

# SNOW START UP

ISSUE #4: FOCUS ON **WORKFORCE**

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## BUILDING A GREAT TEAM

If you want to grow your snow business, you are going to need a great team alongside you. That's easier said than done given that the #1 challenge business owners face in this industry has long been hiring reliable, quality employees. It's a jungle out there, for sure, but focus on these four areas and your path should become a little clearer.

1



### Culture

Look at any successful company and you'll likely find it is built with a purpose in mind and shaped by values, systems and standards that focus on the well-being of its employees, clients and community. Every organization has a culture, whether it is defined or not. It's what we do and say, how we act, and how we treat others as we seek personal and company success. Identify your values, write them down, share them with your team and potential hires, and then live and reinforce them every day.

2



### Hiring

If you're excited to wake up at 1 a.m., go out into inclement weather and work for hours on end, you're likely the exception to the rule. Snow and ice management is a thankless job, and the demands and challenges of the work isn't for everyone. It won't be easy, but don't be content to settle for any warm body to fill your open positions. In today's labor market, candidates are being more selective on where they work. You'll need to sell the candidate on why they should come to work with you. Hint: It's not just about the money.

3



### Onboarding & training

The storm is coming. Is your onboarding process to hand your new hire a shovel and wish them luck? If so, you've set them up for failure and they won't be your employee for long — whether by your choice or (more likely) theirs. A structured onboarding process lets new employees know “who's who” in the organization and gives them a sense of how their role is a part of the bigger picture. Create a plan that makes people 100% clear on their roles and responsibilities. Educate them on company processes and procedures and consider assigning a mentor or buddy familiar with their role to show them the ropes and allow them a safe space to ask questions.

4



### Retention & development

Once you've brought in those quality hires, your job isn't done. According to Gallup surveys, the No. 1 factor that employees are seeking in a job is growth and development opportunities. Employees want to feel like they are learning and advancing within their roles. Every role should have a step-by-step progression that shows every employee how they can move up through the ranks over time. Every person should have a professional development plan, especially those at the lowest levels, where there is greater turnover.

# YOU CAN'T AFFORD NOT TO TRAIN

➔ Training is often viewed as an expense rather than investment. But a proper training program provides a good return on investment (ROI) because the benefits will likely outweigh your initial investment. Why should you invest in training?

**REDUCE INJURIES.** An untrained team member is a danger to himself or herself and everyone else around them — especially if they apply materials or operate equipment. Employee injuries from unsafe practices result in higher workers' compensation costs, lost days of work and employee turnover.

**REDUCE DAMAGE.** Untrained employees cause the most damage of any employee group, regardless of how conscientious they may be. Damages require management time, reporting, downtime, repairs and insurance claims. If property damage occurs on a client's property, it's even worse.

**REDUCE LIABILITY.** Training reduces exposure to liability for slip and fall claims. Training focused on how to recognize and prevent dangerous conditions from persisting reduces the likelihood of a slip and fall. And a solid training program will benefit your defense against claims. Document training, including employee signoff that it was completed. Quiz them to make sure they "get it."

**IMPROVE EFFICIENCY.** The difference between production output of a properly trained person versus that of an untrained person is dramatic. Snow and ice management is a highly profitable business — if your people are efficient.

**IMPROVE QUALITY.** Training can improve client satisfaction and retention. During snow and ice events, clients are not very forgiving; and unlike the summer season, when there are many opportunities to fix a problem, snow contractors have no such luxury.

**IMPROVE EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT.** Companies committed to training and developing their people are the same companies that are concerned about employee satisfaction.

*Best Practice: Training should take place year-round. See Page A4*

## TRAINING TIPS

- 1 TRAIN ON A BUDGET.** Training doesn't have to be expensive. Tap SIMA for resources that can be used to help you build a training library, from tailgate talks, tear and teach documents, training videos and more. Utilize your vendors for help with equipment-specific training.
- 2 CHOOSE A CHAMPION.** If you're a smaller or newer snow company, the weight of training will likely fall on you; but as you grow, create a committee or identify a training champion to take ownership of the schedule, the topics and the follow-through.
- 3 TRAIN TO SOPs.** Outline and document your standard operating procedures (SOPs) because they are an integral part of your training process. Your SOPs are all the things you need and expect your team to know about the day-to-day operations. As you grow, so will your SOPs. Make sure your training evolves with them.



# ROAD MAP TO SAFETY TRAINING

Snow and ice management companies should never take shortcuts when it comes to safety.

1

## TAKE OWNERSHIP OF SAFETY.

Unsafe operations will kill your business. For any safety program to succeed, the desire to create a safe environment, not only for your employees but also your clients and their customers, must come from the top. Decide today that safety matters and begin embedding it in your company culture.

2

## CHOOSE A LEADER.

In a small company the owner may wear the safety trainer hat, but as the company grows the owner should identify a lead person to manage the company's safety program. This person will work with the owner to set goals, create the program and ensure that it's followed.

3

## ESTABLISH A SAFETY COMMITTEE.

Give your safety manager help by creating a safety committee that includes team members from a variety of departments, including drivers, sidewalk crews, supervisors, maintenance, office, HR, etc. For a program to succeed, it must include representatives from each of your company's touchpoints. Determine a timeline and establish a list of topics and presenters for the year.

4

## CREATE A SAFETY MANUAL.

Start small but document your policies. Add to it as you grow your program. Easy-to-reference policies kept in one place will leave little room for excuses if policies aren't followed. Plus, you can use your manual as a reference and a selling tool not only to clients, but also to your insurance company.

5

## BUILD A TRAINING LIBRARY/RESOURCE CENTER.

Creating a training program doesn't have to break the bank. There is a multitude of free and/or inexpensive resources available through SIMA, OSHA, SBA, insurance companies, etc. Start compiling them. As you grow, you may decide to invest in third-party training. If you have employees or subcontractors whose native language is something other than English, make sure you have written manuals and training resources they can understand.

6

## IMPLEMENT A SAFETY PROGRAM.

Training shouldn't be a once-a-year endeavor. At a minimum, a successful program will include robust preseason training to get everyone ready for the year. Classroom and hands-on training is key. Weekly, or even daily, training will help keep safety in the forefront of everyone's minds. A 5-minute safety recap before heading out to the site or a weekly 15-minute tailgate talk will make a difference and reinforce that safety is an ongoing initiative in your company.

7

## TRAIN AND RETRAIN.

Establish a training schedule and stick to it. As new employees are added to the team, ensure they are trained to expectations laid out in your safety manual. Again, training shouldn't be a once-and-done activity. Even the most seasoned veterans will benefit from refresher training throughout the year.

8

## DOCUMENT YOUR TRAINING.

As employees complete training, make sure you document their results, identifying any potential problem areas that may need more instruction. Documenting your efforts will hold your team accountable for safety and may be helpful in securing better insurance rates or to document your actions in the event of an accident or liability claim.

9

## REEVALUATE AND REVISE.

At the end of the season, look at your training processes that were implemented. What worked, what didn't, what's missing, and how can you improve? Identify and implement changes so you're ready for the next round of training.

10

## BUILD MORE SNOW LEADERS.

A commitment to safety must reach through the entire organization. It starts with the owner, but by building a training program that shows you are committed to your employees' well-being and that they are a key part of the process, you will achieve buy-in that will bring your program full circle. Encourage input on topics and how to improve training; reward employees for safe operations; and identify employees who may do well at peer training and give them the opportunity to take a leadership role.

# TEAM MENTALITY: ONCE YOU HAVE THEM, KEEP THEM

➔ Hiring takes time and money, and it's long been known that it costs more to hire a new employee than to keep an existing one. Building a culture that positions your company as the go-to in your market could be as easy as 1-2-3.

**1. HIRE SMART.** Even though applicable skill sets and dedication to safety should always be top priorities, in most cases those skill sets can be taught. Hiring for character is just as, if not more, important. If a candidate doesn't align with your core values, don't hire them as a "number" to fill out your roster. Staffing is no longer about hiring the right person for the position; it's about attracting new people to your team, growing the people you have, and retaining them. They not only want to know where they are going in your company, but how to get there and in what timeframe.

**2. BUILD CAREERS - NOT JOBS.** This industry isn't glamorous, so it's important for owners and managers to build a culture for employees to see that snow and ice management as something more than an hourly job and that the company is invested in providing the training and resources for them to build a career. Help them envision a future where they are financially stable and thriving in a team environment with opportunity for personal growth and fulfillment.

**3. CARE FOR YOUR TEAM LIKE THEY'RE FAMILY.** If you've hired the right people, they're going to work hard for you. Honor that commitment by caring for their mental and physical health and well-being. Make sure they are equipped with the proper personal protective equipment. Provide safe equipment. If they're in a job that requires them to be in the elements, don't put their safety at unnecessary risk. Make sure all receive proper rest during long-duration storms. Working 36 hours straight isn't a badge of honor — it's dangerous. Build a culture that lifts up the whole person, not just what they can do for you in the field. If you're falling short here, take a look at your leadership and management style and correct any shortcomings that might be impacting retention.

## WHEN SHOULD YOU TRAIN?

Visit [www.sima.org/startup](http://www.sima.org/startup) for all Snow Startup resources

### PRESEASON

Before the start of the snow season, bring the team together to train on safety, equipment operations and winter procedures. This should include a mix of classroom and hands-on training. Teams assigned to each site should walk the property with the sitemap to make sure they understand how operations will run during the season. Use a dry run, from beginning to the end of an event, to make sure procedures are clear and to ID potential hiccups before snow is flying.

### IN SEASON

Reinforce training topics during the season — no matter how busy you get. Five- to 15-minute "tailgate talks" on a specific topic before heading out of the yard will help to reinforce the importance of and your commitment to safety and efficiency. If you have new operators, peer ride-alongs are a great way to train to expectations. Monitor operations and use in-season training to correct unsafe or improper practices.

### POSTSEASON

Bring the team together to review the winter's successes and challenges and use them to make adjustments before the following winter. This is a great time to pick your team's brains and ask how training could be improved, whether it's topics, method of delivery, etc. Most companies move from snow straight into spring operations — but it's important not to skip this step.

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