

# PLANET

SPRING 2007

## *advantage*

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AND IMMIGRATION ISSUES

# What has the 'school of hard knocks' taught you?

**SUSAN SADLER, CLP, CLT**



## I learned to delegate to grow

In addition to being the owner of Plantscapers/Green Life Interiors, from day one I have also been the manager, technician, office manager, accountant, director of human resources, salesperson, customer service representative, and so forth. Most interior plantscaping companies start out this way, and many owners like myself probably think that being able to delegate responsibility with the developing team will come naturally.

I found this not to be the case. After filling all these roles in differing degrees, I developed "my way of running the business." I had a comprehensive plan for how Green Life Interiors should be operated, accompanied by a set of expectations for the end results. When I personally worked the above job responsibilities, I was confident that the desired quality and service levels would be met. I also knew that by delegating these same responsibilities, I would lose direct control of the decision-making and the end results.

Instead of gradually handing over responsibilities, I became entrenched doing everything I could myself. Our company wasn't growing as fast as it could, or should, because I wasn't spending time doing what owners and managers should be doing. Our lack of growth eventually forced my hand, and I devised a set of principles that helped me embrace the concept of delegation. They are:

- Select the right team member(s)
- Provide ongoing training and communication
- Put accountability measures in place
- Trust your team member(s)

Following these principles, I have now begun to let go of some daily details, and our company is growing. Green Life Interiors would be a more developed company today if I had recognized the benefits of delegation sooner. If growth is one of your company's goals, then consider the lesson I learned the hard way over time: Delegation is critical if you truly want to develop and grow your company.

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## Not every new service fits, despite appearances

Six years ago, we tried our hand at offering aquatic management services. Our company purchased a "swamp buggy" and the appropriate chemicals, and I became certified. It seemed to be a natural fit. Many of our commercial clients had retaining ponds, and we could easily add the new service to our present offering. As they say, this was a "no brainer."

It proved to be that in more ways than one, because I didn't think it through. I didn't do enough research to find how important, or unimportant, the service was to our clients. It's the same old story; I became knowledgeable as a practitioner, but was less skilled at running our business. I didn't put enough effort into marketing the new service, because I didn't have the time. Furthermore, I was the only one who could apply the chemicals, which meant I had even less time to spend on other parts of our company.

The long and short of it was simply this. I applied the chemicals for two years and got them out of the business. My husband David and I have learned a few other lessons the hard way over the years, and many of them echo the above experience. When we first started our landscape installation/construction company, we thought we needed to diversify to give us a measure of security. We grew the landscape management side of the business, and we plowed snow essentially because that's what "everyone" did.

Our company gave up snow three years ago, because the business was wrecking our nerves, and we have reduced the size of our maintenance operation to one crew — essentially to support our installations. We have disbanded a few other services, as well, all in the name of allowing us to focus more on what we do best, installation and construction.

What is the hard lesson? Only this, our success isn't dependent on doing many things, but instead it is driven by our passion and commitment to do what we do best.

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