



But I want more!

DEMANDING CLIENTS CAN SOMETIMES SOUND LIKE CRANKY CHILDREN. FIND OUT HOW TO MEET THEIR NEEDS WITHOUT LOSING MONEY. BY JASON CUPP

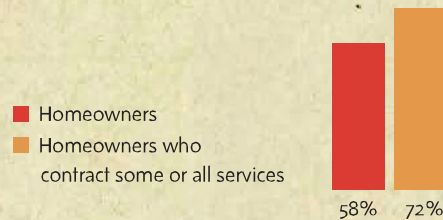
Just a few months ago, a contractor phoned me with an all-too-common example of a client wanting more for less. It was a high-end maintenance client that had been with the company for many years. This client spent an average of \$10,000 with the company on an annual basis and demanded a high level of service, scheduling and execution.

Knowing that the client had high expectations, when the fall clean up ended up logging more hours than previous, mostly

due to weather conditions, the contractor made sure that the end result was what the client wanted, and serviced them to their standard.

When the bill was sent, it was a mere \$500, just a few hundred dollars more than in the past. The client went nuts, saying they would not pay the bill, and demanded a credit to equal previous years. It might be noted that previous years were billed as time and materials as well. Although the client had no issue with the quality of

I trust the recommendations I receive from the lawn and landscape contractors I hire



the work completed, they had a major issue with the invoice. To my knowledge, they client has still not paid the "disputed" bill.

This example smells terribly

of some common themes that exist in the industry today. I've been known to say, "We are not in the landscape business, but we are in the client expectations



business, and it just so happens to be the landscape business that we meet or exceed those client expectations.”

Just a short six years ago, we all remember what it was like in the green industry – the phone would ring off the wall, clients were almost overly eager to do business with anyone who would answer their phones and price was not nearly the qualifier that it is today. Clients, jobs, projects – and yes money – were literally hanging on trees.

That was then, this is now.

The times have changed, and most contractors that I come in contact with on a day to day basis tell me the stories of how their clients have changed with the unique economy we have all been living and enduring since 2007.

Clients are harder to find, harder to earn, the negotiation process is more challenged, price is a key factor and no change in scope of work is accepted.

In a nutshell, clients want more for less. In some cases, a lot more. Sure, there are bubbles in geography, and niche businesses that overcome this current objection, but what I observe is that this philosophy is more rampant now than ever before.

With the constant headlines of companies in any industry lacking integrity, pushing the envelope of what is accepted, and the doomsday elements of the economy, it’s no wonder that clients’ expectations have been altered. Not only have their expectations been altered, in some cases, their loyalty is

tested and clients are willing to jump ship to save a few dollars, or a few added benefits.

To me, the notion of client loyalty is tarnished, there is a lack of trust in contractors, and it all comes down to client expectations. I’m sure there are hundreds of examples we all could think of in dealing with our clients on a day-to-day business.

I’ve found that managing client expectations can help eclipse the loyalty and trust issues that many clients today threaten us with. To be a game-changer and move the needle in customer confidence, the culture of being a client-centric company needs to be in the blood of every single employee on your team.

If your customers aren’t raving about you, it really comes down to three simple elements:

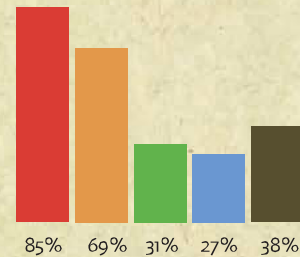
1. Communication – tell what you can do, when you can do it, and how much it will cost.
2. Meeting and beating client expectations – once you communicate, then you must execute.
3. Providing a great service – all this is for not if your product is mediocre or inferior.

I’m confident if you implement these basic ideas back into your business, you can eclipse the element we all are facing in the marketplace today surrounding loyalty and trust, and have clients returning to your company for multiple services, but more importantly – telling the story of how you delivered and exceeded their expectations. **L&L**

The author is a green industry consultant and speaker.

Maintenance

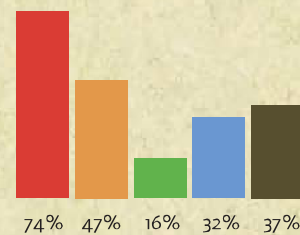
How influential were the following on your decision to fire a contractor?



- Dissatisfied with the quality of the work
- Dissatisfied with the timeliness of the work
- Found a less expensive contractor
- Decided to do the work myself/ourselves for a period of time
- Felt I was being taken advantage of

Lawn Care

How influential were the following on your decision to fire the contractor?



- Dissatisfied with the quality of the work
- Dissatisfied with the timeliness of the work
- Found a less expensive contractor
- Decided to do the work myself/ourselves for a period of time
- Being taken advantage of (overcharged, charged for services that weren't performed or weren't contracted for, etc.)

Have you ever had to fire a contractor you'd hired to do the mowing, trimming and edging of your lawn?

