

Quality Landscape Management: The Employee's Role

VIDEO SCRIPT

GOAL: A BEAUTIFUL LANDSCAPE Well-groomed landscapes don't just happen. You, the employee, make them happen with routine care and, above all, attention to detail. A quality landscape and the image you present on the job speak highly of your firm and you as a landscape professional. Quality is everyone's responsibility and an essential part of your job. In this video you will learn how a routine inspection of the properties you service can help you assess landscape problems and correct them early. You will also learn how daily activities are scheduled so that every task gets done efficiently and thoroughly. Finally, you will learn the importance of your role as an employee in projecting a positive professional image for your company every minute you are on the job.

THE WHOLE PICTURE When you arrive on the job site, look at the entire work area from the eyes of your client. What do you see that doesn't look attractive? Make note of problems that need attention, such as trash littering the highly visible areas of the landscape, fallen limbs, or wilted or discolored plants that need immediate attention. Correct or report obvious problems before your client notices them and complains.

FOREMAN'S CHECK LIST Many firms have route managers who drive properties routinely and prepare check lists of things needing to be done. Review and discuss this list with your foreman before you begin work. Conditions may have changed since the route manager inspected the property, and you may note obvious problems that others missed. Sharing your observations and listening to those of your co-workers are important parts of being a professional team member.

TEAM APPROACH TO PROBLEM SOLVING Your involvement in recognizing and reporting problems is an essential part of a quality landscape management team. Sharing knowledge and experience may avoid similar problems in the future. A team-approach to problem solving often results in a practical solution. You may not know the exact cause of a problem, but you can get help from your supervisor.

PLANT PROBLEMS Learn to recognize common symptoms of plant problems on the properties you service. Don't hesitate to report problems or take a small sample from the affected part of the plant to your supervisor. Sometimes insects or diseases result from environmental or cultural problems. These English laurel plants, for instance, have shot hole disease that is promoted by overhead irrigation. Simply adjusting the irrigation system to avoid spraying the foliage helps control and prevent this problem.

CONTINUOUS CARE Picking up trash or pulling obvious weeds as you go is another important part of an efficient quality management program. Keep a trash bag on your mower or in your hip pocket for collecting debris, trimmings and weeds. Passing over an obvious problem by telling yourself that you'll get to it later often results in neglect and a negative image of your company.

FIRE ANTS In the South, fire ants are an increasing problem. These biting ants are highly undesirable in commercial landscapes, particularly in public areas. Fire ant mounds, like trash and weeds on the property, create a negative perception of the quality of your service. Fire ants may also be a health hazard for your clients, your co-workers and yourself.

COMPANY DRESS Dressing for success is an essential part of your job. Your neat, well-groomed appearance is as much a part of a quality management program as the landscape itself. A dress code projects a professional image of yourself and your company.

RESPECT FOR PEDESTRIANS Respect for pedestrians is a must. For example, when edging, stop work, disengage the blade and wait for a pedestrian to pass by. Quality service is reflected in all that you do each moment you are on the job.

BREAK TIME When taking a break or having lunch. It is best to return to your company vehicle. Certainly, you are entitled to take breaks or have lunch. Your break time, however, should not be perceived by others as loitering or goofing off.

IRRIGATION SYSTEMS Often, irrigation systems are set to operate at night when no one is around to observe problems. At least once a week, each zone of the irrigation system should be turned on for a few moments to check for leaks, misdirected or broken spray heads. If another crew within your firm is responsible for irrigation work, flag any broken parts or problems and report them to the irrigation crew or to your supervisor.

WEEDS IN MULCHED BEDS Weeds in mulched beds in highly visible areas are one of the most common causes of client complaints. For heavy weed infestations, a good pre- and post-emergent herbicide program is an essential part of quality landscape management. Sometimes, when there are just a few weeds, hand-pulling them on the spot is more efficient than spraying.

PICKING UP Remove trimmings immediately after pruning. Otherwise, they make the landscape appear cluttered and unsightly.

EDGING Neatly edged shrub beds and sidewalks are one of the most visible indications of professional landscape services. Like icing on the cake, neat edging shows a professional team is at work.

BLOWING When the job is finished, leave no signs of dirt, debris or clippings on sidewalks, turf or shrub areas. The entire landscape appears well groomed and refreshed.

FINAL CHECKLIST A landscape management checklist keeps your team on track, assures every task is completed, and makes certain nothing is left undone. It is also your written record of the work performed and additional work to be done.

CLIENT COPY Share a copy of your management checklist with your client soon after the work is completed. The checklist shows the date you visited, the work you accomplished, and any additional tasks to be completed on a follow-up visit. If a problem can't be fixed right away, you or your supervisor should let the client know you are on top of it. Most clients appreciate being informed about the work you are doing. Keeping the client informed regularly adds a personal touch to your service and boosts your professional image.

SAMPLE CHECKLIST A sample landscape management checklist is enclosed with this video. Feel free to modify it to fit your firm's needs. If your company has its own management checklist, familiarize yourself with it.

MORE CHECKOFFS Whatever management checklist form your company uses, be certain to:

- Document obvious problems such as broken limbs or litter.
- Compare the route manager's observations, if available, with your own.

Then, focus on the three main areas of the landscape: the turf area, tree and shrub area and seasonal color plantings. Make written notes of tasks performed, problems corrected and future needs of each area.

QUALITY LANDSCAPING There's no doubt about it, the image you project and the quality of your work are a direct reflection on your firm and you as a landscape professional. As in any business, quality management assures a consistent product, consumer appeal and customer satisfaction. In the commercial landscape industry, quality sells landscape services. Your role as a landscape professional is to project your company's quality management program every moment you are on the job.

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