**Maintaining Good Mental Health:**

**Landscape Pros Share Strategies for Coping with COVID-19**

Human beings are social creatures and combining the social distancing along with all of the unknowns of the current pandemic can cause considerable mental strain on your employees, your customers and yourself.

Here are some tips from members on how they are managing mental health in the midst of this crisis.

**Open Communication**

With half of your workforce out in the field still and the other half working remotely, it is important to stay in touch and maintain a consistent message throughout this challenging time.

“I don’t think you can overcommunicate with your employees right now,” says Jack Moore, CEO of Grassperson Lawn Care & Landscape, in Lewisville, Texas. “I think that the employees are going through a lot. It’s easy to think about clients and all that sort of thing, but there’s a lot of uncertainty with a lot of our employees. Their spouse may have been laid off and they don’t know what’s going on with the stimulus package and their kids are at home and they don’t know how to deal with that.”

Jim McCutcheon, CEO of HighGrove Partners, LLC, in Austell, Georgia, says that he and members of his senior leadership team have been taking turns recording a message that is sent out on a daily basis communicating key things, sharing good news that’s happening and being honest about some of the challenges.

HighGrove also has private Facebook group for employees where they have fun little competitions, such as sharing pictures of their home workspaces to keep everyone engaged.

Sun Valley Landscaping keeps Zoom meetings interesting with a “fun hat day.”

“Folks love transparency and it’s something they are used to from our company,” says Paul Fraynd, co-owner of Sun Valley Landscaping, based in Omaha, Nebraska. “Keeping everyone involved and up-to-date is important to manage any fear, panic or misinformation. We have hosted virtual townhalls, implemented weekly virtual safety meetings, and have an optional daily “good news” Zoom meeting every morning at 9:30 a.m.”

During these “good news” meetings, employees share what they are grateful for and fun things they’ve noticed during this time.

Joe Lewis, an account manager for Environmental Management, Inc. (EMI) based in Plain City, Ohio, says their company’s leadership development of their crew leaders has paid off as they are able to pass on information to their field personnel and practice constant engagement with their crews.

“As a leader you have to constantly communicate with your people, and not just about getting the work done, but hey, how are you feeling?” Lewis says. “People could be falling into depression, just seasonal depression because of this. Now you’re adding a pandemic. So, what we do for our employees is just have a heightened ear. Be listening for things that are off in your people.”

“Now’s the time to really make sure that you’re staying in touch with your co-workers and your team members to help them get through this,” Moore says.

Doug Delano, managing partner at Level Green Landscaping, based in Upper Marlboro, Maryland, says the level of concern has varied among employees, with those who are more at risk being more worried than others.

“We have isolated our customer service and sales teams, and the best remedy I can find is phone calls to both customers and employees,” Delano says. “Calling just to talk to people I believe helps reduce stress. Knowing that you are not the only one who is worrying and that there are people out there for you.”

As for communicating with customers, McCutcheon has the company’s individual CRMs communicate directly with their clients about anything that they are doing as a company rather than sending out one mass email. During this time, they have become clients’ eyes and ears on their properties as customers work from home and crews will FaceTime them to show them what’s going on.

“Most of our customers have been very positive, but this is really just the beginning of the crisis,” Delano says. “My expectation is that it is going to get much worse, which will change some customers’ concerns.”

**Finding Balance**

McCutcheon himself says while this is a very stressful time, an underpinning of his life has been following the Stockdale Paradox.

“The general principle behind it is that you never lose faith that you’re going to achieve your goals and get to where you’re going,” McCutcheon says. “And that faith is really that key thing, no matter what’s going on, I never lose that faith, yet at the same time, I have to face the brutal reality and facts of what’s going on in that particular situation, and plan accordingly and not ignore those types of things.”

Delano admits that both he and his business partner fair worse on the weekends when they don’t interact with their team and have more time to dwell on the news. However, he says they’ve both remained fairly positive and see this crisis as a stress test for their company.

While it’s important to stay informed, avoid consuming news 24/7 and seek out reliable sources of information like the Centers of Disease Control.

Fraynd says he’s encouraged everyone to keep to their routines, such as making your bed each day, exercising, eating healthy, drinking enough water and so on.

“For me, this means continuing my healthy daily habits – waking up early, going for runs with my dog, continuing my meditation practice, reading good books (currently I am reading The Infinite Game by Simon Sinek), limiting my news intake and focusing on positive intakes of information as much as possible,” Fraynd says. “This also means being present at home, at work and in whatever I am doing. I can only live in the here and now and worrying about the future will not help.”

You can expect to feel a range of emotions during this crisis and it’s important to manage your expectations. Consider what you can and can’t control at this time.

“While we may not be able to control the virus, we can control some of nature that surrounds us, and we can get outside and smell the newly mowed grass and see some order in our lives in this time of chaos,” Delano says.

**Seek Normalcy**

One form of normalcy is right outside the door. While it may feel like the world is ending, stepping out into your backyard will quickly remind you that spring is still happening.

“The creek is still flowing, grass is growing, it’s springtime, the bumblebees are flying around, it’s just a sense of normalcy,” McCutcheon says. “I think once we get cooped up inside for so long listening to the news and this, that and the other it’s hard to breathe sometimes. So just getting outside and just letting nature be that sense of normalcy.”

McCutcheon says he tries to get outside and work as much as possible and has found journaling helpful as well.

Lewis agrees that maintaining a sense of normalcy is important to help the mental state of both their employees and clients.

“If you can find some normalcy, it lessens the stress of the chaos you’re in,” Lewis says.

Delano notes that while in Maryland there is a strict order to stay at home, walking and hiking outside are excluded.

“I have to agree seeing the springtime trees leafing out and the flowers makes you realize that even when things seem bleak, there is rebirth,” Delano says.

Fraynd adds that being outside is the number one thing he can do for his mental health.

“Being outside brings us into the present moment, we can take a pause from the constant social media and newsfeeds and just be, where nature intended us to be,” Fraynd says. “Things make a lot more sense when watching the sunrise and hearing the birds chirp as you drink your morning coffee. It relaxes us, lowers our blood pressure and puts things into perspective. We will get through this.”