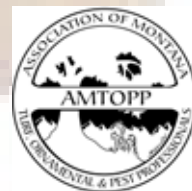


AMTOPP News



Fall - October 2020

President's Message



Along with scrambling to finish our work for the season, your board of directors has also been discussing options for the coming year's conference, weighing the current climate and trying to decide what is best for AMTOPP and its members. Unfortunately we have come to the conclusion that not only is the risk due to COVID too great to hold our regular conference, but also trying to plan a large get together for this winter is a huge logistical undertaking that looks to be more and more impossible as time passes. While it saddens us as board members as well as members of AMTOPP (not to mention hot tub connoisseurs!) we believe that we have come up with

some viable alternatives that will both allow us to offer continuing education credits as well as establish some infrastructure for the future of our organization.

Trudie has been hard at work for the last few months looking into online courses, and is currently working to establish an online portal which will offer everyone the chance to redeem their credits. We also are rolling out some videos for crew training and safety. While these videos will not be for credits, it should help establish a 'one-stop-shop' for new crew ad safety training. Stay tuned over the next few months as we hope to begin rolling the content out in the coming weeks!

We are also looking into a silent auction platform to help raise funds for ongoing AMTOPP projects. While it may not be as entertaining as a live auction, we should be able to get some great items to bid on in the coming months! Stay tuned for more infor-

mation.

Even though we will not be having an in person conference, we hope that members will come together to help support our organization by renewing their memberships. All of our funds come from the members, and we appreciate your support during this time!

As always, your board of directors is here to answer any questions or help our membership in any way possible. Please do not hesitate to reach out during this uncertain time if we can be of assistance to you or your business!

Thank you so much for making AMTOPP as great an organization as it is. We rely on your support for keeping us going, and please let us know if you have any concerns, questions or comments

Cooper Elwood
President - 2020

Support Structures and Clients

By: **Dudley Marburger**
Vice President AMTOPP 2020

I was in my first year of business in Tucson Arizona. It was the early eighties and I was buying plants at a local nursery. Silverbell Nursery was owned by two brothers and successful. One of the brothers came up to assist me in my selections. He asked, "Dudley I like you. Can I give you some business advice?" "Of course." I said. Advice from an experienced person in business successfully for many years. That is a no brainer. He told me to get a CPA and a lawyer to advise me in my efforts to run a young company. Not a bookkeeper though a good bookkeeper is worth their weight in gold. A Certified Public Accountant and a licensed Lawyer. Well I played soccer with a CPA and I played soccer with a lawyer. I have changed accountants three times in over thirty years but have kept the same lawyer.

Most business spend an inordinate amount of time thinking about servicing their clients. The rest of the time is spent about hiring and training good people. Both of these components are critical to a well run business. And they deserve numerous articles in their own merits. This article is about the support structure that a business requires to offer a quality product to their clients. And a energetic, safe work environment that will attract quality personnel.

There are several components of this support chain. Money or cash flow would be on top of the list. Access to capital can make or break a small business. Many years ago it was Friday and I was going to make payroll with my credit card. Yet I was owed over eight thousand dollars in completed jobs. So I went around town and

asked my clients for the money owed. I collected over seven thousand dollars and made payroll. Do not be afraid to include in your bidding process, how am I going to be paid and when am I going to be paid. You do the work, they give you the money. Along with that, get to know your banker. Or several bankers. Many banks specialize and sometimes can custom fit a line of credit to a particular situation your business might be in. Like buying large equipment. Go to lunch with your banker, let him know about your family, run you business plans and expansion plans through them. I was recently looking at buying a nursery. My wife and I thought it was a good idea. My banker, when I brought the proposal to him asked, "Why." I am sixty-five and looking at retirement. Why would it be a good idea to start into a new endeavor at this point in life. A new motorcycle, or fishing boat maybe.

Having a good supply chain is also critical to offering a quality product to your clients. This and providing your employees good and safe equipment to make their time more productive. You cannot install quality landscapes if you do not have a quality line of supply. When I do jobs over five thousand dollars I always get a down payment. This accomplishes several things. One, the client has skin in the game and is a lot less likely to cancel the work after supplies are ordered and schedules are made. Second, I pay my vendors right away with the money the client deposits with the contract. If the client, for what ever reason pulls out of the agreement, my vendors are paid and so is my crew. I might take a hit on the profit but my integrity as a business owner will remain intact with

Continued - See Support page 6

Benchmarking for Improved Profit

This article was published in The Landscape Professional magazine, September/October issue.

By Jeffrey Scott

As an owner, it's your job to become a data scientist and learn how to manage your landscape business like any other business: by the correct numbers and benchmarks. This will allow you to become a successful investor in your own business! Start by getting a handle on these seven benchmarks:

1. Five-year trends.

The most important benchmark is comparing yourself to yourself. Like any great athlete that competes primarily against him or herself, you must keep track of your past performances. Most firms look back just one year for comparison, but a five-year-lookback will give you an actual trend line to see where you are improving (or faltering) over time. This is why company valuations are often built on five-year trends, because it shows the competitive arc of the business.

2. Benchmark the big picture.

The ultimate purpose of your business is to buy things and hire people in order to serve your clients, with the aim of producing a positive cash flow to invest in growth and take dividends. We can sum this up in 3 benchmarks: 1) Squeeze maximum revenue from the trucks/equipment/things you buy (Sales/Assets). 2) Operate with efficiency and a smart pricing strategy to earn the most profit from those revenues (Profit/Sales). 3) Ensure maximum effectiveness turning your profits into a positive

cash flow, aka, cash/profits.

3. Measure activities and results.

In any business, the right results are determined by the right actions. 'Sales' is the perfect example:

Activities, e.g.: How many lunch-n-learns do your salespeople perform? How many leads or RFP are you receiving? How many proposals are your salespeople sending out?

Results e.g.: What is their closing ratio? What are their margins-as-built? What are their total sales? What are their enhancement sales as a percent of maintenance contracts?

In each area of your business define the most important activities that lead to the right results, and track and manage both.

4. Triangulate your numbers.

Any number/percent you take time to review should be done in context, by comparing it against the budget and against the actuals from last year. This answers two key questions: How are we doing vs. our goals? and how well did we do last year at this same point in time? It is best to put these into chart or graph form when you share and discuss with your team. This allows non-financially minded leaders to actively engage in discussion and make informed decisions.

5. Empower the divisions.

Your growth potential lies in treating your divisions as profit centers, but before you grow them you should optimize their profitability. Look at each division's gross and net profit, and benchmark these internally and vs. best in class! Treat each division manager as an intrapreneur and you will optimize your chances for success.

6. Motivate crew performance.

Each division is made of individuals doing work. Their performance will vary from crew to crew and can be tracked as follows: 'revenue per man hour' and 'revenue per man-day and man-week.' You can benchmark your crews versus one another to create internal competition, and you can benchmark vs. best in class to gain perspective on what's possible.

7. Remove the biggest internal obstacle.

To become a successful investor, you must master the soft skills as well as the numbers. But where to start? Because all leaders have their blind spots, I recommend benchmarking your blind spots against your teams, and identify where you and each team member must improve. You can also get outside help, by working with an exceptional coach to understand how you compare with other top performers in the industry. As I tell my coaching clients, "When you continually grow yourself as a leader, the sky is the limit!"

Every business is different and will require a unique set of benchmarks based on its business model and service mix. Apply these seven outlined here as a start and figure out what works best for you!

Interested in learning more? Attend the two-part "Benchmarking for Profit Improvement" session at LANDSCAPES 2020: The Virtual Experience on Wednesday, Oct. 21 at 12:15-1:15 p.m. and 1:30-2:30 p.m.



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Behavioral Safety - Who Is Responsible For Safety?

By: Michelle Gonzales
Behavioral Safety

Safety is everyone's responsibility! As an employee, you should:

- Learn to work safely and take all rules seriously.
- Recognize hazards and avoid them.
- Report all accidents, injuries and illness to your supervisor immediately.

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- Inspect tools before use to avoid injury.
 - Wear all assigned personal protective equipment.
- On the other hand, it is management's responsibility to:

- Provide a safe and healthy workplace.
- Provide personal protective equipment.
- Train employees in safe procedures and in how to identify hazards.

Everyone must be aware of potential hazards on the job:

- Poor housekeeping results in slips, trips and falls.
- Electricity can cause shocks, burns or fire if not handled properly.
- Poor material handling may cause back problems or other injuries.
- Tools and equipment can cause injuries if guards or protective devices are disengaged.

Always use the protections that are provided on the job:

- Guards on machines and tools keep body parts from contacting moving equipment.
- Insulation on electrical equipment prevents burns, shock and fire.
- Lockout/tagout assures equipment is de-energized before it is repaired.

See Safety on page 6

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From Our Affiliates

Ash Pests on the Rise

By: Dr. Laurie Kerzicnik
Associate Extension Specialist II
MSU Extension



Our ash trees cannot seem to catch a break. Most areas around the state of Montana experienced severe temperature fluctuations in October of 2019. As a result, several of our ash trees had symptoms of winter kill and dieback. Some trees were just starting to leaf out in late June/early July; some didn't recover. This summer, we saw extensive damage statewide from ash bark beetles. These beetles have been established in the state and have been detected in ash trees for several years. But this year the damage was extensive. Additionally, woodpeckers were stripping the bark to feed on the immature or larval stage of the beetles. This left these trees even further exposed and weakened. We also saw can-

kerworms, lace bugs, and sawflies feeding on the leaves. Lace bugs are sap feeders and leave stippling-like injuries in addition to fecal spots on the underside of the leaves. We are yet to confirm the emerald ash borer in the state but are monitoring closely. On our end, we can try our best to keep ash pruned, watered, and as free of stress as possible. Removal of unhealthy ash is inevitable and will be more common with environmental and insect stressors affecting the trees.

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Support - continued from page 1

the supply chain.

We all experience breakdowns with the equipment. The landscape industry is hard on both people and the tools we use. I have one guy that loves to break shovels. It takes a

certain type of person to work in this profession. Tough, creative and loving the outdoors. Having someone that can sell, maintain or repair your equipment is essential. I worked for a large tree company in Los Angeles years ago. They had two mechanics come in when we got done with our day. They spent the night repairing, servicing, and sharpening. When we arrived the next day all was in readiness. If a saw broke down or got dull, we just picked up

another one and kept on pruning. This was a big company. I also worked for Davey Tree during this same time. They would use their trucks for seven years. Tear them down and completely rebuild them. Guess how many years you can depreciate equipment. I tend to rent equipment. I use so many types in my jobs it would be prohibitive to own every piece. I can rent a \$65,000 piece of equipment for five hundred bucks a day. Then just pass the cost onto the client that we used the equipment for. You should be adding

the use cost of owned equipment on the client anyway. The difference being if it breaks down on the job the rental company sends out their mechanic or they get me another machine. Thus no down time. If you use a piece of equipment three or more days a week, buy it. But be prepared to insure it, repair it, and store it.

Insurance, insurance, insurance. Another many articles to discuss this very important and expensive portion of business. A major expense and surely disliked as we all know, until you get that fateful phone call. If you want to own a business four things must happen. You are in business for ten or more years. You will face a lawsuit, thus the lawyer. You will face a workman's comp claim, thus the insurance. You will face bankruptcy, thus the banker.

The true profit in being in business is control of most of your time. Taking on projects that are both beneficial to your clients and creative endeavors and profitable. There is nothing wrong with making a fair and reasonable profit. After all that is why our name is on the t-shirt. And the paycheck.

Safety - continued from page 4

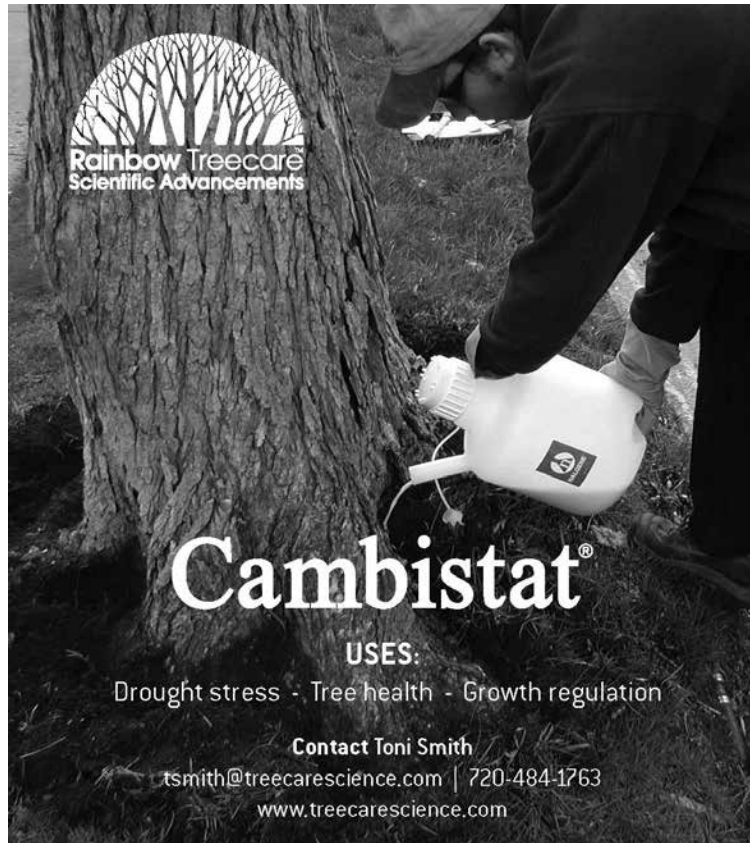
- Personal protective equipment shields your body from hazards you may face on the job.

In case of emergency:

- Understand alarms and evacuation routes.
- Know how to notify emergency response personnel.
- Implement a procedure for leaving the scene safely so emergency personnel can do their job.
- Wipe up spills promptly and correctly.

Safety benefits everyone. With fewer injuries, a business can be more productive and profitable. By incorporating safety rules, employees avoid injury as well as illness from exposure to hazardous substances.

Taken from the website: Safety Toolbox Topics <http://safetytoolboxtopics.com/Behavioral-Safety/behavioral-safety-who-is-responsible-for-safety.html>



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