



President's letter

by Robert Boyle, IANY President

Spring has sprung, now's the time to spring into action! Hopefully everyone enjoyed the off-season and is ready to get back to work in a less restrictive, more relaxed environment.

In the last newsletter, I mentioned the importance of getting involved with IANY. We are here to shape the business environment of the irrigation industry in New York. I ask you to spread the word to those in our industry, manufacturers, distributors, dealers, contractors and consultants to encourage them to become members, join a committee or the Board. It's easy to attend board meetings, our virtual meetings are every second Wednesday of the month at 7 p.m.

Becoming an active member will help secure our industry. It's a way to keep your pulse on the latest water management issues that could affect us and your business. You will have a chance to facilitate positive changes, a win-win for all of us. Most of all, you will make friends, learn interesting things and gain knowledge from other professionals with multiple years of experience.

May the road rise up to meet you. May the wind be always at your back. May the sun shine warm upon your face; the rains fall soft upon your field ...

RB Boyle is owner of RB Irrigation and president of the Irrigation Association of New York.

Renew Your IANY Membership

Spring has sprung and if you haven't renewed your IANY membership, you are missing out! Renew your membership today and:

- Expand your knowledge.
- Grow your professional network.
- Address your business issues.
- Protect your interests.
- Get involved.

Renew your IANY membership online at <https://iany.org/submit-a-payment-to-the-iany/> or via mail.

Not a member? Join online at www.iany.org or via the membership application on page 7.

Would you like to contribute to the IANY newsletter?

Have content you'd like to share?

Have tips and tricks that would benefit the profession?

Looking to reach irrigation contractors in the New York area?

Contact Noreen Rich
(noreenrich@irrigation.org)
to be featured or advertise
in upcoming editions.



Training Irrigation Service Technicians for the busiest months

by Jeff Carowitz, Strategic Force Marketing

With warmer weather and newly-installed spring plants, it's no wonder that April is the peak month for irrigation service calls. Is your service team ready to handle the challenge efficiently and profitably?

During the winter months, I help leading contracting firms in the industry get ready for the busy season. There are always new ways to tackle traditional challenges.

I usually start sessions with an important maxim: customers judge them by their human-relations skills as much as their ability to get the job done. You don't see this reflected in the training plans at most conferences and distributor events: lots of time covering products and technical, and very little on softer skills essential to grow a business.

Now is a great time to refresh your team on the essentials of great service:

Building trust and rapport with customers. Customers who trust their technicians are more agreeable, buy more and stay loyal. The technician must demonstrate that he has the customer's best interests at heart. Building trust starts with how the technician greets the customer and starts the task. For example, does the technician ask the customer to explain the issues? Even though the troubles may be obvious, customers want to share details and viewpoints. The technician is getting paid to listen!

Showing care for the customer's property. Convey respect for the customer's home with the right procedures. Wear shoe covers. Use tool mats. Restore disturbed areas carefully. You're being paid to do the whole job, do it.

Missed connections. Customers are not always home when the technician arrives to do the work. A good best practice is to have the technician call the customer when in route, if the customer is planning to be home. If there is a misconnect, take action immediately to reschedule. (And for sure you should have door hangers to leave indicating that you showed up, but were unable to do the work.)

Proactively recommend. On every service visit, identify opportunities to help the customer avoid future problems. Educate customers on the life-cycle of worn or aging components and the benefit of replacing them before they fail. Rather than changing one 20-year-old broken sprinkler, recommend the whole zone should be upgraded. The customer enjoys immediate water savings and the peace-of-mind of no unexpected future service emergencies.

Handling complaints. Not every service visit has great outcomes. Train your team on how to recover from minor mistakes and missed opportunities. There's often a tendency for technicians to argue with customers versus being good listeners.

Zig when the others zag. The industry's currently embracing the irrigation installation boom, which has been tied to an incredible housing market. A few contractors are embracing a savvy longer-term view. They see a tremendous growth curve in irrigation service. The installed-base of older systems just keeps getting bigger. Consider joining them by investing strategically in service: good software, technician training, solid marketing, selling upgrades, and offering monitoring services. Build your own golden goose that will keep laying golden eggs regardless of what happens to the housing boom.

Jeff Carowitz is a respected advisor to leading landscape industry firms. Connect with him on LinkedIn or at Jeff@StrategicForceMarketing.com.

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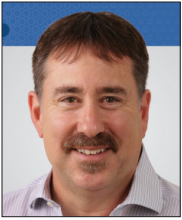
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Embrace change and hang on

Use these three tips to prepare for a season struggling to supply materials, equipment and labor.

by Christopher Pine, CLWM, CIC, CLIA, CIT, MCLP

There is no doubt that challenges with the supply and demand of materials, equipment and labor are the hot topic for irrigation contractors (or any business) these days.

While the intent is to develop some insight on how to manage these challenges, let's start with some discussion on why all this happening. Sure, it may be easiest to point at one specific event or a political party or an individual, but the cause for this is really a combination of many things that have occurred and will take time to sort out. Having spent over four years studying economics, it is fascinating to see all these complex events colliding.

The root cause is the simplest of economic principles: supply and demand. When we look at what is going on in the world these days, there is a clear economic unbalance with demand greatly exceeding supply. This is primarily caused by a huge number of factors that also happened very quickly. Arguably, this is something that we haven't ever experienced before, especially with the size of the global economy. It is going to take some time to balance so that the economy will be more predictable and not continuing to make large adjustments resulting in product shortages and inflation.

In our industry, during the last two years, we have seen availability issues of almost all materials from almost all manufacturers. While we can blame specific events such as the increased consumer demand from the pandemic or weather events that caused major increases in the demand for pumps and supply of resins for plastic or the delay in products arriving from offshore, the point is there are many events that have occurred to cause this combined impact.

Price inflation is the result of supply shortages and is also likely to continue until we achieve more economic balance. Many commodity products have seen extreme price increases, such as plastic piping, wire and bulkier products that have been highly impacted by the space they consume on trucks and containers. We have also seen the impact on equipment cost and availability, with many contractors waiting months for vehicles, trenchers, vibratory plows and paying prices exceeding list price or "book value" for used equipment.

Availability of labor is also tied to these economic principles, and although this problem has been going on for years, unfortunately it is likely to continue for a long

time. We can say, "Kids today don't want to work," but that might not be that accurate, nor will it point toward the solution. We have been anticipating a demographic shift from the aging and retiring of baby boomers and its impact on our labor supply and economy for many years. It is now here, although the pandemic may have forced the hand of many who were just about ready to move into retirement. Our industry still requires a lot of physical labor and we are actively competing with other industries that need the same. There are contractors that are succeeding in this game, but they are making talent acquisition and development a year-round, full-time function of their businesses.

So, what can we do?

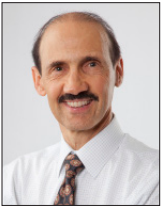
Have patience. We are starting to see some signs that many manufacturers in our industry have adjusted and have increased product availability. As much as this has been a fun ride with record demand for our industry's products and services, it is starting to ease in some areas.

Accept rapid change and be able to adapt quickly. The management buzzword of being able to "pivot" is the word of the day. Businesses need to first be able to quickly integrate information about price increases or availability into their systems, so that they can quickly adjust their pricing and schedules to stay profitable. Office technology plays a huge role here in being able to move information efficiently.

Plan in advance. Having been involved in many discussions with suppliers of materials and equipment this season, this advice is heard from all. Communicate with your suppliers for your needs well in advance. If you are locked into a price, order now. Be prepared to have a second choice for certain materials. Keep an active dialogue.

We can and will get through this. We need to make a plan and take action to make the best of it, but in the meantime, hang on and enjoy the wild ride!

Christopher Pine, CLWM, CID, CIC, CLIA, CIT, MCLP, is a principal of IrriTech Training and the president of BluGreen Solutions in Pocasset, Massachusetts. He can be reached at chris@irritechtraining.com.



Growth takes strong roots Support your employees to expand your business

by Tom Borg, Owner of Tom Borg Consulting, LLC

In *Irrigation & Lighting* magazine's recent [Industry Outlook Survey](#), a majority of the participants responded by indicating that 2022 was going to be the year of strong to very strong growth for their green industry company.

If that is true, then what will these companies need to do to make that growth a reality? Just saying it will be a tremendous growth year won't make it happen.

In some of my previous articles, I have discussed the concept of business paradigms. A business paradigm is the problem-solving system you use to run your business. Each business is a collection of many paradigms. Which paradigms are you using to run your business? Which paradigms will help you expand your business and which ones will prevent you from expanding it?

In 2021, many green industry businesses had trouble hiring enough quality employees. One of my clients was no

different. At each of the meetings we had, we discovered a number of concerns.

One of their beliefs was that there were no good employees available to be hired. They believed most potential employees were taking advantage of unemployment benefits. They believed that most potential employees were lazy and did not want to work. It became clear that this kind of thinking was preventing them from doing the things that were going to attract the right kind of people to work for their company.

You might've heard the statement, "If you always do what you've always done, you always get what you always got." But truth be known, a more accurate way to word that statement would be, "If you always do what you've always done, you will always get less than you always got."

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Choose organized rather than overwhelmed

by Lorraine Hart, President of Ideal Consulting Services

The past couple of years, we all have in some way experienced stress resulting from the challenges we faced in our world and local community. At some point we may have been stressed from not having enough work, and at other times we may have had more work than we could handle in a timely manner.

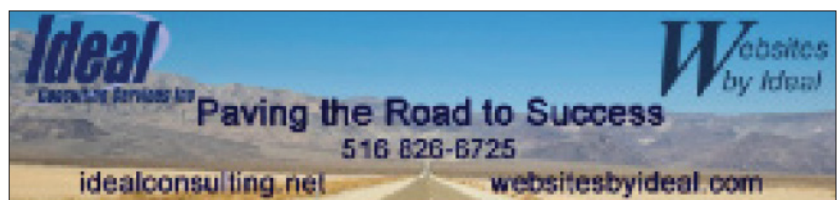
Often, the feeling of overwhelm that results from so much to do comes from lack of organization.

Fundamental to effective organization is the ability to categorize similar functions and the discipline to stick with the task you choose. Often to handle "the overwhelm", there is a tendency to jump from task to task getting little pieces done on each of them. With this approach you are apt to feel like you haven't accomplished anything, because in fact you haven't completed anything. The more prudent approach would be to separate the type of tasks and handle one type at a time until it is done. Of course, you can't spend all your time organizing or you would never get anything done.

In managing time, it is critical to establish goals, and prioritize your activities so that they align with your goals. Whether you are trying to handle your business, your staff or personal life, these same principles apply. Although it is very beneficial to state long and short-term goals, don't allow the creating of these goals to consume too much time.

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For more information, contact Ideal Consulting Services/Websites by Ideal at 516-826-6725.



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Times are constantly changing, and if you keep doing the things you have always done, you will be left behind. Many of your competitors are constantly striving to get better. It won't take long for you to fall far behind your competitors who are moving forward.

Building your team

The best place to begin is with your own team. What are you doing to make sure your present team stays with your company? My colleague Mel Kleiman advocates the use of "stay interviews" as a way to prevent your team from looking for greener pastures. During that stay interview, ask them what they like about your company and what needs to be improved. What do you need to stop doing as a leader? What do you need to start doing?

When you stop to analyze your hiring situation, remember to use the theory of the leaky barrel. Imagine in your mind a large barrel with an open lid. Your goal is to fill this barrel full of water. Unfortunately, the barrel has several holes punched in the sides of it. As you pour water into the barrel, you see some of it spouting out through the holes. You scratch your head and ask yourself, "What was I thinking? How can I expect this barrel to hold all the water I was pouring into it with all of those holes allowing it to escape?"

This is an excellent analogy to help you understand the importance of building an employee retention strategy before you begin to even look for new candidates to fill the jobs within your green industry company. Building an effective employee retention strategy takes time and work. Don't give the excuse that you don't have the time to build one. When it comes to improving your company, you don't have enough time and money not to do the things necessary to improve it.

Let's take a look at three areas you need to include. The first is employee engagement. Are your employees and leaders truly engaged in what they do with your company? Do they know what your company stands for, why it does what it does? Do their values align with your company's mission statement? Do they support the vision of your organization?

How do you find out if your team members are truly engaged? You ask them. Maybe it's time to change or modify your company's mission and vision statement. The best way to do that is to get everyone together and reexamine it. Tear it apart and create a new one. Having everyone's input will help them own and support it.

The second part of building your employee retention strategy in your green industry company is to improve the trust and communication in your organization from the top to the bottom and from the bottom to the top.

Open and frequent communication in one-on-one situations, as well as in group meetings, is a must. When you have clear and on-going two-way communication, you have more trust and engagement. I advise all of my clients to begin with a Talent Insights Assessment. This scientifically validated instrument measures a person's driving forces and behaviors.

When everyone in your organization understands the driving forces and behavior style of each other, you are on your way to better teamwork and job performance. With the proper debriefings, this instrument can be one of the best tools in your green industry company's toolbox for employee retention.

With one of my clients, we had each member of their leadership team complete an assessment with an individual and a group debriefing. As a result, people started to understand each other on a deeper level. Preconceived notions began to disintegrate, barriers were broken down and bridges were built. The result was each member of the team began to truly understand the other members and they started to come together as a well-balanced team.

The last area to help with employee retention is caring for each team member in your green industry company. Sit down with each person on your team and take the time to get to know them. Take a sincere and ongoing interest in them. Find out where they want to be in their career in five or 10 years. How can you support them in reaching their life's goals? Do you have a valid career ladder for them in your company? Or can the time they are with your company be a solid stepping stone to their next position with another larger company?

What kind of outside training and education do they need to grow and develop? How much of that can you or others in your company provide to help them climb that career ladder?

To help make this last suggestion easy to implement, email me for a free copy of my Employee Professional Training and Development Planning form.

So, is it time to expand your company in 2022? Do you have the right foundation and levels of employee engagement, trust and communication, and care and concern? If you answered no, then get busy improving in those three areas. If you answered yes, then go for it!

Tom Borg is a business consultant who works at the intersection of leadership, communication and culture. As a thought leader, he works with his green industry clients and their leadership teams to help them connect, communicate and work together. To ask him a question please call 734.404.5909, email him at tom@tomborg.com or visit his website at tomborgconsulting.com.

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Phone/fax: 631-423-0429
info@iany.org



Officers

President

RB Boyle
RB Irrigation
P.O. Box 1386, Westhampton Beach, N.Y. 11978
631-288-1087

Vice President

Bobby Winter
B&A Lawn Sprinklers
1381 St. Louis Ave., Bay Shore, N.Y. 11706
631-665-4545

Treasurer

Joe Tavalaro, CIC, CLIA
Custom Irrigation Corp.
111 Roger Ave., Inwood, N.Y. 11096
516-239-7659

Secretary

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Oasis Irrigation
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Committee Chairs

By-Laws

Tom Tracey, CIC, CID, CLIA
Dimension 2 Associates
631-421-5200
tomtraceyd2a@optonline.net

Events

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SiteOne Landscape Supply
631-891-7310
george.iannaccone@gmail.com

Membership

Steve Stempler
B&A Lawn Sprinklers
631-665-4545
balawn@optonline.net

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IANY
703-795-4933
noreenrich@irrigation.org

Water Conference

Mike Dwyer, CIC
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516-785-4453
mdhwa@optonline.net

Web Site

RB Boyle
RB Irrigation
631-288-1087
rb@rbirrigation.net

Irrigation Association of New York

P.O. Box 237
Greenlawn, N.Y. 11740
Telephone/facsimile: 631-423-0429
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