

STIHL

5 TIPS TO STRENGTHEN YOUR BUSINESS

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Being part of a family-owned tree care provider for most of my life has given me insight into how to strengthen the business in a variety of ways. My parents started our company in 1976 with one truck and a dream to provide the best possible care for trees. Today we provide all phases of tree care and, in recent years, added turf care. We continue to branch out into new territory at the request of our clients. Here are some lessons we've learned along the way that I hope will help your business:

1. DOCUMENT EVERYTHING

When we were smaller, it seemed like a waste of time to document everything. I eventually learned that documentation helps you grow by forcing you to write and review everything you've done, allowing you to reflect on your work. It also protects the business in many ways. It is said that if you don't document it, it never happened. Documenting briefings and safety trainings and making each crew member sign them creates proof they occurred, which is crucial in the event you encounter a safety audit or have an accident of any kind. It could also help with your insurance needs to show the level of dedication you have for training your team.

2. TRACK EVERYTHING

No one ever wants more work thrown on their lap, but tracking everything can help you understand the health of your business. I know countless smaller companies that I have worked with that are unable to answer questions like how many man hours a job takes, what average fuel costs are or what is the break-even point per person per hour. The extra work pays dividends in the long run and can help you find flaws in your operation or shining stars that you can leverage going forward.

3. HAVE REGULAR MEETINGS

When we are faced with a healthy backlog, it can feel like there's no time to conduct internal meetings. Over the years, I've learned that not only do we have the time, but we also don't have the time not to! When things get busy, the team can feel disconnected, which can cause slowdowns or gaps in execution. Getting together regularly will keep all members on the same page and allow for collective brainstorming that will save time, energy, and/or money.

4. REVIEW A WEEKLY SNAPSHOT

At our weekly management meetings, we review our company scorecard. The scorecard has categories for everything we need to watch on a weekly basis to be able to quickly assess how we compare to the previous week. Things like man hours worked, the average hourly rate achieved, customer/employee issues, incidents, and cash balances are discussed so that we can spot what we need to change or lean into. Having a list of what moves the needle and tracking them accurately will keep you moving in the right direction and alert you of a need to pivot as well.

5. HIRE OUTSIDE CONSULTANTS

Most of us got into this business because we like doing this type of work. That does not mean that we are naturally good at doing business. When I started working on the business side of things, I realized quickly that I was more skilled in the field than behind the desk. That does not mean that we can't acquire these skills, but we may need some help to do so. We hired a consulting firm to come in and help us set up processes that have enabled us to grow at a faster pace than ever before. We were given examples of how to improve, tools to help analyze more components of our business and our team members, and learned valuable outside perspectives. This has been critical to strengthening our business, driving growth, and advancing our culture.

BRING IT TOGETHER

At the end of the day, the show must go on. Making time to perform some changes on the business side can alleviate stress and give you back something that many of us feel we lack—time. There will still be hurdles to face and growing pains here and there, but you will have more tools in your toolbox to solve any challenge and you will feel better prepared.

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