

# SAN FERNANDO VALLEY BUSINESS JOURNAL

Get **FREE**  
Daily News  
Updates at  
sfvbj.com

LOS ANGELES • GLENDALE • SANTA CLARITA VALLEY • BURBANK • CONEJO VALLEY • SIMI VALLEY • SAN FERNANDO • CALABASAS • AGOURA HILLS • ANTELOPE VALLEY

## Learning to Work A Little Like Contractors

These days I'm hearing a lot of comments from landscape contractors that pretty much go like this, "I didn't get into this to be a prisoner to my business or to spend all day in an office. But that's exactly what's happened and I don't like it. Plus, business is down and I can't see a way back to doing what I love and being successful at it. It's very frustrating."

Being a contractor is a tough business today. Rising interest rates, overbuilding, and the sub-prime mortgage meltdown of 2007 have all combined for a dismal forecast.

Managing a labor force (a major expense in a contractor's business) hasn't gotten any easier or less expensive, either.

With about 50,000 landscape service companies in the U.S. reporting combined annual revenues of \$40 billion, the vast majority of all landscape companies are small and many are fighting to stay afloat. Contractors are a different breed: Independent, creative, and nonconformist. Most start their own businesses with a passion for personal independence and success. But after a while their life is not where they would like it to be. Too often their dreams of freedom become more like a prison sentence, and these days many are struggling to stay afloat in a rough economy.

But what is true is that some companies are successful and even prospering in these tough times. Their owners have been there, done that, and used to feel trapped, stagnant or mired in the day-to-day needs of running their business. So how did they turn it around? What separates great companies that stay afloat and prosper from the



**GUEST  
COLUMN**  
**JONATHAN  
GOLDHILL**

other that don't?

Successful companies have several things in common, starting first with the fact that they swallow their pride and asked for help. Yeah, yeah, jokes abound about how some people just won't stop and ask for directions. But this is one area where it's smart to stop and ask, it can mean the difference between success and failure.

The owners of successful contracting businesses realize that they can try and go it alone, toughing it out, learning from their mistakes, or, they can get some quality help and advice and shave weeks – or years – off their learning curve. They get help and get major leverage on their time, money and effort. Able to hit the ground running, they stay ahead of the mistakes, put solid systems into place, regain their free time and prosper.

How? They learned how to put some foundation pieces into place that would allow them to go back to the work they enjoy. Those things include learning how to make and implement a business plan; measure what's working, thereby measuring their success; establish and measure performance goals; increase profitability by putting into place solid marketing, accounting, and sales systems; reduce

turnover, keeping their great employees and hiring qualified people; raise prices because their clients understood the value they received; keep customers by providing great customer service and proving consistent, quality products; become respected leaders in their field

In today's economy, no business can afford to make critical mistakes for long and expect to survive, much less grow and prosper. So remember, it's okay to ask for help and it's smart to ask for help. Don't go it alone when you can benefit from the experience and success of other contractors who've been there, done that, and not only survived but gone on to have wildly successful businesses and thriving lives as well.

There are many resources available, from professional organizations, consultants, coaches, newsletters and articles in the major publications. Get focused on what other contractors are doing to ensure their success, and see if some of what they are doing seems right for you and your business. Stick with what works, change what doesn't, and be open to new ways of doing things.

---

*Jonathan Goldhill of The Goldhill Group has owned several small businesses and has 20 years experience consulting, training & financing businesses in over 100 different industries including landscape contractors, designers, remodelers, and business services firms. He can be reached at (818) 505-9514 or through his website, [www.TheGrowthCoachLA.com](http://www.TheGrowthCoachLA.com).*