



High Growth Service Business with a Large Hourly Workforce Must Quickly Prepare its First-Time Leaders for Greater Responsibility

Seasonal business fluctuations and the lack of an established Human Resource support function created unique challenges.

Situation Summary

By 2008, Green Lawn Fertilizing had outgrown its single facility. Pursuant to a detailed 5-year expansion plan, the company acquired a second location thereby creating an immediate need for greater leadership span of control. Aggressive marketing and a high-touch customer service environment required continuous high volume recruitment and an ever-increasing degree of employee supervision.

Green Lawn's Office Manager was called upon to provide basic HR support; starting with recruitment, payroll and benefits administration. As the company grew and competition for talent intensified, the basics became insufficient. Pre-employment drug screening, non-discrimination/harassment training, a 401(k) program and the like were the kinds of positive differentiators that would be needed to continue Green Lawn's unique success story.

The Objectives: Build specific and scalable leadership skills at all levels of management, establish an HR department, audit employee records for compliance, train an HR staff member, and create an employee policy and procedure handbook.

The Solutions: 1) An individual coaching program for managers that fully integrated company goals; 2) A completely revised set of employee policies and procedures; 3) a Manager's Handbook that ensured consistency and legal compliance.

The Results: Green Lawn was able to open its second location with a leadership team fully prepared to hire, train and supervise a production staff of 20. A professional human resource staff was functioning at a level most appropriate for a company this size. A 35% decrease in property losses, as a direct result of stronger leadership and better hiring decisions.

Customer Profile

Founded in 2004, Green Lawn Fertilizing, Inc. provides a full range of lawn, tree and shrub fertilization, aeration, seeding and pest control treatments to customers in the 5-county Philadelphia metropolitan area. 100% of their field staff is professionally

Customer Profile

Green Lawn Fertilizing, Inc. is a local service provider of fertilization, seeding and related lawn services in the Philadelphia metropolitan area. With over 40 employees and two locations, the company has enjoyed rapid growth since it began in 2004.

Objectives

Expand leadership capability to meet the demands of rapid revenue growth and geographical expansion. Address specific skill gaps in key individuals without significant disruption to daily operations. Establish HR department and Improve new hire selection decisions.

Solution

Individual coaching in 1-hr. time slots spread over six months

- Performance Management
- Interviewing and Selection
- Team Building
- Time Management
- Employee Coaching

Benefits

- Leadership strength
- Lower turnover
- Better hiring decisions

registered with the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection.

President Matt Jesson founded Green Lawn Fertilizing, Inc. despite a vigorously competitive marketplace dominated by national powerhouses Chem-Lawn®, Scotts® and Lawn Doctor®. He started with a highly detailed 5-year growth plan that his company has long-since exceeded, thanks in large part to the dedication of his hand-picked leadership team.

A Detailed View

Context

The lawn care industry generally struggles with high turnover and expensive operating costs, but Jesson recognized an opportunity for differentiation – personal service. His employees are continually trained and tested for technical and customer service excellence. However, Green Lawn managers are usually promoted from within, which gives them technical expertise but no supervisory skills. Once the company surpassed the 40-employee mark, the need for a formal human resource function and leadership development for his managers became clear.

Objectives

The seasonal nature of Green Lawn’s business creates extremely busy periods that are interspersed with brief interludes that can be used for equipment service, planning and marketing activities. Any leadership and HR development efforts would need to be flexible enough to work around these seasonal fluctuations. The Employee Handbook would need to reflect the kind, down-to-earth culture of the company while protecting it from unnecessary risk.

Finding the Right Partner

Preston Leadership’s experience in HR was appealing to Green Lawn’s senior team. Individual customization with coaching sessions delivered on-site over a time period that was respectful of their seasonal business cycle was integral to the company’s decision to select Preston Leadership for this leadership development and infrastructure initiative.

Solutions

A Flexible Leadership Development Coaching Process

Jesson was interviewed to capture each manager’s strengths, developmental objectives and corporate goals. A formal leadership behavioral style assessment was then administered. The resulting information was used to create a custom syllabus for each participant, which was then shared with all stakeholders for coordination and buy-in.

One-hour sessions were held at the client’s office on a semi-monthly basis over nine months, which provided numerous opportunities for relevant discussion, application and practice. Participants were expected to complete outside reading assignments and other preparation totaling not more than 2 additional hours per month. The coaches were accessible to each participant between sessions on an unlimited basis throughout the program. Formal monthly status reports were provided to all stakeholders.

“This has made Green Lawn a better company. Preston Leadership’s coaching program provided me with a clear roadmap for each manager - everything was tailored to their needs. My team is more organized and focused than they were six months ago. I can tell that the coaching has really paid off. Thank you!”

*Matthew Jesson,
Founder and President
Green Lawn Fertilizing, Inc.*

A Human Resource Function Appropriate for Green Lawn's Business

As is so often the case in small businesses, Green Lawn's Office Manager was called upon to provide basic HR support; starting with recruitment, payroll and benefits administration. As the company grew, however, the basics became insufficient. Pre-employment drug screening, non-discrimination/harassment training, a 401(k) program and the like were the kinds of positive differentiators that would be necessary for Green Lawn to continue its quest for top talent.

Beginning with a general outline, a fully compliant HR policy and procedure manual was developed with input from senior leadership over several iterations. From that document, a comprehensive Managers' Handbook was created. On-call HR support was available throughout the year and provided several opportunities to revisit past policy decisions and update them accordingly. Finally, an employee file audit and all-staff training on non-harassment/discrimination law was conducted in order to keep the company in full compliance.

Evaluation

Results and Benefits

The second Green Lawn Fertilizing facility opened in 2008 with an experienced leadership team in place. Key staff members were added in the areas of marketing and commercial sales. The company has been more efficient with recruitment and non-regretted turnover is down by 25%.

Line managers report fewer employee issues and greater confidence in their day-to-day decision making. A key metric, insurance loss ratio (property and Worker's Comp), is down 35% in 2008. Senior management, including HR, has been able to create more reliable processes in nearly every area of the business. The company continues to grow rapidly while maintaining excellent customer service ratings.

Customer Quote

"I'm very happy to be working with Preston Leadership. I feel as though they have so much to offer to me, both in HR and also in becoming a better manager, and I think they have a lot to offer all of the managers at Green Lawn. I look forward to continually learning throughout the next year!"

Allyson Yannone, HR/Office Manager
Green Lawn Fertilizing, Inc.

For More Information

For more information about Green Lawn Fertilizing services, call Matthew Jesson at (888) 581-LAWN or visit <http://www.greenlawnfertilizing.com>.

For more information, call Alan Preston at (877) 326-7770 or email us at info@prestonleadership.com

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