and customer service, satisfaction, and retention; consistently reaches “The Zone (score of 85-90) with Quality Counts Program.

**Job Sequencing.** Maintains a strong yard departure routine; clarifies expectations to the crew members; ensures all job tasks are performed in accordance with company protocol; monitors the arrival to the yard efficiently (i.e., vehicle parking, unloading debris, storing tools); debriefs with Account Manager.

**Interpersonal Skills.** Treats others with respect, collaboration, and support in such a way that work relationships are improved and morale is increased.

**Education/Experience Requirements.** The successful candidate should possess at least two (2) years of professional landscape and grounds management experience equivalent to that shown above.

**Physical Characteristics.** Frequently stand, walk, or crouch on narrow and/ or slippery surfaces; stoop, kneel, bend to pick up or move objects; walk for long distances and on sloped ground and uneven surfaces; move, lift, and carry objects weighing up to 50 pounds; normal manual dexterity and hand-eye coordination; corrected hearing and vision to normal range.

**Working Conditions.** Work is predominately outdoors, exposed to varying temperatures, weather conditions, and noise levels; exposure to dust, pesticides, herbicides, grease, oils, dust, fumes, and electrical currents.

**SAMPLE FOREMAN PERFORMANCE REVIEW**

Evaluate the employee on each performance area using the following rating scale: 1=“Unsatisfactory” 2=“Below Average” 3=“Average” 4=“Above Average” 5=“Outstanding”

RATING	PERFORMANCE AREA
	1) Foreman Orientation Program
	2) Safety Certification
	3) Punctuality, Attendance, and Appearance
	4) Interpersonal Skills
	5) Advanced Supervision
	a) Work Quality
	b) Safety
	c) Equipment Management
	6) Field Operations Management
	a) Managing Plant Materials
	b) Pest Control
	c) Weed Control
	d) Managing Irrigation Systems
	7) Quality Counts
	8) Job Sequencing
	9) Overall Performance Rating

Additional Training and Certification needed: \_\_\_\_\_

Employee Strengths: \_\_\_\_\_

Areas for Improvement: \_\_\_\_\_

Supervisor Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Employee Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Review Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Recommended Increase from \_\_\_\_\_ /hour to \_\_\_\_\_ / hour

**EMPLOYMENT ADVERTISING PIECES**

**Example 1: Landscape Maintenance Business Developer**

Do you love working with people? Helping people be successful? Like the outdoors and enjoy gardens? Enjoy the excitement of designing, building and delivering Marketing and Sales campaigns? Want to be working in a smaller positive family-like environment?

If so, this position is for you! We are looking for a person who loves all of this and more.

What you will need:

- Bring a great can do attitude!
- Five years of experience selling a service type business
- As an option, working in the property management business for five plus years.
- Know basics of computer software like word, excel, power point.
- Valid Driver License with a clean record

Want to have fun again at work and know you are making a difference.

Come join us!

We are an EOE employer by choice

Please submit your resume to:

**Example 2: Landscape Maintenance Foremen**

We are seeking a foreman to join our team. You will be responsible for a crew of two to three people and here is what we will be expecting from you:

- Keep you and your crew safe and accident free
- Maintain your jobs at expected quality levels
- Deliver quality levels while being on budget with assigned hours
- Help make our customers happy and glad they chose our company
- Have a can do positive attitude

- Be a team player and help train others
- Be on time and prepared for a safe, productive day everyday

Here is what you can expect from us:

- We will treat you with respect and help with your success in every way we can
- To listen to your suggestions on how we can be a better company
- Provide you with all the best tools, equipment and training to perform at the highest level
- Reward you for your results with competitive pay and bonuses

We are an EOE employer by choice

If all this sounds like a company you would like to be part of please contact us at:

### **Example 3: Landscape Maintenance Account Manager**

Are You Looking to Grow! Grow! Grow!  
In the Green Industry?

(name of company), in beautiful (location) has one Account Manager position open and we are.

**ON THE GO TO GROW!**

Are you ready to fulfill the role of:

- Leader
- Customer Satisfier
- Operational Manager
- Employee Developer
- Sales and Business Developer
- Financial and Administrative Manager

As an Account Manager for (name of company) you will apply your skills and experience in the Green Industry to build lasting relationships with clients, which lead to renewed contracts and enhancement sales.

You will lead a team of landscape professionals ensuring that team members are properly trained and certified, performing regular performance appraisals and executing ongoing professional development, via coaching and mentoring.

Managing operations will include ensuring that all maintenance services are delivered according to contract specifications, meeting quality standards, and staying within budget.

The Account Manager provides estimates for new accounts and landscape enhancements while growing existing accounts and providing leads for new business development.

Via strategic planning and regular review of financial data, the Account Manager will ensure that accounts are collected, administrative tasks are completed on a timely basis, and gross margin goals are attained.

As a leader in our company you will conduct regular meetings encouraging collaboration within your team toward accomplishing the company mission.

(name of company) is an Equal Opportunity Employer. We offer a competitive compensation package which includes commissions, paid holidays and vacation, simple IRA, and health/dental/life insurance. For more information please email your letter of interest and resume to: INSERT e-mail address or fax or mail to:

### **COACHING WITH THE 10-15 REPORT**

We found this piece at a seminar that one of my employees attended more than 30 years ago and have been using it ever since. This has been used to help serve as the framework for frequent “touch base” sessions with thousands of employees. These review points can be modified to meet your needs. Try to keep them clean, crisp and to the point. These should take no longer than 10 minutes to write them

down and 15 minutes to review them and are never to be more than ½ hour long, OK? Do these weekly for new employees during their first 90 days then monthly after that. These could be expanded into a mini performance review, which the Harvest Group is cooking up right now. These will be conducted quarterly rather than the classical “big daddy” review at the end of the year, which we all hate to do and seldom complete.

The original 10-15 Report only had three areas that were reviewed:

1. My morale is \_\_\_\_\_
2. What I have learned \_\_\_\_\_
3. What recommendations I have for the organization: \_\_\_\_\_

### THE 10-15 REPORT, EXPANDED VERSION

Take 10 minutes to fill out this form and then take 15 minutes to review it with your coach.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Coach's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

- 1) Overall, my morale for the past week (month, quarter) is: \_\_\_\_\_  
(1=“Poor,” 2=“Below Average,” 3=“Average,” 4=“Above Average,” 5=“Outstanding”) Or fill in the blank with some word descriptors like: Fantastic, Positive etc.
- 2) The reasons for my morale being at this level are:
- 3) The most important things I learned this week (month, quarter) were:
- 4) Here are some recommendations I have to improve the company:
- 5) Here are some of my accomplishments
- 6) Here were some setbacks or here are my challenges moving forward

- 7) My goals moving forward are:
- 6) Here's how I will measure these goals and know they are being accomplished
- 7) During the next week (month, quarter), the following action items will be taken:

The date, time, and location of our next meeting will be: \_\_\_\_\_

### SAMPLE OFFER LETTER

February 16, 2012

Mr. Green Grass  
10000 Garden Lane  
Garden Grove, CA 99999

Dear Green:

It gives me great pleasure for me to offer you the position of Account Manager for Harvester Landscape Services Inc.

You will receive an annual salary of \$\_\_\_\_\_, which is paid semi-monthly. Your employment starting date will be \_\_\_\_\_. This is a full-time exempt position and as a middle management position is not eligible for overtime.

In addition to the compensation described above, you will be eligible to receive the following:

- Automobile Allowance of \$400 per month, and a gas card
- Laptop Computer and Mobile Telephone/Palm Treo PDA
- Simple IRA with matching funds of up to 3% of salary
- Medical Insurance
- Accrual of up to two weeks of vacation per year



As an Account Manager your bonus will be based on \_\_\_\_\_ and paid out annually. Usually within 45 days from closing our annual books and financial statement.

Your employment is “at will” which therefore, we recognize that you retain the option, as does Harvester Landscape Services Inc., of ending your employment with us at any time, with or without notice and with or without cause. Neither our oral or written representations may be considered a contract of employment for any specific period of time.

Please speak to Betty regarding any administration and for setting up your payment and equipment. In addition she will need evidence of auto insurance and a clean DMV printout before you can claim the monthly automobile allowance. Also please bring the needed documents to satisfy the I9 requirements.

We look forward to having you join Harvester Landscape Services, Inc. and become a member of our team. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions about starting your employment with us.

Welcome aboard,

Harvester Bill

### SAMPLE EMPLOYEE SURVEY

Here are 20 sample questions (out of 50 questions) from our employee survey that we conduct during our Harvest Assessment. Employee surveys should be conducted annually and used to assist with your company’s planning process.

Evaluate each survey item using the following rating scale:

1=“Strongly Disagree” 2=“Disagree” 3=“Neither Disagree nor Agree”4=“Agree”5=“Strongly Agree”

Rating:

- \_\_\_ 1. Our company has a clear vision of the future
- \_\_\_ 2. My role in the company is clearly defined
- \_\_\_ 3. My goals are clearly defined and well understood
- \_\_\_ 5. I have enough support and resources to accomplish my goals
- \_\_\_ 6. Our team spirit/morale is very good
- \_\_\_ 7. When I have a problem, people listen and give positive input
- \_\_\_ 8. My opinions count and are listened to
- \_\_\_ 9. I received quality feedback on how I am doing on a regular basis
- \_\_\_ 10. I am working at my fullest potential
- \_\_\_ 11. In the last month I have received recognition or praise for doing a good job
- \_\_\_ 12. The team I work with is completely satisfied with their jobs
- 13. List the three leadership characteristics that are most important to you.
- 14. Does company leadership consistently demonstrate these characteristics?  
Yes or No Please give three examples to support your answer.
- 15. What are the three primary strengths of the company’s leadership team?
- 16. What three areas require the most improvement at our company?
- 17. From 1-5, with “5” being the highest, what is your current level of career satisfaction?  
What can the company do to get you to a “5”? What can you do to get you to a “5”?
- 18. From 1-5, with “5” being the highest, how do you rate your overall job performance?
- 19. What are your top three goals to accomplish during the next year, how measured?
- 20. If you could change one thing about the company, what would it be?

## **SAMPLE ON-BOARDING FOR AN ACCOUNT MANAGER**

### **PURPOSE**

- The purpose of this 90-day program is to provide the new Account Manager with a clear sense of priorities by learning the company's way of doing business. There are many things to learn during these first 90 days, and as such, it is very important to begin the process the right way.

### **1) OPERATIONS**

- First 30 Days
  - a) Visit all jobs, evaluate each job's quality, and identify action items
  - b) Established as the leader of Foremen they will have respect for him.
  - c) Knows what a quality job looks like and how to get a job to "standard."
- First 60 days
  - a) Establish a safety program with weekly tailgate talks.
  - b) Understand what gross margin is and how to raise margins
- First 90 Days
  - a) Prepare a 90-day plan to improve operations.

### **2) TECHNICAL SKILLS**

- a) Demonstrate knowledge of irrigation systems, problem identification

### **3) MANAGERIAL SKILLS**

- a) Demonstrate efficient time management skills.
- b) Demonstrate effective verbal and written communication skills.

### **4) SUCCESS BEHAVIORS**

- a) Demonstrate a "can do" attitude along with a clear sense of urgency.
- b) Is perceived as being a team player.

### **5) CREWS**

- a) Establish positive relations with the work crews.
- b) Know the names and basic background of each team member

### **6) CLIENTS**

- a) Learn the names and locations of the top 20 accounts by dollar amount
- b) Spend at least 5-6 hours each day reviewing jobs with clients or Foremen.

### **7) COMPANY LEADERSHIP**

- a) Learn the dos and don'ts from the company leadership.
- b) Spend 15 to 30 minutes at the end of each day with immediate supervisor to debrief, brainstorm, and get on the same page; review schedules and priorities.
- c) At the end of each week, complete a 10-15 report and review it with immediate supervisor.

## **COMPLETE THE 10-15 REPORT WEEKLY**

Take 10 minutes to answer the following questions then take 15 minutes to review it with your immediate your supervisor each week:

My morale this week is:

What I learned this week:

Here are some recommendations I have for the Company:

Coach's Corner

Observations: \_\_\_\_\_

Coaching Areas: \_\_\_\_\_

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

Tasks Assigned/Follow Up:

Priority	Action item	Date to complete by:

## ON BOARDING OVERVIEW

### 1) The Setting

- Social setting, informal atmosphere, friendly tone; food and drinks are provided.
- Spanish translation, if necessary.

### 2) Attendees

- New employees with account manager have executive team/ branch manager or human resources manager give their portions of the program.

### 3) Introduction

- Owner or owner's representative statement:
  - Company history, current status, and how the new employees will contribute to future success.
  - Explains organizational values (i.e., job quality, safety, customer service, gross profit).
  - Company employees introduce themselves and welcome new employees to the team.
  - Transitions to human resources for orientation program overview.

### 4) Orientation Overview

- Preparation for work:

- Employee handbook: Topic overview (i.e. pay periods, procedures, safety culture).
- Job descriptions: Clarify roles & responsibilities, performance expectations, and career path.
- Drug test: Purpose, timing, and location.
- DMV report: Purpose, timing, and documentation.

- Prior to starting work:

- Completed documents: Employment application, handbook paperwork, and DMV report.
- New employee orientation program:
  - Vision, mission statement, core values and success behaviors.
  - Overview of policies and procedures, operational guidelines, and safety culture.
  - Hands-on equipment training.
  - Yard tour.
- Employees are transported to clinic for pre-employment drug tests.

- Starting work:

- Branch manager and account managers introduce new employees to current employees.

- 30-day review

- Human resources or account manager meets with new employees to debrief transition process, solicit feedback, and improve subsequent orientation programs.

### 5) Conclusion

- Encourage questions from new employees, clarify key points, and re-assure them.
- Specify action items and calendar dates.
- Human resources distributes business cards as points of contact.

**ON-BOARDING CHECKLIST**

## Culture

- Vision, mission, core values and success behaviors
- Introduction to key people
- Tour of facility
- Company dos and don'ts
- Assign a coach or buddy

## Expectations Reviewed

- Job description review
- Punctuality and success behaviors reviewed and understood
- List of corporate policies
- Employee handbook reviewed and signed
- Yard norms: parking, break times, lunch time, time card process
- Performance expectations: quality, safety, productivity, training & certifications
- Performance appraisal form

## Review of Compliance:

- Verify I9 requirements are in place
- Complete E-verify where required or where companies have in place
- Workers' compensation
- Unemployment insurance
- State disability insurance
- Sexual harassment review
- Equal Employment Opportunity
- Paid Family Leave Act

## Safety Overview:

- Safety program review
- Injury reporting process
- Safety training topics
- Back injury prevention
- PPEs assigned
- Proper lifting techniques
- Heat illness prevention training
- Hazard communication overview
- Injury and illness prevention program

## Equipment Operation/ Training and Certification

- Mowers, blowers, edge trimmer, power hedge trimmer, string trimmer
- Defensive driving overview

**SAMPLE EXIT INTERVIEW**

Employee's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## 1) Preparation

- Request the exit interview from the employee; do not coerce the employee to have the meeting.

## 2) Meeting or Teleconference Protocol

- State that the purpose of the exit interview is to improve the company, not get someone in trouble.
- Solicit candid feedback from the employee without interrogation.

## 3) Survey Questions

(1 = Poor 2 = Below Average 3 = Average 4 = Above Average  
5 = Outstanding)

- How would you rate the quality of supervision you received at our company?
- Rate the level of compensation/rewards/recognition at our company?
- Rate the level of training provided to you while working at our company?

## 4) Narrative Questions

- What is the primary reason you are leaving our company at this time?
- If you could change any one thing at this company, what would it be and why?
- What could we have done to keep you from leaving our company at this time?
- What is the key aspect of your new position that is so attractive to you?

## 5) End of the Meeting

Thank the employee for his/her time and effort while working for the company, and for the time spent in this exit interview.

Wish the employee good luck in his/her next job and throughout his/her career.

## LESSON 11: THE NEXT STEPS FOR BUILDING YOUR RECRUITING THE RIGHT PEOPLE PROGRAM

Well now that you have finished this book it is my hope that this has reenergized your commitment to become a “best in class” organization. Most certainly being “best in class” will come to fruition through your ability to “attract, get on board, keep and grow the right people” I think I have made that point several times. (No kidding Harvester Bill)

At the beginning of this book I shared with you: How to Use this Book. So now I would like for you to look back and see where this book can help you moving forward.

Read and Highlight the Good Stuff That Stands Out. Go through each chapter and read and digest the material presented. I usually either use a highlighter or I dog-ear a page that really hit home with me.

What areas did you highlight or dog-ear? List some here:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

Were there any quotes that particularly caught your attention? Which ones?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

Identify Two or Three Areas to Work On. Identify two or three areas you should be working on to improve your PEOPLE program. Pick three areas that you need to develop or tune up. What are they?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

How will you go about this? When will these be in play? Who will champion these?

Try Out Some of the Tips. Look for Helpful Hints, Notes etc. that are in larger print. These are meant to have high impact. These are truly “nuggets” that have been learned over decades of experience. Try out some of these tips and see how they work for you.

What tips rang true? Which quotes will you be using or saying?

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Tool Box Cornucopia. Now go to the toolbox section and see what tools are available in the areas that you are in need.

What tools will come in handy for you? How will you go about using?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

Please send me some of your success stories or some of your recruiting tips, ok? Let’s see what new ideas you can come up with and let me know how they work for you. I will use them in the first revision of this book and be happy to give you the credit! I promise. Send them to [bill@harvestlandscapeconsulting.com](mailto:bill@harvestlandscapeconsulting.com)

Hey, even Harvester Bill after 30 years of recruiting is always on the hunt for more ideas and nifty programs to help organizations become “best in class” so please touch base with me when you encounter some great new ideas on recruiting OK?

I hope you enjoyed reading this book on recruiting and will be using some of the tips, tactics and techniques I have listed. If you found this book to be helpful we have plenty more good helpful and practical stuff. I invite you to contact the Head Harvesters on our website [www.harvestlandscapeconsulting.com](http://www.harvestlandscapeconsulting.com) to learn other areas where we can help with your journey to “there.”

Here are a few samples of other programs and “Best Practices” we have ready.

- Marketing & Sales: Attracting, Getting On-Board, Keeping and Growing the Right Clients
- Quality Counts: How to Deliver Consistently at the Highest Levels and Still Make Money
- People: How to Keep & Grow the Right People in Your Organization & Have the Rest go to Your Competition
- Human Resources: Complete Guide to the “Best People” Practices
- The GrossMarginator: How to make more Gross Margin while delivering the best quality

Wishing you all the very best,  
Head Harvester Bill

# CONCLUSION:

## GO FORTH AND RECRUIT

Finding, Attracting, Getting On-Board, Keeping and Growing the Right People is the most critical competency an organization must possess to become successful, and to enjoy sustainable success. The first part of this People equation is Finding, Attracting and Getting On-Board the Right People. This is where we have spent our time together in this book sharing all of the tips, tactics and techniques that will help you with this part of the people business.

You now have the makings for building your own “recruiting machine.” If you really get after it, I feel quite confident you can get your machinery in place in less than 30 days. Keep in mind it took me 30 years to get most of these tools in place so this will most certainly shorten your learning curve. WOW! How nice is that?

Having a recruiting program is very similar to having a well thought out and executed sales and marketing program. We must ALWAYS keep our “radar” on and ALWAYS be on the lookout for opportunities with people – and with customers. This applies to both retention and recruitment.

In this book, I have shown you that if you have your People Radar on at all times you can find opportunities virtually everywhere. I have found great candidates in elevators, car washes, restaurants, conferences, on the train, in the plane and through others who are eagerly giving me leads all of the time.

Finding and Attracting the Right People must become second nature and part of the fabric of your organization. People really need to understand and embrace the concept that the more talented people we have in our organizations the more opportunities there will be for all.

My encouragement to those who have struggled with this area of your business

is that there is hope. However, you need to take action and that usually starts with you the leader. No longer can you afford to just talk about how hard it is to find good people you need to do something about it. You need to exude the importance of this critical area throughout your organization. Your people really need to be involved and engaged. You need to have a plan, the right tools and commit the resources to make this happen.

All of us are “very busy” doing what we think and believe are the right things to become successful. And yet we usually end up doing the things that we are either most comfortable with or what is the most urgent emergency episode that has “landed” before us during the day-to-day operations of running a busy landscape company.

Take a good look at where you are spending your time and please include a good amount (at least 20 to 25 percent) of it with leading and inspiring your current people as well as finding and getting on-board the right people for your organization.

**GO FORTH AND RECRUIT!**



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR: HEAD HARVESTER BILL ARMAN

Harvester Bill is trained and educated as a horticulturist along with a long career in corporate landscaping nurtured at one of the nation's largest landscape companies. His expertise in people development and helping organizations thrive is rooted in 35 years of experience growing great programs and people.

After successfully leading ValleyCrest's Southern California region and overseeing the company's multi-million-dollar portfolio, Bill developed and implemented a national training program, performance management system and the recruiting program as ValleyCrest's V.P. of Human Resources.

In 2007, Bill co-founded a national landscape business consultancy/coaching firm called The Harvest Group, where he serves as The Head Harvester.

Today, Bill and his fellow Head Harvesters, Ed Laflamme, Steve Cesare and Cindy Code travel nationwide helping organizations, leaders and team members in "Harvesting Their Potential" with their Harvest Way "Best in Class" program.

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can help you get from "here" to "there,"  
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## ABOUT THE COVER

For those of you who know me, you know that besides the landscape industry and the people who are part of it my next passion is wine. Red wine in particular. I am the co-founder of a red wine tasting group known as the Grapeful Reds. We have sampled many wines from around the world and remain in pursuit of our motto, “in search of exemplar red.” So with this passion and interest in mind, the idea for the cover of this book was born and created. It shows the pastoral scene of a beautiful vineyard and shows the bountiful harvest of some selected grapes. This serves as a symbol for recruiting and hiring the right people and hopefully that this book will help your recruiting program a whole “bunch.”