

The Vegetation Manager

Serving the vegetation management industry



FALL 2015

this issue

▶ FEATURED ARTICLE	03-05
COMPETITORS CAN BE ALLIES	
▶ IT STARTS WITH A SEED	06-07
▶ BUSINESS INSIGHTS	09
DIVERSIFICATION	
▶ WAKE UP CALL FOR	10-11
GEN Y WORKFORCE	
▶ PVMA UPDATE	12

Featured Article

Competitors can be allies

Business Insight
Diversification

The Business of Families

Laura Hammer

**Wake up call for Gen Y
workforce**

Bill Hoopes - TrainingChamp

Fall Edition

Alberta's Vegetation Managers

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FALL 2015

contents

Featured Articles

- 03-05 Competitors can be Allies
- 06-07 The Business of Families
- 09 Business Insight - Diversification
- 10-11 Wake up call for Gen Y workforce
- 12 PVMA Update

Featured Article

Competitors can be allies

Julie Thoring, Freelancer

Competitors can be allies. This concept probably isn't something that most business owners agree with, but according to Laura Hammer, owner of Cortex Management Inc., this idea is crucial in the vegetation management industry. She explained the reason behind the need for a collaborative vision in the industry this way, 'Herbicide application is a unique industry where the demand will always be there but the supply might not.' As public awareness and advocacy for the environment increases the herbicide applications industry may face more opposition. 'Whether you work for a herbicide manufacturer, an application company or the government, everyone needs to work together to ensure the future of this industry,' said Hammer. It's vital that her and her counterparts work together to keep herbicide application sustainable.

Hammer has some ideas about how all herbicide applicators can work together to protect their industry. One of them is the development of legislation that would require applicators to obtain a professional designation. She believes creating a certification process would go a long way towards protecting the image of herbicide applicators in the public eye. 'We all know there are a lot of bad applicators out there, doing questionable applications. These operators, whether knowingly or unknowingly, tarnish the industry.' Hammer believes a professional designation would demonstrate to the public that herbicide application is an actual profession. She added, 'I have often had to defend my recommendations because people simply don't believe that I am educated and experienced and that this is indeed a true profession.'

Hammer hopes applicators, herself included, can work to soften their image as professionals who actually care about the environment. She added, 'In all applications I do, and in all the work I have ever done, I have always seen it as my role to protect pesticides as a tool in holistic environmental management.' She believes that the way to protect the use of herbicides is to use them responsibly, while demonstrating competence to the public, both on paper and in the field. 'If we do this, the majority of the public will be on board with our protecting the environment through discretionary pesticide use.'

Hammer says another way applicators can work to improve the public's perception of pesticide use is by keeping any and all interactions with the public as positive as possible. She explained; showing people how herbicide application has had a positive effect on their lives will help people see the value of this tool. Before and after photos are a great way to do this, 'People need to see the long term effects of our work.' Hammer says people often only see the plants they didn't spray, and not the plants that were sprayed and therefore are no longer visible. 'We are painted by the public as an industry who just kills plants, but we need to finish the story for them. Yes, we kill plants but we only kill some plants so that the more desirable plants can grow' said Hammer.

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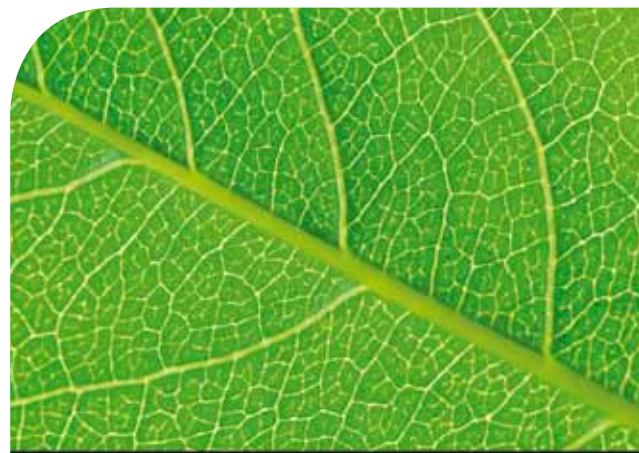
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As with any industry, one of greatest obstacles is finding competent employees to do the work. Hammer takes great care in selecting the right staff and recognizes that their industry has a unique advantage when it comes to recruiting employees.

'There are a lot of benefits with this work that most people don't recognize and having the winters off is one of them.' Since starting Cortex, Hammer has been able work as a ski instructor, something she's always wanted to do. She says owning Cortex Management has given her a new type of work/life balance, which is a perk of the job that she often promotes to prospective employees. Another way Hammer has addressed staffing issues is by taking the time to invest in each employee personally. She believes mentoring is very important and says, 'In the craziness of the summer we need to take time with our staff, show that we care about them, and share our knowledge and experiences with them.' Hammer added, 'Many people choose their work based on interest, but they stay because of positive interactions they have had with people in the industry. I know I did.'

Julie Ma, Freelancer



The Business of Families

Laura Hammer

Its no secret that this can be a tough business. Customers calling (or not calling), fighting weather, staffing and equipment issues, early mornings and late nights. We know our season is short so we plunge ourselves into it hoping to come out with something for ourselves on the other side when we finally surface and can breath again. What kind of wake for our families do we leave behind?

Speaking from experience, those with young families are pulled in every direction. The joke around our home is: 'The kids will remember my name in October'. Long days means I'm usually gone when the kids get up and only home about half the time they go to bed. I have found the kids to be extra clingy when I am around, my son has a habit of crawling on me like a lion cub. Our daughter asks: 'Why did you start a company mommy? You are always so busy now.' My heart and soul are crushed. She's 8, she knows what she is doing. Even when I'm home, I'm not really home. I'm usually on the phone or doing paperwork. The demands of the season conflict with the fun summertime the rest of the world seems to be having. But I love the fast pace, I love being busy and I love that I have no idea what the day is going to bring when I wake up.

The kids have learned to be more independent too. Mommy is simply not around as much and everyone is busy so they have to entertain themselves, get their own snacks, and take care of their own skinned knees. I'm pretty proud my 5 year old knows how to pump up his bike tires and my 8 year old can make us coffee. A happy mommy makes for happy kids. And it will all be worth it when I can be around more in the winter for the everyday things like school field trips and ski lessons. Last I checked there is more winter than summer around here. Plus they think mommy has some pretty kool trucks and they like to go for rides on the UTV's. My husband Mike is the ever supportive partner, ready to help. He makes sure I am fed and am taking care of myself. He helps spray when we are short a person. He knows by my mood and if he should bring me tea or wine. It feels like the family revolves around me and the job for the summer. 'All Hammers on deck!' The kids help cleaning signs, organizing paperwork and maintaining equipment. It will be good in the winter when I can return the favour to all of them. We are turning my dream into our dream and its great to have a team.



Article Continued...

Some families with teenagers have things a bit different. Danette Kohut with BGK Sprayers puts it this way about her two teenage sons; 'Since starting the business five years ago I have found that yes, I do have less time with my kids. The time we have together we have really great talks. Our time is more valuable and more valued. The kids have their lives and they see I have mine. I like to think that I'm setting a good example for them about what it means to work hard and love your job. I'm teaching them to be happy productive adults and they best way I know how to do that is to be their example'. Does Danette see her kids joining the family business? She says 'I want my boys to go out and work away from home. They need to learn about expectations, work ethic, success, disappointment, and real life situations out in the real world. When they go and have experiences they can learn from and realize what it takes to make it out there, then I'd consider hiring them.' Great advice to those mixing family and business.

Family and business, with all this hard work what is the reward to the family? A bigger home? Nicer vacations? More stuff? To some this may be the case, and to many it is not. Families who have been in the business for a long time see the ultimate rewards, the obvious and the subtle. Sarah McDonald with Ace Vegetation knows all too well what family life is like in this business. Her father Ian McDonald has been in the business for 40 years. Sarah grew up at times with Ian gone a lot, but he always found a way to be home when it meant the most.

Sarah was one of the lucky kids who got to tag along with dad on client meetings and site visits, back in the day when rules weren't so strict. It didn't take her long to realize she was learning a lot of things that her friends were missing out on. She learned patience and saw how to deal with people, and negotiate. She experienced land and nature, and how people interact with them. Her primary role was co-pilot and she can now offer her crews directions pretty much anywhere in the Alberta. She knows the business but acknowledges she has so much more to learn: 'There are so many different ways I can go with this.

Business, marketing, environment, science, people, everything is here". And now after university and other job experiences she finds herself working alongside her dad. This summer has been intense for her but Sarah has had some time to reflect on her position: 'I never really knew how good my dad was at his job, until I starting working with him. He is well known, well liked and respected in the industry. I'm really proud of him. I didn't know that, but I see it now. All the times he was gone, he was building something. He was building the business by building people and now I can be part of it.' Sarah tries to hide her pride but it comes through with the loudest sincerity. I remember Sarah valiantly dismissing ideas of her entering into the business full time. She said it to me in when she was in highschool and in university. Now she finds herself planning into the future and has a fresh new perspective to add to what her father has built. Her maturity and confidence are evident when you speak to her and she claims a lot of that has to do with her early experiences helping her father in the field.

Families are integral to our success. They support us and we all know we couldn't do it without them. We often work like we do for our families and sometimes at their expense. If we stick with it long enough, we see the fruits of our labours with a successful company and a happy bottom line. What we are working at is not as important as how we are working. We all know, no matter what we do someone is always watching us. Sometimes the most important people in our lives are watching; our families.





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Business Insight Diversity or not?

By: Neil Thiessen, Able Business Consulting



To give variety to; vary: **diversify** a menu. b. To extend (business activities) into disparate (different or dissimilar) fields. 2. To distribute (investments) among different companies or securities in order to limit losses in

the event of a fall in a particular market or industry. (www.thefreedictionary.com/diversification)

There is much written on the subject of diversification. We generally think of diversification when we think about spreading risk in own investment portfolios. We also consider diversification of our business services as a benefit to offer our customers a more complete suite of services and/or products. We see examples of this in our industry across the country.

The questions that often determines if diversification is a good thing should be focused on 'how does this provide better or a wider range of services/or products to existing and potential new customers? And, do these products or services leverage our existing core values and strengths? Too often diversification for the sake of diversification is not within current competence and capacity and often lacks change management strategies to ensure success.

Diversification is usually a strategy to enter into a new market which the business is currently not in. This according to the 'Ansoff Matrix' theory is most risky as it usually involves different technical, financial and marketing resources. In other words, usually requires a company to develop new skills.

Experts in the field of diversification say that the goal should result in better financial performance and leverage of existing resources.

This can only be achieved with committed leadership and engaged employees.

It is critical that there is clarity on the reasons for diversifying and an appropriate strategy in place to facilitate the process.

At the end of the day diversification should create value to the enterprise in excess to what it normally enjoyed. Experts do caution those of us that are considering diversification outside our CORE business, as it sometimes can lead to lower overall company performance.

Asses if your diversification opportunity is right for you. Diversification should result in CORE BUSINESS plus DIVERSITY equals MORE THAN THE SUM OF EACH.

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Wake up call for Gen Y workforce

Bill Hoopes - TrainingChamp

Achtung! Wake up kids, it's a new ball game! Listen closely now, I've got a new word to add to your vocabulary....layoff. Making my rounds as a small business consultant, in the past 90 days, I've noticed a perceptible change in the younger, less experienced workforce...the Gen Y folks in their early 20s. Now, I don't want to make too much of this observation but...the new generation of workers is getting a rude awakening. No reason to repeat what you all know...times are tough. In some industries, real tough. And, compared to a just one year ago, layoffs are far more common. Around the water cooler, staff members in the slowing home services business wonder..."Will I be next?" As I said, to me, this newfound concern for job security is clear.

What does it mean? More importantly, what does it matter? I believe those of us whose concern it is to manage and lead in tough times, have a real opportunity! An older member of the management profession, I've seen it, lived it all before...back in the late 80s. Recession then led to job cuts and more work for those who were kept on the team. And, I must say, we learned a lot about productivity, as delivered on a daily basis by concerned workers.

I suppose all I'm saying is....Maslow had it right! His well known "hierarchy of needs" theory is proven to be fact over and over again. Human beings react to the most urgent, most threatening situations in ways that preserve their lives and lifestyles. Nothing new here. The point is, when people are worried about their jobs, they tend to listen more closely to those who have the power to end their careers. "What", they wonder, "must I do to keep this job?" Smart leaders understand that, if only for a fleeting moment in time, Gen Y workers, self-possessed and focused on balance, flexibility and lots of control and immediate gratification in their lives, are going to pay more attention to how they can add value to the company. This is a good thing! Smart leaders will seize the moment! I'm not talking about grinding an extra 10 percent out of each frightened worker...I'm talking about teaching the new generation of workers how good they can be! Why? Because most have no idea how productive a person can be when focused on the task at hand vs. a consuming belief that life must be fun 24/7!

So, go for it boss! Crank up the training... have more team meetings. Let your best people know that, together, you will weather the recession and emerge a better, more productive team than ever before. Teach your people to multi-task. Cross train everyone. Show people how good they can be and recognize the positive growth when you see it!

Let's go America...time to turn off MSNBC and CNN...time to cut out the negative thinking....time to pull you team up by the boot straps! You can do it...your workers can do it...if you understand that it really does take an energized team approach to leading. Go for it! After all...what is your next best option?

Developing Teams – It's About Time To Get Serious!

2008, I made over a dozen presentations to business groups interested in learning how to be more effective and successful managers. When they hired me, these folks knew they were going to hear about one thing, leading, or managing if you prefer, people. After 20 years in management training, that is the part of the business I understand best.

In every instance, whether I was speaking at a trade show and conference or to a private business management team, in one way or another, I asked this question; what is your most vital resource? To clarify, if you had to pick one resource that, if properly used, will lead to success, what would it be? And I offer these choices; Products? Equipment? Operating capital? Credit? Marketing programs? People? And in every instance the answer is the same; people are the key resource in building a successful business.

It's not that other resources aren't required; it's that they are more easily acquired and managed. If you accept that as fact, let's move on.

Again this season, as in every spring since 1985 [when I began training/consulting], I encountered owners and managers who struggled mightily with people. It has to be the single biggest frustration we face.

As an example, reflecting on my experience with one company, the sequence of events goes like this:

1. Plan the year...marketing strategies and details.
 2. Create the annual budget with all known costs, revenue projections, etc.
 3. Set timelines/benchmarks for activities, marketing, sales, and production.
 4. Oh yea, people! Do we have enough of them?
- And the story repeats itself to a greater or lesser degree in 90% of the businesses I encounter.

My point; everything is nailed down...except for people. Smart managers plan and strategize. Owners and top managers with valuable experience lay out the year, deal with banks and vendors. We know it pays to contact each customer and confirm their business for next year. So, many make the time to do that. But staffing with the right people? Gee, time to get the ad in the paper. Bad.

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Article Continued...

Enough 'brow beating'. The intent of this article is to make you think about developing your team. My goal is to get you to put people on the top of your resource planning list and do it now! The intended result will be to begin 09 with the best prepared core of people you've ever had. Does it take time? Yes. Will you invest more labor dollars up front? Yes. Is it a smart business move? Yes...if you do it properly, as part of an overall people strategy that builds teams vs. just filling chairs.

Mistakes to eliminate:

- Assuming your best, core people are satisfied and will be there when you need them most.
- Assuming staffing is pretty much a 'roll the dice', run the ad and see what happens game you play without predictable results.
- Assuming you can start new hires and bring them up to speed in a week or two.
- Assuming training and daily coaching will happen without specific, focused plans in place.
- Assuming you can't control new hire turnover.

Strategies I've seen work to develop people:

- Assess your staff. Don't assume you know a person's mind. If you want to build a team of loyal, committed players, you must begin by confirming that motivationally, your veteran leaders are 'on board' and supportive of your business philosophy and practices. If not, they will sink your ship, guaranteed. Have a one-on-one with core team members. How did the year go for them? Are they getting bored, need a challenge or expanded responsibility. What can you do for them that will motivate them to help you?
 - Designate a competent person to handle new hire recruiting and on-boarding. It's time to get serious about bringing on the best new hires. You cannot develop someone who is simply doesn't have what it takes or who has taken the job for invalid reasons. Understand, you can control this process and, to a large degree, the results will be predictable. The days of finding the best new people in the classified ads are gone. You've got to be more pro-active than in the past.
 - Sales reps find jobs on the internet. Go to 'monster' or 'career builder' and be pro-active! Scan resume's listed and contact them! This takes time. Assign the responsibility or do it yourself but don't sit, waiting and hoping 'the ad works'.
 - 21st workers search specific, industry focused internet sites. So, get familiar with sites that address your industry and business.
 - Use your best employees to find additional labor. Create incentives for successful 'in house' recruiting.

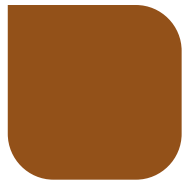
Don't let incompetent people conduct screening interviews! Prepare and role-play the hiring questions in advance. Be sure you are looking at past performance as the best indicator of future results. And, for most jobs, I place a candidate's attitude above all else in scoring the interview.

Show candidates your 'best face' but present the job honestly with clear expectations and rewards.

A candidate will be asking him/herself 'Why should I work here'. You must effectively answer the question in their mind. Don't forget the interview setting. What are the physical surroundings like? Clean or disorganized? The physical environment means a lot. Walk outside and come back in. Would you want to work here? Is your office private, uninterrupted? Desk cluttered? All this matters.

- New hire on-boarding must be a positive experience. Bring new hires into a positive, organized and well planned training, learning environment. Show the new team member how he/she is now an important team member. Introductions are first. How does the new hire fit into the group? Give the new person an opportunity to spend some time with each veteran and get to know them unsupervised. You are going through a process called 'socialization' and it takes time. Be sure that each day of the first few weeks is planned and controlled to ensure a positive start and finish. The new person should be given limited goals, followed by honest but consistent positive reinforcement as they learn and gradually take on more responsibility. When new people feel important, respected and succeed, they don't quit.
 - Provide 'hands-on' daily coaching after the initial training period. It is vital that the each new person on your team is brought on-board with enough advance time to go through a reasonable learning period without undue stress. 'Hands-on' coaching is an investment of time and effort that is not only worth making, it is key to the new person's success. You or your designated 'recruiting/training' person can be this coach. Or, the immediate supervisor can do the job. But someone must prioritize and maintain consistent daily contact, coaching and reinforcement of early learning. Though daily coaching, the new hire will learn and form the right habits quickly. To throw new people out on the job without initial training and follow up coaching simply does not work. Your investment in the recruiting, on-boarding and follow up coaching process must become an integral part of the annual business plan.
 - Provide visible 'top-down' examples of positive leadership. Practice what you preach. If you truly want to build a team of loyal, 'can-do' players, your people must see exactly those traits in you. Telling people to be considerate of customer's feelings and needs, then failing to do the same with your staff, sends an undeniable double message. If your people feel you highly value your customers but treat the staff with less caring and concern, your people will simply leave. Think about how you treat customers vs. your people. Be honest. If you place the same priority on your employees feelings about you as you do the opinions of your best customers, I guarantee turnover will drop! So, don't assume high turnover. Be certain you have a positively motivating work place environment.

With limited space, I have tried to address some of the most impactful and controllable factors we all face as people managers and leaders. The suggestions I make have been proven to work in the real world. How much you need to change, how seriously you take the people challenge is up to you.



Update the New Office and Administration Team

Best Wishes and Thanks to Shannon Tritten
New PVMA Office

On behalf of the association, I would first like to take this opportunity to thank Shannon Tritten for her excellent work for the PVMA over the last 5 years. Preparation for conferences and meetings, UTW-UTT Certification and the bookkeeping role have been in good hands and the role developed from where it was 5 years ago. Thanks for the job well done!

With Shannon's resignation effective Sept 30, 2015, the board has been fortunate to hire an experienced administrator to take over the association administration and bookkeeping role.

We are pleased to announce Val Eichelt as the new office manager. Val is married with four grown children and enjoys gardening, camping and family vacations.

Val and Shannon will transition the role over a period of time to ensure as seamless administration as possible. Val's previous experience as a legal secretary and 12 years as administrator for a registered charity will help the organization continue to provide professional service to our members.

The PVMA board of directors has recently approved the 3 year lease of a 345 sq. ft. office in Leduc. The intention is to share the administration cost with the UVMA as has been the case in the past with Shannon's services. The organization has grown and the need for a permanent location was realized. The new office will have regular operating hours to reflect the traditional workload, likely open several days per week. In addition, PVMA and UVMA boards and committees will have access to use the office association related meetings.

Details of the address and office hours will be posted on the PVMA and UVMA websites.



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