

by Ed and Aaron Wandtke

■ The green industry, like most other service industries, is increasingly feeling the strain for better, more professional employees. And many of you are suffering through an inability to attract valuable employees.

If you finally discover a promising employee, retaining him or her for any period of time often becomes a challenge. Business owners continually claim that most promising employees never stay

with a company more than two years. Why are employees leaving? Where are they going? What criteria should you evaluate future employees on?

Packing their bags—The two most common reasons for leaving a company are money and job security. Clearly, the old-fashioned six-to-dark worker has disappeared; today's employee wants more money for working less.

Unfortunately, the green industry is creating its own problems. Today, companies are offering pay for seasonal work that is no better than a fast food restaurant. They are discovering that employees want the opportunity to make money the entire year rather than only during the growing season. Offering lower pay and seasonal employment are proven ways to limit the pool for professional and reliable employees.

The minimum wage—now being discussed in the halls of Congress—appears to be headed for a change in the next year or two. Here's a general rule of thumb: if you are not paying twice the minimum wage, then perks must be used as an inducement to retain good employees. Offering additional money through incentives can be an opportunity for personnel to earn increased pay. If, on the other hand, higher wages are already being offered, then perks will be the alternative to keep payroll costs reasonable.

Not just a job—Good employees often leave because of limited security,

overlong hours, or lack of advancement opportunities. Employees are looking at green industry employers for a career, not just a job. Promising employees invariably seek:

- long-term opportunity;
- hours that allow them to have a "personal life;"
- a retirement plan; and
- increasing benefits through seniority.

If you don't offer these benefits and opportunities, these promising employees will leave.

Employees with potential often can be found in other service industries where they may start with lower pay. Job security, benefits, training, shorter work weeks and promotional opportunities are usually found at an employer who has good employees.

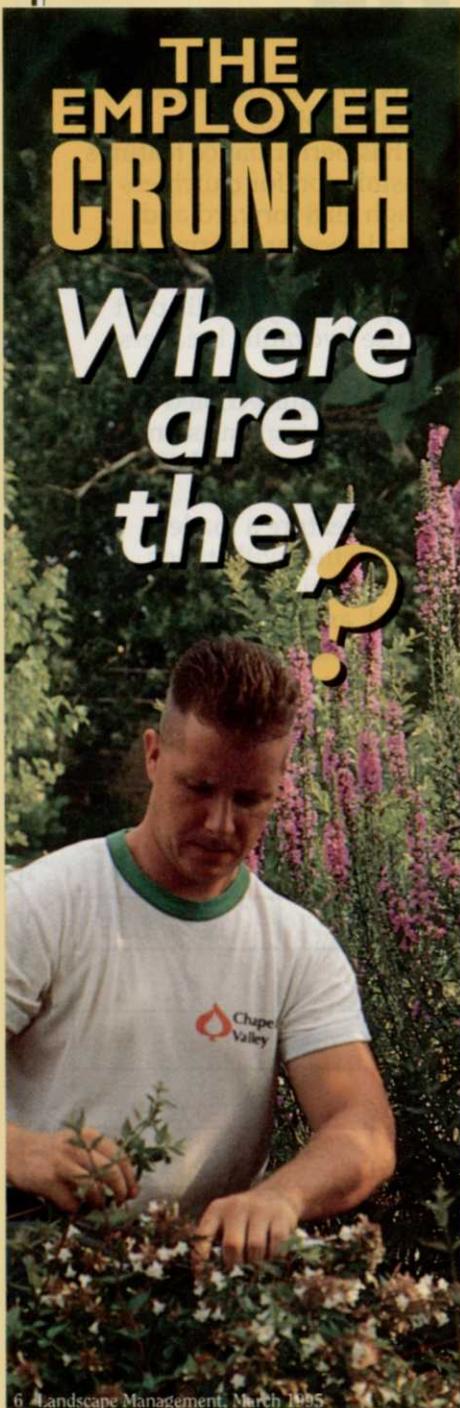
Criteria—Seeking and primarily offering seasonal employment is the surest means to attract sub-par employees.

Simply stated, how many people look for and are satisfied with seasonal employment? Most of you don't understand that career-oriented, professional workers are not looking for seasonal jobs—yet, this is what most employers want. If you want the best employees, you must make the effort both financially and professionally to do what is necessary to retain them.

The criteria each employer uses when hiring employees is usually different from other employers in a market. The following criteria may be helpful when recruiting and evaluating employees.

THE EMPLOYEE CRUNCH

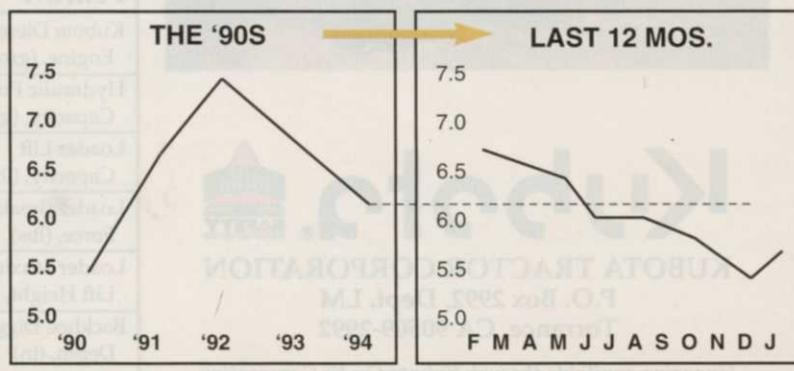
Where are they?



A RECENT HISTORY OF UNEMPLOYMENT

The national unemployment rate either stayed the same or fell for 10 straight months, until January (the most recent month for which

statistics are available), when it rose 3-10ths of a point. Overall, the unemployment rate has been decreasing steadily since 1992.



HOW DO YOU STACK UP?

Benefits offered by Landscape Management reader companies/departments:

	GREEN IND AVG.	GOLF COURSE	ATHLETIC FIELD	LAWN CARE	LAND- SCAPE
Paid holidays	82.1%	82.0%	96.4%	65.4%	69.0%
Paid vacations	82.4%	88.0%	96.4%	62.7%	66.5%
Paid sick leave	61.6%	64.5%	95.8%	37.3%	38.1%
Monetary bonuses	46.4%	39.9%	6.6%	64.7%	64.0%
Health insurance*	70.1%	78.1%	93.4%	47.7%	48.2%
Dental insurance*	34.5%	36.6%	62.3%	15.7%	17.8%
Retirement plan**	30.9%	31.7%	41.3%	20.9%	23.9%
Paid tng./educ.	68.8%	74.9%	76.0%	59.5%	52.3%

*Partial to full coverage

**Includes 401(k), pension, profit-sharing, etc.

Base: 666

Source: LM survey, Sept.-Dec. 1994

First, determine what type of work the individual is looking for. Does the potential employee view the opportunity as temporary employment while he looks for other work, or does he or she want this job to be a career move? If absolutely necessary, temporary employees may be sufficient, but for professional employees, temporary employment is not practical.

Second, determine what experience or specialty skill the employee brings to the company. Employees who can complement services already offered by the company will improve the company's opportunities. Discussing services is also a good time for prospects to address how they feel about training and their willingness to acquire additional skills through training.

Third, ask the individual why he or she chose your company to apply for a job. This is a great way to discover the employee's intent. If he or she simply flipped through the phone book and picked your company, that's probably not the best person for the job. A person who has researched the golf or landscape market in your area and is evaluating a couple of companies is likely a more promising employee.

Fourth, ask direct questions to determine both how he/she responds to pressure and how quick and favorable his/her responses are. After all, you are in the people business and employees must be able to communicate with clients, management, and

their immediate supervisors. The responses from the prospective employee will serve as another indication of his/her potential.

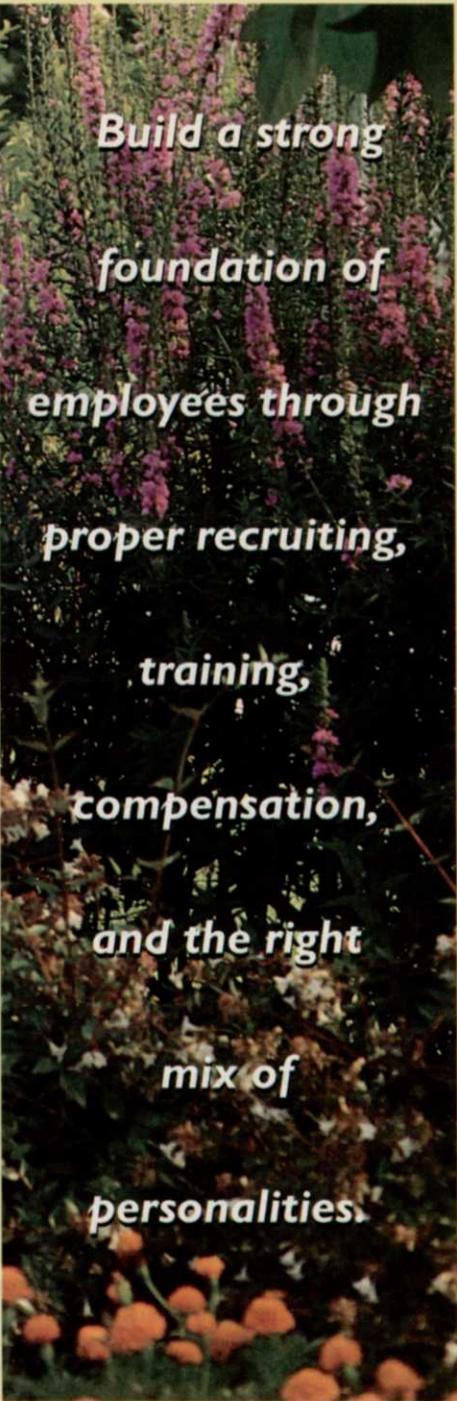
Fifth, determine—through questions—the style of management under which the potential employee works best. This may be determined through questioning of previous jobs and previous managers. Find out where potential conflicts may arise and how he/she solves conflicting situations. If a future employee appears to have many areas of conflict or has a quick temperament, that candidate is not likely the best for the job.

The above-mentioned points all funnel into one single issue: what type of person is this individual? Do you like him or her as a person, and would you like to work every day next to this person? If you don't like the candidate, what are the chances he/she will get along with other supervisors and employees?

Good employees begin with attitude, image and the ability to socialize with other employees, customers and managers. If employees have a bad attitude, they are more detrimental to the company than they are worth the investment.

Also, if employees have a self-image problem, they will not be helping the company image, either.

Finally, if employees can't communicate and explain their feelings or needs, they are not a fit for a company because of their inability to communicate with others.



*Build a strong
foundation of
employees through
proper recruiting,
training,
compensation,
and the right
mix of
personalities.*

Hiring good employees is not an easy task. These employees are looking for both an opportunity and a future with an employer. If you are not offering a future and opportunity for good employees, these quality employees will gradually leave your company.

—The authors own and run Wandtke & Associates, a green industry business consulting firm. They can be reached at (800) 966-3546 or by fax at (614) 891-7698.